

THE DUCKWORTH APPROACH

by

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Characters:

Cast of 5 (3M 2F)

TOBY HARPER – around forty
SAMANTHA HARPER – late thirties
DOUGLAS FULLER – around forty
GINA FULLER – late thirties
JASPER WRIGHT – mid thirties

Synopsis of scenes:

Act 1

Scene 1 – Friday 6.30 p.m.

Act 2

Scene 1 – Saturday 9.30 a.m.

Place – Kent. Two adjoining cottages belonging to Toby and Samantha and Douglas and Gina.

Time – The present. Summer.

Act 1

Scene 1

Friday 6.30 p.m.

The living rooms of two adjoining cottages with a shared garden on a lower level. There is the suggestion of an interior wall USC dividing the two cottages. The rear view of each cottage has glass doors on their fourth wall that open out on to a traversing paved or gravel walkway. (The doors are cut off just above the handles with the rest suggested.) Three wide steps in the centre of the walkway descend into the garden. The garden is essentially one long lawn with shrubs etc. about the border. In the garden there is the front end section of a shed DSL. A paved path US of the shed leads off SL. There is a bush, perhaps rhododendron, DSR. A paved path US of the bush leads off SR. The layout of the two cottages is mirrored so to describe the SR cottage would effectively describe the SL. The SR cottage has a front door and a window on the US wall. There is a staircase US leading up and off SR to the upstairs rooms. The living room suggests it extends further SR. This leads to the kitchen. Each cottage is furnished according to the tastes of the respective inhabitants.

Birdsong. TOBY enters SL. He checks his mobile and then himself in the mirror. He crosses to the SL glass doors, opens them and descends the steps into the garden. He enters the shed. Sound of car arriving and pulling to a stop. TOBY exits the shed with a garden table. He places it on the SL area of the lawn. He returns to the shed to fetch a couple of garden chairs. He opens them and places them by the table. GINA enters through the SR front door. She carries her case. She puts the case down and crosses to the SR glass doors. She enters through the doors and descends into the garden.

TOBY: Oh, Gina! At last!

GINA: Stay there!

TOBY: What? What is it?

GINA: I've imagined this moment for six weeks – seeing you standing here, in the flesh – I want to enjoy it... for a few seconds at least.

TOBY: I can't wait that long.

GINA: You're going to have to.

TOBY: I want to hold you, kiss you.

GINA: Let me enjoy my moment. I don't want to rush anything. I want everything to be special, every minute to be savoured, impressed deeply into my heart, my soul for always. Just drink me in, Toby, and I'll drink you in.

TOBY: Yes, let's drink each other in. Sounds a bit raunchy, doesn't it, when we phrase it like that – a bit like one of our text messages.

GINA: One of yours.

TOBY: Excuse me, I think one of yours too. Unfortunately I've had to delete them all so there's no recourse to empirical evidence, but they're indelibly printed in here... every naughty detail.

GINA: Stop it. I'm shy now in the cold light of day and without a glass of something to encourage me.

TOBY: That's on its way. You're so beautiful: an angel... a goddess... a nymph.

GINA: So are you.

TOBY: A nymph?

GINA: Not a nymph perhaps, but beautiful... handsome.

TOBY: Can I kiss you now?

GINA: Not quite yet.

TOBY: Oh, Gina, I thought I would go mad – facing another day without you – literally stark, raving bonkers. I've been shaking practically the whole day, shaking with thoughts about you – a million thoughts bombarding me at once. I could barely keep my mind on my work, I showed people the same bathroom three times – potential buyers to a

bungalow in Penshurst. I felt like an idiot – was behaving like one, a foolish... fool.

GINA: My sweet, foolish fool.

TOBY: I've been semi-articulate all day – that's not good for an estate agent. You'll put me out of business if we carry on like this.

GINA: Do you want us to stop?

TOBY: No, I want us to start. Now?

GINA: Almost.

TOBY: You've got me feeling like a schoolboy facing my first kiss.

GINA: Good. That's how I want you?

TOBY: Like a schoolboy?

GINA: No, like a man, but fresh, unsullied, untainted by the past.

TOBY: Yes, if that's how you want me, I can be that.

GINA: And so can I... unsullied, untainted by the past.

TOBY: Fresh.

GINA: I'm ready.

TOBY: So am I.

They are about to kiss. TOBY's mobile rings.

Bugger! Sorry, I should've put it on silent.

He checks the display.

It's her.

He turns the volume down.

I'll call her back.

GINA: No, deal with it now, we don't want her hovering over us. You'll just be thinking about what to say to her while we're kissing. Don't want that.

TOBY: No.

GINA: Better answer.

TOBY: Sorry.

TOBY answers his mobile.

(To mobile.) Yes, hello?... Yes I am... It was – it was fine... No, not too bad... In the garden... Just – just enjoying the garden, that's all... No, not yet, probably have something up at the pub... Yes, probably. *(Mouthing to Gina.)* Sorry. *(To mobile.)* Was there something you... What? I can't hear you. You need to put the – Samantha?... That's better... Yes. Is everything... *(Concerned.)* Talk about what?... Sorry? Sorry for what?... Sam, have you been drinking?... Okay, okay, I'm just asking, you just sound a little... emotional – emotional and muffled again... Yes. What is it you're sorry about?...

GINA exits into the SR cottage.

(To himself.) Balls!... *(To mobile.)* No, I just... stood on a stone.

GINA fetches her case and exits up the SR stairs.

Look, Sam, this sounds like something that needs to be said not on two ends of a telephone – on the ends of two telephones – especially since I keep on losing you... Yes... No, I'm not not wanting to hear what you're wanting to say – I'm not saying that – I'm just saying... What is it you're sorry about – right now?... I see... Right... Okay... Look, Sam, I really do think this is something we need to discuss at home – at leisure – where we can lay it all out on the living room floor, so to speak... Yes, my advice now is to plonk yourself in a nice, hot, relaxing bath and... What's that?... No, like I've said, I'm fine... Yes, just looking forward to doing nothing for a couple of days – with no-one – no-one about... No, they're not here.

GINA has entered down the SR stairs. She crosses to the SR glass doors and looks out. TOBY holds up his hand to indicate a couple more moments.

Look, Sam, battery's practically out. Have that bath, light some candles, listen to one of your relaxation thingies. I'll probably do the same myself in the pub – de-stress myself over a pint I mean... Yes... I'm going to lose you any

moment... Talk anon... Yes... Okay... Bye then... Bye now...
Yes.

*TOBY hangs up. GINA enters through the doors and
descends into the garden.*

So sorry. This is now officially on silent.

GINA: Everything okay?

TOBY: Yes. I thought she suspected for a moment though.

GINA: Us you mean?

TOBY: When she said she wanted to talk about something
important.

GINA: What was it?

TOBY: Oh... I don't know, it wasn't clear – it never is clear with
Samantha what she's trying to say – even more so after
a couple of gin and tonics. Something about being sorry.

GINA: Sorry for what?

TOBY: How she's *been* lately – I don't know. It'll pass. But let's not
talk about her, it's eating into our precious time together.
Now, please, please, please can we kiss?

GINA: We can. But make it like the first time, Toby.

TOBY: The very first.

GINA: Always like the first time.

TOBY: Always.

GINA: Forever now.

TOBY: Yes, yes, forever now – now let's kiss.

They kiss.

Bliss and heaven. More.

They kiss again.

More bliss, more heaven. Like an oasis after a trek through
the Gobi desert. Again.

GINA: Enough.

TOBY: Enough?

GINA: For the moment. Let me savour those two.

TOBY: I like to savour as I go.

GINA: So do I, but I want to go slowly.

TOBY: I will adjust my throttle accordingly. I have Riesling. It's chilling so we should give it a moment.

GINA: (*Sings 'Till There Was You'.*) 'There were bells on a hill but I never heard them ringing, no I never heard them at all till there was you.' That song's been on my mind since we met.

TOBY: What for six weeks?

GINA: On and off. It says everything I feel.

TOBY: Me too. I was contemplating the workings of fate on the way over.

GINA: Fate?

TOBY: Meeting you. If Douglas's cousin and wife hadn't decided to move to Italy and you and Douglas hadn't decided to take on the renting of the place here I would never have met you.

GINA: We almost didn't. I was persuading Doug it was a luxury we couldn't afford.

TOBY: I'm so pleased he didn't listen to you.

GINA: And being such a long way away. He said we needed a place like this to escape to – to get away from the noise and pollution of town. It would be good for our health. The benefits would outweigh the costs.

TOBY: How right he was.

GINA: It was the only reason I came – last time. He said once I saw the place I'd fall in love with it. I came all prepared to talk him out of it. But it wasn't the cottage I fell in love with – although it is very pretty –

TOBY: It is.

GINA: It was my neighbour – potential neighbour... and landlord.

TOBY: The moment I laid eyes on you I knew I'd be extremely flexible with the rent.

GINA: He thought it was the place of course that did it.

TOBY: Win win situation. And all so fast, a whirlwind. I'm still marvelling at how many opportunities we got, to sneak off together, to enjoy our secret trysts. Fate smiling on us. I'm ready to kiss again, if you are.

GINA: When will you tell her?

TOBY: Tell her what?

GINA: About us? You are going to tell her, I presume... aren't you?

TOBY: I... I haven't really thought that far ahead – yet. Have you?

GINA: Yes... and beyond.

TOBY: Beyond?

GINA: When we're together – beyond being with them.

TOBY: Shouldn't we first see how things go between us before we rush into things – telling them? I mean I think we *should* – at some stage – if everything goes... to plan. But we've only had a handful of kisses to date, shouldn't we at least... well, to put it bluntly, bed test things for a while – for your sake just as much as – you might be hugely disappointed with me – by me... I'm hoping you won't be, of course.

GINA: How could I be, Toby, I'm in love with you, I adore you.

TOBY: And I adore you too, Gina, there's no question about that, none at all. But, as you wisely say, let's savour things slowly, enjoy every moment, get to know one another intimately, lovingly... at a comfortable pace.

GINA: And we will, Toby, I know we will. I just want things to be right between us – right from the start.

TOBY: They've never felt righter.

GINA: But it's wrong to deceive them any more than we have to.

- TOBY: And we won't... any more than we have to, but first we have to. Like they say – as harsh as it sounds – one can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs. The eggs have already been cracked and the pan's on the hob, there's no undoing that now, Gina. When we feel the time's right to tell them, we will.
- GINA: I just don't want to be one of those women who sneak off at weekends to carry on a grubby affair behind their husband's back.
- TOBY: It doesn't have to be grubby. We won't let it get to the grubby stage. We'd have told them well before it gets grubby.
- GINA: I'm not good at deceiving anyone.
- TOBY: Me neither, Gina, me neither.
- GINA: My neck goes all red when I lie.
- TOBY: No, I don't have that problem.
- GINA: All around here. But that's not the reason I don't lie more, it's just that I have a very strong sense of right and wrong – a natural sense of justice perhaps.
- TOBY: Me too, me too.
- GINA: I suppose essentially I hate to see people suffer – people, children, animals.
- TOBY: No, me neither, string 'em up, that's what I say – people who cause other people to suffer, that is – especially children and animals.
- GINA: Perhaps. I'm not sure I agree with stringing up.
- TOBY: Metaphorically speaking I mean.
- GINA: Yes, metaphorically speaking, I'd agree.
- TOBY: Don't worry, Gina, like I say we'll tell them when the time's right – not a second too late... or too early. We really haven't been deceiving them for that long – when you think about how other people stretch it out for years without a shred of guilt. Only six weeks – two and a half days, if we're not counting text messages – that's nothing. Listen, Gina, we're

discussing things too intensely too soon. The Riesling will be chilled by now. I'll be right back, so don't run off.

GINA: I won't. The only place I want to run to is into your arms.

They exchange kisses as TOBY starts to go.

TOBY: You beautiful angel.

GINA: You handsome man.

TOBY: My nymph.

GINA: My prince.

TOBY exits into the SL cottage and exits SL.

(Sings to herself.) 'There were birds in the sky but I never saw them winging, no I never saw them at all till there was you'.

GINA crosses to the shed and has a cursory peek inside. DOUGLAS enters through the SR front door. He holds a travel bag and a bunch of flowers.

DOUGLAS: *(Calling.)* Geeny?

GINA: *(To herself.)* Oh God!

DOUGLAS calls up the SR stairs.

Geeny? Geeny are you here?

GINA hurries into the shed, closing the door behind her. DOUGLAS crosses to the SR glass doors and looks out.

Geeny?

He enters through the doors and descends into the garden. He looks across to the SL cottage. He is about to return when TOBY enters SL holding two glasses of wine and the opened bottle in a cooler sleeve. TOBY enters through the SL glass doors.

TOBY: Here we are my gorgeous – *(Seeing DOUGLAS.)* Oh!

DOUGLAS: Hello. Sorry, didn't mean to... Doug.

TOBY: Yes, I know. You surprised me, I didn't think... I didn't think you were... here.

DOUGLAS: I wasn't... until now. I've just arrived.

TOBY: Right. Right. How are you?

DOUGLAS: Well thanks, Toby. You?

TOBY: Yes, yes... well. Thanks. You... both here or just you?

DOUGLAS: No, both of us... I think. Gina came ahead of me in the car.

TOBY: Ah.

DOUGLAS: I came on the train.

TOBY: Oh.

DOUGLAS: Have you seen her?

TOBY: No... no I haven't. I've just arrived myself, not so long ago – (*aware of glasses*) we have, Samantha and I.

DOUGLAS: For the weekend?

TOBY: Probably – we need to see how it goes. Problems – with her parents. We're poised to hurry off at any moment – well, she is.

DOUGLAS: Oh. Nothing too serious I hope.

TOBY: Just age... you know... age.

DOUGLAS: Yes... age.

TOBY: Are you... planning to stay long – you and Gina?

DOUGLAS: Gina the weekend, me... well it depends.

TOBY: Oh, on what?

DOUGLAS: Whether she wants me to... or not. She's not expecting me to be here.

TOBY: No?

DOUGLAS: No, she wanted to be here alone – to have some thinking time alone, she said.

TOBY: Ah.

DOUGLAS: She was quite insistent she didn't want me around.

TOBY: Well, we all need time alone to think sometimes, I know I do, that's why I'm here.

DOUGLAS: But you're not.

TOBY: Not...?

DOUGLAS: Alone.

TOBY: Oh... no – no, not yet, but like I say, I'm expecting Sam to hurry off at any moment – then I will be. She might in fact be hurrying off as we speak.

DOUGLAS: What, without telling you?

TOBY: Her mind's all over the place with the stress of it, so anything's possible. I'll probably get a text letting me know she's on the A21 before too long... if she has.

DOUGLAS: I wanted to surprise her, that's why I came.

TOBY: Samantha?

DOUGLAS: No, Gina.

TOBY: Oh... yes of course.

DOUGLAS: I don't usually remember it and she probably thinks I've forgotten again. She usually nudges me just before the day – but not this year. Thankfully I remembered.

TOBY: Her birthday?

DOUGLAS: Anniversary.

TOBY: Ah.

DOUGLAS: Especially since it's the big one too.

TOBY: The big one-two – twelve?

DOUGLAS: No ten. I should say *a* big one too.

TOBY: Oh, I see.

DOUGLAS: Ten years, mustn't forget that one.

TOBY: No. Well done... for remembering.

DOUGLAS: Tricky time.

TOBY: Is it?

DOUGLAS: In a marriage... ten years... they say.

TOBY: Do they?

DOUGLAS: The old ten-year-itch.

TOBY: Oh, yes. Isn't that seven-year-itch?

DOUGLAS: Is it?

TOBY: I believe so.

DOUGLAS: Oh, well we've survived that one. Thought I'd kick off our eleventh year together on the right foot. Unexpected romantic gestures are at the top of the list apparently.

TOBY: The list?

DOUGLAS: Yes, I was reading an article recently: 'How to maintain a healthy and thriving marriage'. Unexpected romantic gestures were at the top.

TOBY: *Expected* romantic gestures coming a poor second, I'm guessing?

DOUGLAS: No, doing one's fair share of the housework was number two. I should get points for that, I'm pretty regular with the Hoover.

TOBY: Points off for me, I'm afraid. Samantha too – plenty deducted for her. I'm very tidy at work though. Have to maintain the semblance of order. You too, I should imagine – being an accountant – can't be too chaotic with your figures.

DOUGLAS: Try not to be.

TOBY: So full marks for us both there. Too bad our wives aren't there to see it.

DOUGLAS: Yes. They seem to be fairly scarce around here too. She's probably gone for a walk, or having a lie down perhaps.

TOBY: Probably. Nice evening for it – a walk, that is, not a lie down.

DOUGLAS: I was desperately trying to resist it – on the train – calling her, or texting. I so nearly did – several times, just to let her know – but then it wouldn't have been unexpected, would it?

TOBY: No.

DOUGLAS: Perhaps we could join forces – if I'm allowed to stay.

TOBY: Join forces?

DOUGLAS: Drinks together – or dinner.

TOBY: Oh – well, don't want to get in the way of your anniversary celebrations.

DOUGLAS: No, not tonight, I was thinking tomorrow perhaps. It was all a bit formal last time – necessarily so – sorting out keys, boilers and recycling arrangements. Wasn't much opportunity to get to know each other, personally.

TOBY: No, no there wasn't. Well I'll run it by Sam – if she's still here – see what she says, but in theory I'd definitely be... definitely... up for it.

DOUGLAS: We'll keep each other posted.

TOBY: Yes.

DOUGLAS: Dahlias.

TOBY: What?

DOUGLAS: *(Flowers.)* These. She likes them... when I remember.

DOUGLAS exits into the SR cottage. He exits up the SR stairs.

TOBY: *(Softly calling.)* Gina? Gina?

GINA comes out of the shed.

Gina.

GINA: God, why did he have to remember it this year of all years?

TOBY: Very inconvenient of him.

GINA: It's just a little hiccup, that's all, Toby. I'll insist that I want to be here alone. I'll pack him off on a train back home.

TOBY: Yes.

GINA: Oh, it sounds so brutal, doesn't it, hearing myself saying that.

TOBY: All part of the omelette process, Gina, I'm afraid.

GINA: I suppose so.

DOUGLAS enters down the SR stairs. He exits through the SR front door.

Since it's our anniversary it might have to wait till tomorrow. I can't be that cruel.

TOBY: No?

GINA: I can't.

TOBY: No... of course not. I'll probably have to pack Samantha off to her parents. I can't keep her absence hidden from him for too much longer.

GINA: Oh I'm sorry, Toby, I really am.

TOBY: It's not your fault, Gina, it's his fault for remembering.

GINA: What will you do?

TOBY: Do?

GINA: Tonight?

TOBY: Entertain myself, I suppose. Dinner at The Swan and an early night... thinking about you.

GINA: Perhaps we can get a text or two in.

TOBY: That would be nice.

DOUGLAS: *(Off calling.)* Geeny?

GINA hurriedly exits via the SL paved path. DOUGLAS enters via the SR paved path.

- TOBY: No luck?
- DOUGLAS: No, nowhere to be found.
- TOBY: Mine hasn't shown either. No texts from the A21 yet so that's a good sign.
- DOUGLAS: Yes, most likely gone for a walk.
- TOBY: Well...
- DOUGLAS: Actually – just between you and me, Toby – I had a bit of an ulterior motive for following her down here.
- TOBY: Oh?
- DOUGLAS: I've been trying to put it out of my mind – the thought of it – that there might be.
- TOBY: Might be what?
- DOUGLAS: Somebody else... on the scene – so to speak.
- TOBY: On the scene?
- DOUGLAS: You know... romantically.
- TOBY: Ah. Really?
- DOUGLAS: Yes. But I haven't been able to.
- TOBY: Able to what?
- DOUGLAS: Put it out of my mind. The thing is I have no hard evidence for it – nothing solid to go on to prove anything, just a horrible, gnawing feeling in here telling me all is not well.
- TOBY: Well that's good.
- DOUGLAS: Is it?
- TOBY: Having no hard evidence for it, I mean. You don't want your fears confirmed for you, do you... I'm presuming.
- DOUGLAS: No, but then I don't want to be in the dark about it either – if there is something... happening.

TOBY: Yes... no... true.

DOUGLAS: I have a fair bit of soft evidence for it.

TOBY: Soft evidence?

DOUGLAS: The way she's been behaving – recently.

TOBY: Oh?

DOUGLAS: She's been humming and singing a lot more... generally perkier about the house.

TOBY: Perhaps she's won the lottery and isn't telling you.

DOUGLAS: I'd like to think that was it, I'd be a lot more comfortable knowing that.

TOBY: Or *not* knowing that – as the case may be.

DOUGLAS: Yes.

TOBY: Just *that*?

DOUGLAS: No, not just that. She's been a lot more guarded – with her phone I mean – a lot more so than usual. The other day I picked it up, just to move it – I wasn't even looking at the screen – I don't think – but she snatched it away from me with such... panic, as if there were something on it she desperately didn't want me to see. Her neck was going all red too.

TOBY: All red?

DOUGLAS: It does that when she's trying to conceal things from me, not telling me the truth – not just from me, others too. It's genetic – on her mother's side.

TOBY: Probably rules out her winning the lottery then and not telling you.

DOUGLAS: I can feel them all coming back – all the old fears. In the past with relationships I've had – the few I've had – I've always been the one who's been left, not the one doing the leaving. I have abandonment issues – one of my clients told me – but it hasn't really been an issue since I've been with Gina – until now. When Sandy was leaving me I had terrible panic attacks – debilitating – and for a long time afterwards. I

used to have to retreat into the basement at work to try and compose myself – often while dealing with clients. Fortunately I'm managing to keep those at bay... so far.

TOBY: Well, if it's any consolation, Douglas –

DOUGLAS: Doug, please.

TOBY: Doug. Sam's always shielding her phone from my prying eyes and I have absolutely zero suspicion of her carrying on with someone behind my back... perhaps I should. No, they just need their own stuff – for their eyes only... we all do. So, if I'm understanding things correctly, Doug, your ulterior motive for surprising her unannounced was to see if she had secretly arranged to meet this... whoever it is – if there is a whoever it is – here at the cottage, while you were... *not* here with her.

DOUGLAS: I'm ashamed to admit it – appearing to be so suspicious having so little grounds for it. It's what destroys marriages, isn't it: irrational jealousy.

TOBY: That's... certainly one of the things that does it, I'm sure.

DOUGLAS: But it's hard to reason with one's gut – these churning doubts – no matter how much I try.

TOBY: Just a thought, Doug, but wouldn't you have done better to wait a bit.

DOUGLAS: Wait?

TOBY: Delayed your arrival. I mean Gina's only just got here – hasn't she? – hardly time for things to get underway. He's probably still on the way down – if there is a someone on the way down. Plenty of time for her to alert him – and if it is a *him*, of course, mustn't assume. If I were you, I would've waited until perhaps morning tomorrow – the prime time to catch them with their pants down... so to speak. Sorry to be so matter of fact about it.

DOUGLAS: Well that's the thing, I suppose, I don't really want to catch her with someone... with their pants down. My hope is things haven't got to that stage yet – if indeed there is a someone to get to that stage with – and no, mustn't rule out a woman – although I've seen little evidence of interest in them... in that way I mean. If there is someone she's planning to meet here it's better I arrive sooner rather than later so nothing can actually *get* underway. I'm hoping this

unexpected romantic gesture might remind her that I'm not all dull Doug and there's a passion in here that's still alive.

TOBY: Yes... I'm sure it will.

DOUGLAS: You know the main thing that heartens me that she hasn't arranged to meet anyone here is the fact that you're here.

TOBY: Me?

DOUGLAS: And Samantha, of course. It would be a bit brazen of her to carry on with somebody right under your noses – so to speak.

TOBY: Yes, true.

DOUGLAS: Word would soon get back to me, wouldn't it?

TOBY: We'd feel obliged to tell you.

DOUGLAS: I know you come and go, but she doesn't know your diary, does she?

TOBY: No – no she doesn't.

DOUGLAS: Unless of course she was hoping to sneak someone in unnoticed – under the cloak of darkness.

TOBY: Still... hell of a risk to take. No, if you want my opinion, Doug, I think you need to take her word for it and that she is actually here just to... to think. Like I say, we all need that. You're talking to an estate agent – we know how important thinking time is for people. No my advice would be just to leave her to it.

DOUGLAS: Go you mean?

TOBY: She might not take too kindly to you interrupting her thinking time.

DOUGLAS: But it's our anniversary.

TOBY: True... there is that – but probably wouldn't hang about though. Share a glass of bubbly together then leave her to it... Sorry, just thinking aloud, Doug, none of my bloody business of course.

DOUGLAS: No, thanks for lending an ear to my concerns, Toby.

TOBY: We're good listeners, estate agents – well the good ones are, that is.

GINA has entered through the SR front door. She crosses to the SR glass doors and looks out. She enters through the doors.

GINA: *(Acting surprised.)* Douggie, what the heck are you doing here?

DOUGLAS puts the flowers behind his back.

DOUGLAS: Hello, Geeny.

GINA: Toby, you're here too.

TOBY: Yes, just arrived – well almost just arrived.

GINA: With Samantha?

TOBY: No – yes – I mean if she's still here, that is, I was explaining to Doug she might have to shoot off at any moment – parent problems.

GINA: Ah.

TOBY: Doug says you're here for the weekend.

GINA: I am, Douggie's not supposed to be though – are you?

DOUGLAS presents the flowers to GINA.

What's this?

DOUGLAS: Flowers.

GINA: I can see that.

DOUGLAS: Happy anniversary.

GINA: Oh... oh I completely forgot about that.

GINA puts her hand to her neck.

DOUGLAS: The big one-o. Don't know how you managed to forget that one, Geeny.

GINA: No. Completely forgot.

DOUGLAS: Is your neck reddening?

GINA: No.

DOUGLAS: It is. *Did* you forget?

GINA: Yes, I did. Please stop reading too much into that, Douggie. *(To TOBY.)* It reddens sometimes – it's genetic.

TOBY: Really?

DOUGLAS: Yes, I told him.

GINA: Did you? Why?

DOUGLAS: Ah... it came up in our conversation.

GINA: My neck?

TOBY: We were discussing family genes.

DOUGLAS: Yes, that's right, we were.

GINA: Well I'm not happy about you telling Mr Harper my intimate quirks.

DOUGLAS: Sorry, won't happen again.

GINA: *(To TOBY.)* There aren't any more to tell. Anyway, I was talking to someone the other day – a doctor – who said it could equally be caused by sudden stress. Her friend had the same condition.

DOUGLAS: Are you feeling sudden stress now, Geeny?

GINA: Yes, I am actually. I specifically wanted time to be here alone to think – and you suddenly appear out of the blue.

DOUGLAS: But it's our anniversary. I thought I'd surprise you. I don't usually remember.

GINA: I know and it's... very... sweet of you, Douggie – despite the stress of it.

TOBY: Well, perhaps a drink to you both is in order.

TOBY picks up the wine glasses. He gives a glass to GINA.

Gina, Sam hasn't touched this one.

TOBY keeps hold of the other.

To ten happy years... and to a wonderful, bright new future together.

GINA: *(Half to TOBY.)* I'll drink to that.

DOUGLAS: *(Miming his drink.)* Me too.

TOBY winces at the sweetness of the Riesling.

What is it?

TOBY: Hock. Sam loves it.

DOUGLAS: Oh, so does Gina, don't you?

GINA: Yes.

TOBY: Well, I'll leave you to your celebrations – check out where Sam's got to. *(Glass.)* Just plonk that back on the table when you're done. Lovely to see you both.

DOUGLAS: Don't forget, Toby, perhaps tomorrow.

TOBY: Yes.

TOBY exits into the SL cottage with his wine glass.

(Calling.) Sam? Samantha, are you about?

*TOBY exits SL to put his wine glass away. He enters SL, fetches his jacket and exits through the SL front door.
GINA puts her glass back on the table.*

GINA: Tomorrow?

DOUGLAS: I told him – if I'm allowed to stay – it would be a nice idea for us all to get together for drinks or dinner perhaps.

GINA: But then when do I have my thinking time, Doug?

DOUGLAS: Well I thought possibly Sunday. I could go for a long walk perhaps – leave you to it – join you for dinner and travel back together in the evening.

GINA: No.

DOUGLAS: No?

GINA: I need to be alone to think.

DOUGLAS: Well you would be.

GINA: No, you'll be around – in the vicinity.

DOUGLAS: I could walk a fair distance away.

GINA: No, I really do want to be alone – it's all part of the... the thinking process. I'd like you to get the train back tomorrow morning.

DOUGLAS: I still don't know what you're needing to think about.

GINA: No, and I've told you, neither do I, that's why I'm here to think... to find out what it is I'm needing to think about.

DOUGLAS: I do love you, Geeny, you know that, don't you?

GINA: Yes, I do. We'll need to get some food in.

DOUGLAS: I thought we could go to The Swan.

GINA: No, no not The Swan. Let's not go anywhere, I'll nip out and get something in.

DOUGLAS: We'll nip out together.

GINA: There – you see, Douggie, you're not allowing me my space. I'm still in thinking time mode.

DOUGLAS: Going to the shop?

GINA: Yes, until I switch off. When I'm back it'll be anniversary time. Thanks again for the flowers.

DOUGLAS: Don't you want to take them?

GINA: Yes.

GINA takes the flowers and gives DOUGLAS a quick kiss.

DOUGLAS: I brought champagne. *(To himself.)* Oh!

GINA: What?

DOUGLAS: That was meant to be a surprise.

GINA: I'll try to forget it. *(Giving flowers back to DOUGLAS.)* Perhaps you could find something to put these in. I'll probably include a little thoughtful drive along the way, so don't fret if I'm a little longer than expected.

DOUGLAS: Are you sure I can't treat you at The Swan?

GINA: Positive. It's much cosier here.

DOUGLAS: You really want to be cooking on our anniversary?

GINA: No, I won't be, you will. All part of my surprise, isn't it?

GINA exits into the house. She fetches her bag and exits through the SR front door. Sound of car starting up and pulling away. DOUGLAS breathes to manage his anxiety. He exits into the SR cottage. He goes to his bag, takes out the champagne and exits SR with the champagne and flowers. JASPER enters via the SL paved path. He surveys the garden and looks up to the SL cottage. He crosses the lawn a little and looks up to the SR cottage. He crosses back to a garden chair and sits. He picks up the wine glass and has a sip. He takes out his mobile and dials. DOUGLAS enters SR with the flowers in a vase. He places them in the room. He takes his bag and exits up the SR stairs.

JASPER: *(To mobile.)* Hello my beautiful, darling, angel... Yes, it's me again... Yes, I know you did... Yes, I know that too, but you didn't think I was *not* going to did you?... No. If I was I wouldn't be calling you, would I? I'd be ringing your bell, banging on your door with both fists, shouting your name lovingly though your letterbox until you welcomed me in... Hello?... Sam Sam?... I know you're still there, I can hear you breathing... Ah, there you are... No, I'll give you a clue: it's somewhere we've enjoyed wild and unbridled lovemaking together... Well, yes it could be I suppose. I'll narrow it down: somewhere where you'd expect to find *him* – Yes of course him, who do you think I mean? On a weekend perhaps... Have we ever enjoyed wild and unbridled lovemaking together in the public bar of the Red Lion? Think woody retreat. Naked on the lawn – big clue there... Bingo!... Well, I just happened to be on a train which just happened to stop here, so I just happened to get off and here I am... Sitting on the lawn, as it happens – don't worry, I'm not naked... Yes, I know he is... No, I just tracked him to

pub where he's presently sousing his innards with fine Kentish ale... Because I'm not prepared to let you throw away nine months of a beautiful, loving affair for a meaningless marriage, that's why, Samantha!... No, I will not keep my voice down!

Sound of birds being startled and taking flight.

Because if you're going to cast me off as cruelly and as callously as you would an old pair of tights I think you ought to know how I'm feeling about it... Yes, so you've said... Because I don't believe it's what you want, that's why... What you really want... What you really, really want... Yes, he most likely will... Well I think one of us ought to be honest with him – and since it's not going to be you... Yes, we do... No, I'm staying here... Well, you'll have to take a taxi then... Really looking forward to seeing you... Hello?

JASPER hangs up. He enters the shed. After a moment he backs out of the shed, holding a tennis racket and playing an imaginary opponent within the shed.

(Commentating as he plays.) A low forehand across the net to the Serb's backhand... Shedovitch tries to lob Wright, but Jasper Wright's on it. Beautiful return back into his opponent's court... Shedovitch tries a chip. Wright sprints for it...

JASPER races into the shed. There is the sound of crashing.

(Within shed. After a moment.) Ow!

DOUGLAS enters down the SR stairs. He crosses to the SR glass doors. He enters through the doors and descends into the garden. JASPER exits the shed still holding the racket.

DOUGLAS: Hello?

JASPER: Hello?

DOUGLAS: Can I help you?

JASPER: Help me?

DOUGLAS: Are you looking for someone?

JASPER: No. Are you?

DOUGLAS: No, I live here.

JASPER: Here?

DOUGLAS: Here.

JASPER: Oh. I thought you might have been one of us.

DOUGLAS: One of you?

JASPER: Yes, society for the protection of endangered species: SPES. There's a group of us going round keeping an eye out.

DOUGLAS: Eye out for what?

JASPER: Badgers – this weekend.

DOUGLAS: Badgers?

JASPER: Yes.

DOUGLAS: I didn't think they were.

JASPER: What?

DOUGLAS: Endangered.

JASPER: Badgers?

DOUGLAS: Yes.

JASPER: They are in Kent.

DOUGLAS: Really?

JASPER: Very much so – nowadays. Didn't used to be of course, used to be teeming with the buggers – badgers. That's why they came here.

DOUGLAS: The badgers?

JASPER: No, the people – malicious people, unsavoury elements of society – to hunt them, bait them, slaughter them. Now there's only about two hundred left in the whole of the county.

DOUGLAS: Two hundred badgers in the whole of Kent?

JASPER: Give or take.

DOUGLAS: I find that quite hard to believe.

JASPER: Most people do. So did I before I joined SPES.

DOUGLAS: So what were you doing in there?

JASPER: Looking for badgers – sorry, I thought I'd explained that.

DOUGLAS: You know you're on private property?

JASPER: Try telling that to a badger. No, I've got his permission.

DOUGLAS: Mr Harper's?

JASPER: Yes, Mr Harper's. He said I was free to come through if I was on the trail – which I am. I've been tracking a family of them for most of the day – one in particular, the daddy – last seen heading this way. Have to keep my distance of course.

DOUGLAS: I thought they were nocturnal.

JASPER: Common misconception – they're actually quite active during the day too – especially in the summer months. No, he's a keen badger supporter is Mr Harper. I've just been sharing a drink with him up at The Swan. You haven't caught sight of him have you.

DOUGLAS: Mr Harper?

JASPER: No, the badger.

DOUGLAS: He's at the Swan?

JASPER: The badger?

DOUGLAS: Mr Harper.

JASPER: Oh – yes he is.

DOUGLAS: And his wife?

JASPER: What about her?

DOUGLAS: Was she there too?

JASPER: Not that I noticed.

DOUGLAS: Well either she was or she wasn't.

JASPER: Then no she wasn't. Now you come to mention it, he said he'd come without her.

DOUGLAS: To The Swan?

JASPER: No, here to the house – this weekend.

DOUGLAS: No, he didn't.

JASPER: He did.

DOUGLAS: He didn't.

JASPER: I'm sorry, but I was there when he said it.

DOUGLAS: He didn't come to the cottage here without her. She's here.

JASPER: Is she?

DOUGLAS: She was. She may've gone off now to see to her parents.

JASPER: Her parents?

DOUGLAS: They're not well – apparently.

JASPER: No?

DOUGLAS: Mr Harper obviously didn't tell you that.

JASPER: No... we were mainly discussing badgers. What's wrong with them – her parents?

DOUGLAS: It doesn't matter. Interesting why he should tell you he'd come here to the cottage without her – when he hadn't.

JASPER: Yes it is, isn't it.

DOUGLAS: Yes it is, isn't it. I wonder why he did that?

JASPER: No idea.

DOUGLAS: No?

JASPER: Perhaps he's a... compulsive liar.

DOUGLAS: He is not. Mr Harper is a very honest man.

JASPER: I'm not saying he isn't. It's an illness – a condition, like Tourette's or kleptomania.

DOUGLAS: Mr Harper is not a compulsive liar, Mr...?

JASPER: Duckworth – Ethan Duckworth.

DOUGLAS: Mr Duckworth.

JASPER: And you are...?

DOUGLAS: I think you know who I am.

JASPER: Do I? If you're someone off the TV, I'm sorry, I don't usually watch –

DOUGLAS: You know very well I'm not someone off the TV, Mr Duckworth.

JASPER: Okay. You're going to have to help me out here a bit.

DOUGLAS: I hoped it wasn't true – that you didn't actually exist – but here you are, it seems, proving that you do.

JASPER: Exist?

DOUGLAS: Yes.

JASPER: Well... I hope I do.

DOUGLAS: And I hoped you didn't, but I suppose I have to deal with the reality of it that you do.

JASPER: Have I said something to upset you, Mr –

DOUGLAS: It's not what you say that upsets me, Mr Duckworth, it's what you are.

JASPER: Someone who's passionate about the welfare of badgers?

DOUGLAS: There are no badgers, Mr Duckworth, are there?

JASPER: No badgers?

DOUGLAS: No.

JASPER: Well, like I say, they are very scarce here in Kent, but there are some left.

- DOUGLAS: I know exactly who you are and why you're here... and it's not for the badgers.
- JASPER: I think perhaps you may be confusing me with someone else.
- DOUGLAS: Yes, someone else perhaps who just happens to wander into our garden... who just happens to be confronted by the one person he expects not to be here... who has to come up with a fantastical story about looking for badgers. No, Mr Duckworth, there's only one person you could possibly be.
- JASPER: Who's that?
- DOUGLAS: Her lover.
- JASPER: Ah.
- DOUGLAS: Yes 'ah', Mr Duckworth, 'ah'. Do you still want to talk about badgers?
- JASPER: No... probably not much point now, is there.
- DOUGLAS breathes to manage his rising anxiety.*
- She told you about us?
- DOUGLAS: Of course she didn't.
- JASPER: No?
- DOUGLAS: There wouldn't be much point her secretly carrying on if she had – would there?
- JASPER: I'm sorry?
- DOUGLAS: If she'd told me.
- JASPER: I'm not with you.
- DOUGLAS: Why would she... secretly carry on – knowing that I knew?
- JASPER: Presumably she's trusted you not to tell anyone else.
- DOUGLAS: Tell anyone else?
- JASPER: Well, people blab. Anyway you said she *hadn't* told you.

DOUGLAS: No.

JASPER: Then how did you find out?

DOUGLAS: Let's just say I've known it for a while, Mr Duckworth.

JASPER: Okay. Weeks... months?

DOUGLAS: Months! How long's it been going on for between you?

JASPER: Just over nine.

DOUGLAS: Weeks?

JASPER: No, months.

DOUGLAS: Oh!

DOUGLAS breathes again to manage his anxiety.

JASPER: You okay?

DOUGLAS: No, Mr Duckworth, I am not okay! I secretly hoped nothing as yet had 'happened' between you, but I suppose nine months is hoping beyond hope that nothing has.

JASPER: You seem to be taking all this quite personally, Mr –

DOUGLAS: Quite personally! How else can I take it other than quite personally, Mr Duckworth! This may be an idle affair for you, an inconsequential fling, a –

JASPER: It's not! It most certainly isn't! In fact I take great offence at you calling it that.

DOUGLAS: Do you!

JASPER: I do. You know nothing about our relationship, how we feel about each other. This is no inconsequential fling, no idle affair. Perhaps you're concerned about her as a friend.

DOUGLAS: A friend!

JASPER: If you are, I can tell you, Mr – whatever your name is –

DOUGLAS: Fuller! Douglas Fuller!

JASPER: Mr Fuller, she's certainly not just another... up-for-it-bit-of-skirt to satisfy my supercharged libido.

DOUGLAS: Oh!

JASPER: Some casual bed-fellow for temporary relief.

DOUGLAS: Oh!

JASPER: For the first time in my life – Douglas, was it?

DOUGLAS: Yes, Douglas.

JASPER: I can put my hand squarely on my heart here and say: this is someone – a woman – I’m actually in love with.

DOUGLAS: And so can I, Mr Duckworth, so can I!

JASPER: I see. Ah... I see. Well... it all makes perfect sense now.

DOUGLAS: Sense?

JASPER: How you’re behaving. I thought it was just because you cared about her – as a friend.

DOUGLAS: You’re quite unbelievable, Mr Duckworth.

JASPER: Does she know how you feel about her?

DOUGLAS: What?

JASPER: Have you told her?

DOUGLAS: Told her what?

JASPER: That you love her?

DOUGLAS: Yes, I’ve told her.

JASPER: And... what’s she said?

DOUGLAS: She’s told me she loves me too.

JASPER: I see.

DOUGLAS: Not so much recently – you’ll probably not be surprised to hear.

JASPER: How recent is recently?

DOUGLAS: That’s none of your business!

- JASPER: I think it's very much my business – Mr Fuller – Douglas – considering she's been telling me she loves me for most of the past nine months. I wouldn't like to think she'd be saying it to us both.
- DOUGLAS: Neither would I, Mr Duckworth, but that obviously seems to be the case.
- JASPER: And sex?
- DOUGLAS: Sex?
- JASPER: Has it taken place between the two of you?
- DOUGLAS: Of course it has.
- JASPER: Within the past nine months?
- DOUGLAS: That is absolutely none of your business!
- JASPER: That's probably more of my business than anything else – don't you think?
- DOUGLAS: No, I don't.
- JASPER: I'll take that as a yes. Well it seems she's done a better job concealing you from me than me from you.
- DOUGLAS: I can't believe she hasn't mentioned me.
- JASPER: Well, she hasn't.
- DOUGLAS: In the whole of the nine months you've been... with each other?
- JASPER: Not a squeak of you.
- DOUGLAS: (*More to himself.*) I suppose she had to, to manage her guilt.
- JASPER: Perhaps.
- DOUGLAS: To carry on with you behind my back.
- JASPER: Well, that's all a matter of perspective – whose back she's been carrying on behind.
- DOUGLAS: Well obviously it's mine.

JASPER: Well, sorry, I beg to differ – Douglas.

DOUGLAS: You're... you're quite unbelievable.

JASPER: It's funny, it's usually me – up to that kind of thing – in the past – keeping one hidden from the other. Once I managed three of them – all at the same time – separately, I mean. I must confess it hurts – now the shoe's on the other foot and love's involved. What about him?

DOUGLAS: Who?

JASPER: Mr Harper.

DOUGLAS: What about him?

JASPER: Does he know?

DOUGLAS: About what?

JASPER: You and her?

DOUGLAS: Yes, of course he does.

JASPER: Yes?

DOUGLAS: Yes.

JASPER: You make it sound like he's quite okay about it.

DOUGLAS: About what?

JASPER: You and her.

DOUGLAS: Being here?

JASPER: Well... anywhere I suppose, but yes, here – in such close proximity.

DOUGLAS: Of course he is, he wouldn't be renting the place otherwise, would he.

JASPER: What... it's all part of the agreement?

DOUGLAS: What?

JASPER: You and her.

DOUGLAS: Of course.

JASPER: You've all agreed to it?

DOUGLAS: Yes.

JASPER: Well... it seems things around here are a little less conservative than they at first might appear. Meeting you has been extremely informative, Mr Fuller.

JASPER hands the tennis racket to DOUGLAS.

DOUGLAS: Where are you going?

JASPER: None of your fucking business... Douglas.

JASPER exits via the SL paved path. DOUGLAS breathes to manage his anxiety. He's unable to and sinks his teeth into the racket. There is the sound of a car arriving. GINA enters through the SR front door. She carries a bag with takeaway in.

GINA: *(Calling.)* Dougie?

She crosses to the SR glass doors and looks out.

Still out here?

DOUGLAS: Yes.

GINA: Thinking time all done for tonight now – you'll be pleased to hear. I picked up a takeaway in the end – Chinese. Thought I'd spare you the cooking.

DOUGLAS: Right.

GINA: Flowers look nice.

DOUGLAS: Yes.

GINA: Is everything...? Dougie? Are you all right?

DOUGLAS: I suppose there's no point pretending I am, when I'm quite clearly not.

GINA: What is it? Are you not well?

DOUGLAS: No... I'm not well... not well at all.

GINA: Is it your stomach again?

DOUGLAS: My stomach... my head... my heart... all suffering.

GINA: Suffering? Suffering from what?

DOUGLAS: I knew there was something... something happening – my gut was telling me that much – as well as other tell-tale signs... all was not... well.

GINA: Dougie – ?

DOUGLAS: Let me finish. I hoped things had not gone too far and that it could be avoided. I know I'm as much to blame for... after all it has to be worked at, doesn't it... complacency sets in, things become... neglected – little things, but important things nevertheless – things that... shouldn't be neglected.

GINA: Dougie, what are you – ?

DOUGLAS: Please, Gina, let me finish. I suppose I always hoped if things did get... critical, they'd be able to be talked about before any action – drastic action – was taken. But now I know that was a hope that was... just a hope... having no foundation in reality.

GINA: This isn't about your stomach, is it Dougie?

DOUGLAS: When you told me you needed to come here alone to have some thinking time – so insistent you needed to be here by yourself... to think – I did have my fears.

GINA: Fears of what?

DOUGLAS: Of what I've subsequently learned to be true.

GINA: You're being extremely oblique, Douglas.

DOUGLAS: I know about him.

GINA: Him?

DOUGLAS: You know who I mean, so there's no point trying to hide him any longer... or your neck.

GINA: Did you look at my phone?

DOUGLAS: No, I didn't, but by the way you've been handling it recently I suspected there was something on it you didn't want me to see.

GINA: How did you find out?

DOUGLAS: I've just been chatting to him.

GINA: Really?

DOUGLAS: I presume it was him you went looking for on your thoughtful drive. You got your wires crossed it seems.

GINA: No, I was just with him in the pub – before I went to get this. He came back here then to tell you?

DOUGLAS: I prised it out of him more like – after he tried to fob me off with a highly implausible story about him looking for badgers.

GINA: What?

DOUGLAS: He may've been just toying with me – like a matador before the kill.

GINA: Where is he now?

DOUGLAS: Somewhere around.

GINA: Listen, Douggie... you may not believe this but nothing's... 'happened' between us – apart from cuddling – and kissing – nothing more.

DOUGLAS: No, I'm afraid I don't believe that.

GINA: It's true. Look at my neck.

DOUGLAS: Then one of you is obviously lying.

GINA: You trust my neck don't you?

DOUGLAS: At this point I don't trust anything about you.

GINA: Well, what has he told you?

DOUGLAS: He was quite open about his supercharged libido – as he so delicately put it.

GINA: Really?

DOUGLAS: I can't believe he's managed to keep that contained for the time you've been together.

GINA: Well... he has.

DOUGLAS: Please, you don't have to lie to me to soften the blow, I've already hit the ground.

GINA: I'm not. Doug – ?

DOUGLAS: Would you have told me... about him?

GINA: Of course.

DOUGLAS: After how long: a year – two years – three perhaps?

GINA: No, of course not. I wouldn't have left things more than a couple of months.

DOUGLAS: Well, it seems your definition of a couple and mine is obviously quite different.

GINA: I would've told you, Doug, believe me... if you can.

DOUGLAS: Were you going to...? Would you have... left me... for him?

GINA: Doug –

DOUGLAS: You're... in love with him? – No don't answer that.

GINA: Doug –

DOUGLAS starts to hyperventilate.

DOUGLAS: I... I...

GINA: Dougie –

DOUGLAS: I need to be... I need... I...

DOUGLAS drops the tennis racket and exits via the SR paved path.

GINA: *(Calling after.)* Dougie? Dougie? *(To herself.)* Oh!

GINA puts the takeaway bag on the steps. She takes out her mobile and checks it. She crosses to the SL glass doors.

(Calling within.) Toby? Toby?

She enters the SL cottage.

Toby, are you here?

She crosses to the SL stairs.

(Calling upstairs.) Toby, are you up there?

She checks her mobile again before exiting through the SL front door. There is a moment's pause of birdsong which suggests a passing of time. JASPER enters via the SR path. He surveys the garden and looks up towards the cottages. He checks his mobile briefly. He picks up the tennis racket and notices the teeth marks in it. He checks them against his own to verify. He crosses to the takeaway bag and looks inside. There is the sound of a car arriving and then pulling away. JASPER crosses to the table and chairs. He takes a chair and places it more centrally in the garden. He sits. SAMANTHA enters via the SL paved path. She remains close by the shed.

SAMANTHA: *(Calling softly.)* Jasper?

JASPER pretends not to hear her.

Jasper? *(Louder.)* Jasper?

JASPER: Oh, it's you.

SAMANTHA: Is he here?

JASPER: Who are we talking about?

SAMANTHA: Who do you think? Toby.

JASPER: Oh. No, he's still at the pub.

SAMANTHA: How do you know?

JASPER: I spied him recently through the window, tucking into his ale and venison pie.

SAMANTHA: And *they're* here too? Their car's outside.

JASPER: Yes – he is... haven't seen her – yet.

SAMANTHA: He saw you?

JASPER: Oh yes, we saw each other.

SAMANTHA: You spoke to him?

JASPER: I did – we spoke to each other.

SAMANTHA: What did you tell him?

JASPER: About...?

SAMANTHA: Who you are, what you're doing here?

JASPER: I told him I was your lover.

SAMANTHA: What!

JASPER: No, don't worry, I told him I worked for SPES.

SAMANTHA: SPES?

JASPER: Society for the protection of endangered species. That I was out looking for badgers.

SAMANTHA: Badgers?

JASPER: I told him I had your husband's permission to trespass – if I was on the trail.

SAMANTHA: He believed that?

JASPER: I was very convincing.

SAMANTHA: Jasper can we please, please go somewhere else to talk?

JASPER: No, I think here's a good place... even more so now.

SAMANTHA: Listen, Jasper... if you think I haven't agonised about this... if you think I haven't spent the last several days and nights questioning whether or not I'm being the greatest idiot that ever lived to give up on something so... wonderful, incredible – let's face it, something I'll probably never – definitely never – experience in my life ever again.

JASPER: Possibly.

SAMANTHA: Definitely.

JASPER: Possibly.

SAMANTHA: Definitely.

JASPER: If you say so.

SAMANTHA: I do, Jasper, I do. I'll never find anyone like you again – not that I'll be looking. Nobody can be as passionate, romantic, vital – yes, infuriating at times – and sheer bloody-minded too when you want to be – and stubborn – but exciting, demonstrative, loving.

JASPER: Sounds like I got about a fifty percent pass rate there.

SAMANTHA: No you got a hundred percent, Jasper, it all makes up who you are. Anyway, what I'm saying is: I love you, Jasper, I haven't stopped loving you and I will never stop loving you.

JASPER: All good and excellent reasons to give someone the boot I'd say.

SAMANTHA: No, Jasper, I've explained – or tried to – this isn't about us.

JASPER: Isn't it?

SAMANTHA: Yes, but for me it's also about him.

JASPER: And for me it's also about you – not so much about him.

SAMANTHA: Jasper –

JASPER: Can I stop you there? Which *him* are we about here?

SAMANTHA: Toby of course, who else?

JASPER: Just checking.

SAMANTHA: What, if you think there's someone else, Jasper – someone I met at my group perhaps –

JASPER: Cult.

SAMANTHA: Group.

JASPER: Cult.

SAMANTHA: Group. And I'm giving you the brush off with some phoney story about how I'm... wanting to reinvest in my marriage for the good and well being of my soul, so I can ditch you and get together with him.

JASPER: Goodness no, I wouldn't imagine you'd be quite so scurrilous as to do a thing like that.

SAMANTHA: No, I wouldn't.

JASPER: Our affair has always thriven on trust and honesty absolute.

SAMANTHA: Yes, Jasper, it has.

JASPER: Well... your affair, I should say.

SAMANTHA: What?

JASPER: Technically I'm not having one – not having a significant other. So for me it's just a relationship.

SAMANTHA: Jasper –

JASPER: Which doesn't mean to say it's any less precious to me.

SAMANTHA: Jasper –

JASPER: As the immortal bard said: 'what's in a name?' And might have added: 'let not trifling terminology screw up a beautiful thing, baby.'

SAMANTHA: Jasper, please, he could show up any moment.

JASPER: The bard?

SAMANTHA: Toby?

JASPER: Or not Toby. I thank you.

SAMANTHA: Jasper! Please go now before he comes back. Jasper, please... unless you're still intending to... Jasper, I beg you not to, it'll only make things messy – for everyone. I'm begging you, beseeching you not to.

JASPER: Beseeching. I don't think anyone's ever beseeched me before.

SAMANTHA: Well I am now, Jasper.

JASPER: The bard would approve.

SAMANTHA: I've made up my mind – despite what you tell me – it's what I want, what I really, really want.

- JASPER: Yes, and you've probably been in breach of the rules too, haven't you?
- SAMANTHA: Rules?
- JASPER: Carrying on with someone – someone *else* that is: me – without the full consent of the group.
- SAMANTHA: No, Jasper, despite what you'd like to think, my group doesn't have any rules like that.
- JASPER: No, I'm not talking about that group – I'll continue to call that the cult if you don't mind, to avoid confusion – I'm talking about the thing you've got going on here.
- SAMANTHA: What thing?
- JASPER: I'm sure you've agreed a certain protocol to adhere to – house rules – like not having two on the go at once.
- SAMANTHA: Jasper, you're making no sense.
- JASPER: No?
- SAMANTHA: No, none whatsoever. Look, Jasper, we're both quite raw at the moment and we're both in danger of doing – and saying – something we'll most likely regret for a long time to come. Please, please, please, leave now. I promise I'll call you – very soon. You're right, we need to talk – but not now, not here. Jasper, I'm beseeching you again.
- JASPER: (*Tennis racket.*) I've been wondering who these teeth marks belong to.
- JASPER gives the tennis racket to SAMANTHA.*
- Any ideas?
- SAMANTHA: No.
- JASPER: Maybe you should raise it at your next AGM.
- SAMANTHA: AGM?
- JASPER: If you're that formal that is.
- SAMANTHA: Jasper?

JASPER exits via the SL paved path. SAMANTHA briefly looks at the teeth marks before putting the racket down. She picks up the wine glass, tastes the wine and winces at the sweetness. She examines the label on the bottle. She notices the takeaway bag. She goes to it and looks inside. She checks her mobile. She wrestles with her thoughts for a couple of moments.

(To herself.) Oh, Jasper.

SAMANTHA exits via the SL paved path. GINA enters through the SR front door. TOBY enters through the SL front door.

GINA: *(Calling.)* Douggie? Douggie are you here? Douggie?

TOBY warily enters through the SL glass doors. GINA crosses to the SR glass doors. She enters through the doors.

He's still not back.

TOBY: *(Takeaway bag.)* Who's is that?

GINA: It's ours – our takeaway.

TOBY: What's it doing there?

GINA: I put it there.

TOBY: I'm sorry, Gina, but he must've been looking at your phone, it's the only conclusion I can come to.

GINA: Like I say, Toby, I don't think he would lie to me.

TOBY: Why wouldn't he? After all you've been lying to him for the past six weeks. I know I've had a couple of drinks but I think I would've remembered if I'd come back here and told him about us – so he's obviously lying.

GINA: Perhaps he picked it up from your conversation earlier.

TOBY: I've been going over that and I'm absolutely sure I gave no hint of anything – unless he's a master sleuth and can pick up on subliminal clues like Sherlock Holmes – which he obviously isn't.

GINA: Please, don't be rude about him.

TOBY: God, this is...! This is... God!

GINA: I secretly hoped you might be happy about it, Toby.

TOBY: *(Suspiciously.)* Does he really know?

GINA: What?

TOBY: Or are you just telling me he does – so I call Samantha and tell her about us before he does – which he won't do because he doesn't really know?

GINA: What, you think I'm trying to trick you, Toby?

TOBY: Are you?

GINA: No. How could you think that!

TOBY: No – sorry, sorry – forget I said that – I'm just... So he just walked off did he?

GINA: Yes.

TOBY: And you told him absolutely nothing had happened between us?

GINA: Only kissing and cuddling.

TOBY: Did he even need to know that?

GINA: I suppose not, but he does now. Obviously something has to have happened between us. Better to tell him the truth that nothing much has, rather than him imagining the worst... *(more to herself)* although he is imagining the worst.

TOBY: He's got our landline number, so he's probably called her already... and she's had a couple. God knows what she's going to say... and do. What do I tell her?

GINA: Why don't you tell her the truth, Toby?

TOBY: The truth?

GINA: That you're in love with me.

TOBY: But I don't know if I am yet, do I – it's too early to say! That's the whole bloody point of us doing this, isn't it, so we can find out!

GINA: Well I know I'm in love with you and I don't bloody care who finds out about it!

GINA tearfully exits through the SR glass doors.

TOBY: Gina! Gina!

GINA hurries up the SR stairs.

(To himself.) Balls, balls, balls, balls, balls!

TOBY checks his mobile. He notices the tennis racket. He crosses to it and picks it up. He nervously assesses the teeth marks. He surveys the garden perimeter.

(Calling warily.) Douglas? Doug? Douglas?

He enters the shed with the racket. SAMANTHA enters through the SL front door.

SAMANTHA: *(Calling.)* Toby?

There is a thump from within the shed.

TOBY: *(Within shed.)* Ow!

SAMANTHA enters through the SL glass doors. She has a quick glance for evidence of JASPER.

SAMANTHA: Toby? Toby are you in the shed?

TOBY: *(Within shed.)* Yes, yes, I'm in here.

TOBY exits the shed.

(Guiltily.) Samantha.

SAMANTHA: I needed to come.

TOBY: Yes. He... called you, I presume.

SAMANTHA: Who?

TOBY: Um... Douglas – didn't he?

SAMANTHA: Called me? To say what?

TOBY: Sorry... why are you here?

SAMANTHA: Because I wanted to talk.

TOBY: About what?

SAMANTHA: About us – not on the ends of two telephones.

TOBY: Ah.

SAMANTHA: What's Douglas supposed to have called me about?

TOBY: Um – to tell you that he's here – they're here – him – and Gina too.

SAMANTHA: Why would he want to tell me that?

TOBY: Just... being friendly neighbours, I suppose.

SAMANTHA: Well, no he didn't.

TOBY: That's why I thought you'd come – to say hello to them.

SAMANTHA: I came to see you.

TOBY: Ah. Isn't your car still at the garage?

SAMANTHA: I took a taxi. *(Takeaway bag.)* This yours?

TOBY: No – it's their anniversary apparently, must be their...

SAMANTHA: Anniversary dinner?

TOBY: Yes – I guess.

SAMANTHA: What's it doing there?

TOBY: No idea. I've just come back from the pub.

SAMANTHA: *(Wine.)* That theirs too?

TOBY: Oh – no that's... that's mine.

SAMANTHA: I didn't know you liked hock.

TOBY: Well... no I don't. Just thought I'd try it out – as an aperitif... digestive.

SAMANTHA: Ah.

TOBY: How did you know?

SAMANTHA: Know?

TOBY: That was hock – without tasting it – or looking at the label?

SAMANTHA: Oh I... I arrived earlier.

TOBY: Ah. How much earlier?

SAMANTHA: Not much. I came into the garden. You weren't about so I... had a little walk.

TOBY: I see.

SAMANTHA: Everything okay, Toby?

TOBY: Okay?

SAMANTHA: You seem... a little –

TOBY: Oh no, no I'm fine – was just in my own world – in the shed – just... in the shed in my own world. Looking at the roof where the branch came through. Think I'll need to do a better repair job – seems to have let the rain in.

SAMANTHA: Oh dear.

TOBY: Also quite surprised to see you – after our conversation earlier – I thought you might have taken up my suggestion of a nice relaxing bath.

SAMANTHA: I needed to come, Toby. The pub will still be open. Perhaps we can have a drink... and talk there.

TOBY: Sure.

SAMANTHA: (*Shed.*) Do you need to...?

TOBY: No, no... all done in here.

SAMANTHA: Okay... I'm ready.

TOBY: Me too.

SAMANTHA: To The Swan then.

TOBY: Yes, to The Swan.

SAMANTHA and TOBY exit into the SL cottage and exit through the SL front door. JASPER enters via the SL paved path. He looks up to the cottages. He crosses to the table, picks up the wine glass and drinks. He pours himself another. He soon becomes bothered by gnats. There is a distant rumble of thunder. JASPER looks up to the sky. He takes the wine bottle, the glass and the chair and enters the shed. After a couple of moments he exits the shed, crosses to the takeaway bag and returns to the shed with it. He kicks the door shut behind him. Another rumble of thunder. Lights down.