

SUMMER

An old house in North London.
 A large room, extending the width of the stage.
 The back wall, which contained the door, has been removed.
 A square arch shape remains. Beyond it, the hall. In the hall a staircase, ascending U.L., well in view. The front door U.R.
 A coatstand, hooks, etc.
 In the room a window, R. Odd tables, chairs. Two large armchairs. A large sofa, L. Against R. wall a large sideboard, the upper half of which contains a mirror. U.L., a radiogram.

START

Act One

Evening.

LENNY is sitting on the sofa with a newspaper, a pencil in his hand. He wears a dark suit. He makes occasional marks on the back page.

MAX comes in, from the direction of the kitchen. He goes to sideboard, opens top drawer, rummages in it, closes it.

He wears an old cardigan and a cap, and carries a stick. He walks downstage, stands, looks about the room.

MAX. What have you done with the scissors?

Pause.

I said I'm looking for the scissors. What have you done with them?

Pause.

Did you hear me? I want to cut something out of the paper. LENNY. I'm reading the paper.

MAX. Not that paper. I haven't even read that paper. I'm talking about last Sunday's paper. I was just having a look at it in the kitchen.

Pause.

Do you hear what I'm saying? I'm talking to you! Where's the scissors?

LENNY (looking up, quietly). Why don't you shut up, you daft prat?

MAX lifts his stick and points it at him.

MAX. Don't you talk to me like that. I'm warning you.

He sits in large armchair.

There's an advertisement in the paper about flannel vests. Cut price. Navy surplus. I could do with a few of them.

Pause.

I think I'll have a fag. Give me a fag.

Pause.

I just asked you to give me a cigarette.

Pause.

Look what I'm lumbered with.

He takes a crumpled cigarette from his pocket.

I'm getting old, my word of honour.

He lights it.

You think I wasn't a tearaway? I could have taken care of you, twice over. I'm still strong. You ask your Uncle Sam what I was. But at the same time I always had a kind heart. Always.

Pause.

I used to knock about with a man called MacGregor. I called him Mac. You remember Mac? Eh?

Pause.

Huhh! We were two of the worst hated men in the West End of London. I tell you, I still got the scars. We'd walk into a place, the whole room'd stand up, they'd make way to let us pass. You never heard such silence. Mind you, he was a big man, he was over six foot tall. His family were all MacGregors, they came all the way from Aberdeen, but he was the only one they called Mac.

Pause.

He was very fond of your mother, Mac was. Very fond. He always had a good word for her.

Pause.

Mind you, she wasn't such a bad woman. Even though it made me sick just to look at her rotten stinking face, she wasn't such a bad bitch. I gave her the best bleeding years of my life, anyway.

LENNY. Plug it, will you, you stupid sod, I'm trying to read the paper.

MAX. Listen! I'll chop your spine off, you talk to me like that! You understand? Talking to your lousy filthy father like that!

LENNY. You know what, you're getting demented.

Pause.

What do you think of Second Wind for the three-thirty?

MAX. Where?

LENNY. Sandown Park.

MAX. Don't stand a chance.

LENNY. Sure he does.

MAX. Not a chance.

LENNY. He's the winner.

LENNY ticks the paper.

MAX. He talks to me about horses.

Pause.

I used to live on the course. One of the loves of my life. Epsom? I knew it like the back of my hand. I was one of the best-known faces down at the paddock. What a marvellous open-air life.

Pause.

He talks to me about horses. You only read their names in the papers. But I've stroked their manes, I've held them, I've calmed them down before a big race. I was the one they used to call for. Max, they'd say, there's a horse here, he's highly strung, you're the only man on the course who can calm him. It was true. I had a . . . I had an instinctive understanding of animals. I should have been a trainer. Many times I was offered the job - you know, a proper post, by the Duke of . . . I forget his name . . . one of the Dukcs. But I had family obligations, my family needed me at home.

Pause.

The times I've watched those animals thundering past the post. What an experience. Mind you, I didn't lose, I made a few bob out of it, and you know why? Because I always had the smell of a good horse. I could smell him. And not only the colts but the fillies. Because the fillies are more highly strung than the colts, they're more unreliable, did you know that? No, what do you know? Nothing. But I was always able to tell a good filly by one particular trick. I'd look her in the eye. You see? I'd stand in front of her and look her straight in the eye, it was a kind of hypnotism, and by the look deep down in her eye I could tell whether she was a stayer or not. It was a gift. I had a gift.

Pause.

And he talks to me about horses.

~~LENNY. Dad, do you mind if I change the subject?~~

Pause.

I want to ask you something. That dinner we had before, what was the name of it? What do you call it?

Pause.

Why don't you buy a dog? You're a dog cook. Honest. You think you're cooking for a lot of dogs.

MAX. You don't like it get out.

LENNY. I am going out. I'm going out to buy myself a proper dinner.

MAX. Well, get out! What are you waiting for?

LENNY looks at him.

LENNY. What did you say?

MAX. I said shove off out of it, that's what I said.

LENNY. You'll go before me, Dad, if you talk to me in that tone of voice.

MAX. Will I, you bitch?

MAX grips his stick.

LENNY. Oh, Daddy, you're not going to use your stick on me, are you? Eh? Don't use your stick on me, Daddy. No, please. It wasn't my fault, it was one of the others. I haven't done anything wrong, Dad, honest. Don't clout me with that stick, Dad.

Silence.

MAX sits hunched. LENNY reads the paper.

SAM comes in the front door. He wears a chauffeur's uniform.

He hangs his hat on a hook in the hall and comes into the room. He goes to a chair, sits in it and sighs.

Hullo, Uncle Sam.

SAM. Hullo.

LENNY. How are you, Uncle?

SAM. Not bad. A bit tired.

LENNY. Tired? I bet you're tired. Where you been?

SAM. I've been to London Airport.

LENNY. All the way up to London Airport? What, right up the M4?

SAM. Yes, all the way up there.

TEDDY. Come on, then.

TEDDY moves a step towards him.

Come on.

Pause.

MAX. You still love your old Dad, eh?

They face each other.

TEDDY. Come on, Dad. I'm ready for the cuddle.

MAX begins to chuckle gurgling. He turns to the family and addresses them.

MAX. He still loves his father!

Curtain

Act Two

Afternoon.

MAX, TEDDY, LENNY and SAM are about the stage, lighting cigars.

JOEY comes in from U.L. with a coffee tray, followed by RUTH. He puts the tray down. RUTH hands coffee to all the men. She sits with her cup. MAX smiles at her.

RUTH. That was a very good lunch.

MAX. I'm glad you liked it. (To the others.) Did you hear that? (To RUTH.) Well, I put my heart and soul into it, I can tell you. (He sips.) And this is a lovely cup of coffee.

RUTH. I'm glad.

Pause.

MAX. I've got the feeling you're a first-rate cook.

RUTH. I'm not bad.

MAX. No, I've got the feeling you're a number one cook. And I right, Teddy?

Pause.

MAX. Well, it's a long time since the whole family was together, eh? If only your mother was alive. Eh, what do you say, Sam? What would Jessie say if she was alive? Sitting here with her three sons. Three fine grown-up lads. And a lovely daughter-in-law. The only shame is her grandchildren aren't here. She'd have petted them and cooed over them, wouldn't she, Sam? She'd have fussed over them and played with them, told them stories, tickled them - I tell you she'd have been hysterical. (To RUTH.) Mind you, she taught those boys everything they know. She taught them

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all the morality they know. I'm telling you. Every single bit of the moral code they live by - was taught to them by their mother. And she had a heart to go with it. What a heart. Eh, Sam? Listen, what's the use of beating round the bush? That woman was the backbone to this family. I mean, I was busy working twenty-four hours a day in the shop, I was going all over the country to find meat, I was making my way in the world, but I left a woman at home with a will of iron, a heart of gold and a mind. Right, Sam?

Pause.

What a mind.

Pause.

Mind you, I was a generous man to her. I never left her short of a few bob. I remember one year I entered into negotiations with a top-class group of butchers with continental connections. I was going into association with them. I remember the night I came home, I kept quiet. First of all I gave Lenny a bath, then Teddy a bath, then Joey a bath. What fun we used to have in the bath, eh, boys? Then I came downstairs and I made Jessie put her feet up on a pouffe - what happened to that pouffe, I haven't seen it for years - she put her feet up on the pouffe and I said to her, Jessie, I think our ship is going to come home, I'm going to treat you to a couple of items, I'm going to buy you a dress in pale corded blue silk, heavily encrusted in pearls, and for casual wear, a pair of pantaloons in lilac flowered taffeta. Then I gave her a drop of cherry brandy. I remember the boys came down, in their pyjamas, all their hair shining, their faces pink, it was before they started shaving, and they knelt down at our feet, Jessie's and mine. I tell you, it was like Christmas.

Pause.

RUTH. What happened to the group of butchers?

MAX. The group? They turned out to be a bunch of criminals like everyone else.

Pause.

This is a lousy cigar.

← END

He turns to SAM.

What time you going to work?

SAM. Soon.

MAX. You've got a job on this afternoon, haven't you?

SAM. Yes, I know.

MAX. What do you mean, you know? You'll be late. You'll lose your job? What are you trying to do, humiliate me?

SAM. Don't worry about it.

MAX. It makes the bile come up in my mouth. The bile - you understand? (*To RUTH.*) I worked as a butcher all my life, using the chopper and the slab, you know what I mean, the chopper and the slab. To keep my family in luxury. Two families! My mother was bedridden, my brothers were all invalids. I had to earn the money for the leading psychiatrists. I had to read books. I had to study the disease, so that I could cope with an emergency at every stage. A crippled family, three bastard sons, a slut of a wife - don't talk to me about the pain of childbirth - I suffered the pain, I've still got the pangs - when I gave a little cough my back collapses - and here I've got a boy idle bugger of a brother won't even get to work on time. The best chauffeur in the world. All his life he's sat in the front seat giving lovely hand signals. You call that work? The man doesn't know his gearbox from his arse!

SAM. You go and ask my customers! I'm the only one they ever ask for.

MAX. What do the other drivers do, sleep all day?

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TEDDY. I know they would.

MAX brings out his wallet.

MAX. I've got one on me. I've got one here. Just a minute. Here you are. Will they like that one?

TEDDY (*taking it*). They'll be thrilled.

He turns to LENNY.

Good-bye, Lenny.

They make hands.

LENNY. Ta-ta, Ted. Good to see you. Have a good trip.

TEDDY. Bye-bye, Joey.

JOEY does not move.

JOEY. Ta-ta.

TEDDY goes to the front door.

RUTH. Eddie.

TEDDY turns.

Pause.

Don't become a stranger.

TEDDY goes, shuts the front door.

Silence.

The three men stand.

RUTH sits relaxed in her chair.

SAM lies still.

JOEY walks slowly across the room.

He kneels at her chair.

She touches his head, lightly.

He puts his head in her lap.

MAX begins to move above them, backwards and forwards.

LENNY stands still.

MAX turns to LENNY.

MAX. I'm too old, I suppose. She thinks I'm an old man.

Pause.

I'm not such an old man.

Pause.

(*To RUTH.*) You think I'm too old for you?

Pause.

Listen. You think you're just going to get that big slag all the time? You think you're just going to have him . . . you're going to just have him all the time? You're going to have to work! You'll have to take them on, you understand?

Pause.

Does she realize that?

Pause.

Lenny, do you think she understands . . .

He begins to stammer.

What . . . what . . . what . . . we're getting at? What . . . we've got in mind? Do you think she's got it clear?

Pause.

I don't think she's got it clear.

Pause.

You understand what I mean? Listen, I've got a funny idea she'll do the dirty on us, you want to bet? She'll use us, she'll make use of us, I can tell you! I can smell it! You want to bet?

Pause.

She won't . . . be adaptable!

THE HOMECOMING

*He falls to his knees, whimpers, begins to moan and sob.
He stops sobbing, crawls past SAM'S body round her chair,
to the other side of her.*

I'm not an old man.

He looks up at her.

Do you hear me?

He raises his face to her.

Kiss me.

← END

*She continues to touch JOEY'S head, lightly.
LENNY stands, watching.*

Curtain