

Cambridge IGCSE™

DRAMA**0411/12**

Paper 1

May/June 2026

PRE-RELEASE MATERIAL



Centres should download this material from the School Support Hub and give it to candidates.

INSTRUCTIONS

- The questions in Paper 1 will be based on the **two** play extracts provided in this booklet.
- You may do any appropriate preparatory work. It is recommended that you explore both extracts as practical theatre, investigating performance and staging opportunities.
- You will **not** be allowed to take this copy of the material **or** any other notes or preparation into the examination.
- A copy of the pre-release material will be provided with the question paper.

This document has **32** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

EXTRACT 1

Adapted from Cordelia Lynn's modern version of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters*

These notes are intended to help you understand the context of the extract.

Chekhov's play premiered in Moscow in 1901, while the modern version was first performed in London in 2019.

The play is in four acts, and the extract is adapted from the first half of Act One.

The three PROZOROV sisters (OLGA, MASHA and IRINA) have very different personalities but all live in a large house in a provincial town in Russia. The play opens on IRINA's birthday, 5 May, exactly a year since their father died.

The sisters are all pining for Moscow, where they grew up, as they are now a long way from home and feel alienated and purposeless. Despite the sadness of the situation, Chekhov referred to the play as a comedy, and there are some comic elements in it.

CHARACTERS

OLGA	the eldest of the three sisters, 28
MASHA	the middle sister, 23, married to FYODOR
IRINA	the youngest sister, 20
ANDREY	brother of the three sisters, an academic
FYODOR	husband of MASHA
NATASHA	an awkward young woman who dresses poorly
ALEXANDER	a Lieutenant Colonel commanding the artillery
NIKOLAY	a Lieutenant in the army, not deemed handsome
VASILY	a Captain in the army, a misfit who is infatuated with IRINA
IVAN	army doctor, 60
ALEXEY	a Second lieutenant in the army
VLADIMIR	a Second lieutenant in the army
ANFISA	an elderly family retainer and former nurse, 81
FERAPONT	doorkeeper at the council offices, elderly and hard of hearing

ACT ONE

*[Midday. Spring. Sun. Light.
The Prozorovs' house. A living room with a large hall beyond. The
table in the hall is being laid for lunch.
In the living room, OLGA in navy, MASHA in black, IRINA in white.]*

- OLGA: Daddy died a year ago today. Exactly a year ago, the fifth of May, on your birthday. Irina. It was cold. It was snowing. You fainted – do you remember? – and I thought I wasn't going to survive but here we are a whole year later and we can talk about it like it was – Look at you now. You're wearing white again. You're radiant. 5
- [The clock strikes twelve.]* 10
- The clock struck twelve just like that.
- [Pause.]*
- IRINA: I remember when they carried him out of the church the military band was playing, and the soldiers fired a salute at the graveside. But even though he was a general there weren't many people, at the funeral I mean. Though it was raining. Heavy rain and snow. Why are you doing this? 15
- [NIKOLAY, IVAN and VASILY come into the hall.]*
- OLGA: No leaves on the birch trees yet, but it's warm enough to keep the windows open ... It was the beginning of May when we left Moscow too but everything was already in bloom. It was so hot, the city was rich in the sunshine. Then Daddy was given his brigade and we had to move here and although it was eleven years ago I remember it like it was yesterday ... I woke up this morning, I opened my eyes and my room was full of light, my room was full of the spring and I felt like I was filling up too and I longed, I longed to go home. 20 25
- IVAN: *[to VASILY]*. Never!
- NIKOLAY: *[to VASILY]*. That doesn't make any sense.
- MASHA: *[whistles her song]*.
- OLGA: Stop whistling Masha. It's annoying. 30
- [Pause.]*
- IRINA: It's just that I get these headaches. I go to school every morning and teach all day and my head aches and aches. My brain feels sort of crippled and my thoughts are sort of dead, like I'm old already ... I've been working at that school for four years and for four years they've bled me dry, drop by drop, every day, but there's one thought left in me that gets clearer and clearer ... 35
- OLGA: Get out of here and go back to Moscow! Sell the house, settle up and go. To Moscow ...
- IVAN: Yes! Back to Moscow as soon as we can. 40
- IRINA: *[laughs]*. NIKOLAY: *[laughs]*.
- IRINA: Andrey's going to be a professor anyway so he can't live here. The only thing stopping us is Masha ...

OLGA:	Masha will come and visit us every summer, for the whole summer.	
MASHA:	[<i>softly whistles her song</i>].	45
IRINA:	It'll all work out, you'll see. It's such a lovely day today! I feel like my lungs are expanding. When I woke up I remembered it was my birthday and I was so excited, like on my birthday when I was little and Mummy was still alive. I had such wonderful dreams ...	
OLGA:	You're glowing today, you look beautiful. Masha is beautiful too. Andrey would be handsome but he's put on weight and it doesn't suit him. And I've got old and thin, I suppose from being angry at the girls all day ... But not today! Today I'm free, I'm at home, I don't have a headache, I actually feel my age again! I'm only twenty-eight after all ... Everything happens for a reason, but sometimes I think I'd be happier if I got married and could stay at home all day.	50
	[<i>Pause.</i>]	
NIKOLAY:	I would have loved my husband. [<i>to VASILY</i>]. You're ridiculous, I'm sick of listening to you. [<i>Comes into the living room and sits at the piano.</i>] I've been meaning to tell you, our new battery commander is planning to visit today.	60
OLGA:	Really?	
IRINA:	Is he old?	
NIKOLAY:	Not very. Mid-forties at most. [<i>Plays the piano as he speaks.</i>] He seems nice. Certainly not stupid, though he does talk a lot.	65
IRINA:	Is he interesting?	
NIKOLAY:	Fairly. But he has a wife, a mother-in-law and two daughters, it's his second marriage too, and wherever he goes he says, 'I have a wife and two daughters.' He'll say it here, just you wait. Apparently she's sort of mad, the wife, does her hair in a long, thick plait like a little girl, talks politics and pseudo-intellectual stuff and every now and again tries to kill herself, apparently just to annoy her husband. I'd have done a runner long ago but he just complains about it to everyone.	70
	[<i>VASILY and IVAN come into the living room. IVAN is reading a magazine.</i>]	75
VASILY:	[<i>at once</i>]. With one arm I can lift sixteen kilos, but with two arms I can lift fifty, even sixty kilos. Evidently two men are not twice as strong as one, but about three times, if not more ...	
IVAN:	[<i>at once</i>]. For male pattern baldness ... dissolve five grams of naphthalene in half a bottle of spirit ... Use daily. [<i>Writes in a little notebook.</i>] I'll make a note of that ... So as I was saying, you just put a cork in a little bottle, run a glass tube through it, then you take the teeniest pinch of ordinary ...	80
IRINA:	Ivan Ivan Ivan!	85
IVAN:	Yes, my love, light of my life?	
IRINA:	Why do I feel so happy today? Like I'm sailing in a great blue sky with great white birds all around me. Tell me why!	
IVAN:	[<i>takes her hands and kisses them</i>]. Little bird ...	
IRINA:	I woke up this morning, I got out of bed, I got washed, and suddenly it was like I understood everything in the world and I knew how we're supposed to live. Trust me, I know <i>everything</i> . We have to work. Whoever we are we have to work and work hard otherwise we'll never be happy. If you don't work then you may as well not be alive,	90

	you may as well forget being a human being altogether! It's better to be an animal than a young woman who wakes up at twelve, has breakfast in bed then takes two hours to get ready. It's disgusting! You know how in hot weather you long for a glass of cold, clear water? That's how I long to work. And if I don't start getting up very early and working very hard then you have to promise never to speak to me ever again!	95
IVAN:	[<i>tender</i>] I promise, I promise ...	
OLGA:	Daddy made us get up at seven every day. Now Irina still wakes at seven but she lies in bed for hours thinking and thinking. [<i>Laughs.</i>] And she has such a serious expression on her face!	100
IRINA:	You still think I'm a little girl so you find it funny when I'm serious. But I'm twenty years old!	105
NIKOLAY:	I understand you completely Irina. I come from a rich and privileged family that didn't have to work and never worried about anything. When I got home from cadet school an orderly used to take off my boots while I had some kind of a tantrum, but my mother spoilt me and was surprised if anyone thought I was anything less than miraculous. They tried to protect me from work, they hid me from it. But they didn't succeed, not quite! The world is changing, you can feel the weight of it building in the air. There's a great storm coming, coming closer and closer and it's going to break over all our laziness and indifference and apathy and cleanse the rotten heart right out of our society. I'm going to work, and in twenty-five or thirty years so will everyone else. Everyone!	110
IVAN:	I won't.	115
NIKOLAY:	You don't count.	
VASILY:	In twenty-five years you'll be dead. If you don't have a stroke first I'll crack and put a bullet in your brain. [<i>Takes out a bottle of perfume and perfumes his chest and his hands.</i>]	120
IVAN:	But the truth is the moment I graduated I didn't do a thing. I even stopped reading, I haven't finished a book in years. All I read are these silly magazines. Look ... [<i>A magazine.</i>] According to this magazine there was a critic called Dobrolyubov, but what he critiqued and why I haven't the foggiest ...	125
	[<i>Knocking from the floor below.</i>]	130
	That's for me! It's for me. I'm expecting someone. I'll be back in a minute ...	
	[<i>Exit IVAN.</i>]	
IRINA:	He's up to something ...	
NIKOLAY:	He's obviously going to give you some kind of extravagant present.	135
IRINA:	But I told him not to!	
OLGA:	Why is he always doing these embarrassing things?	
MASHA:	[<i>standing, singing her song</i>]. 'On a curved white shore grows a green oak tree, with a golden chain wound round and round ... A golden chain wound round and round ...'	140
OLGA:	You're in an odd mood today Masha.	
	[<i>MASHA, humming, gets her hat.</i>]	

Where are you going?

MASHA:	Home.	
IRINA:	Home!	145
NIKOLAY:	But it's your sister's birthday!	
MASHA:	It doesn't matter, I'll be back this evening anyway. [<i>Kisses IRINA.</i>] Bye for now darling, happy birthday ... When Daddy was still alive thirty or forty officers would come and celebrate with us, it was so loud you couldn't hear yourself think. Now there's about one and a half people and it's silent as a desert ... Okay I'm going. I'm feeling a little down today, don't pay any attention to me. [<i>Laughs.</i>] We'll catch up later, but I've got to get out.	150
IRINA:	You're so ...	
OLGA:	[<i>upset</i>] It's okay Masha. I understand.	155
VASILY:	If a man talks a lot then that's a lecture, or at least a speech. But what do you call it when a woman talks a lot?	
	[<i>Beat.</i>]	
MASHA:	What do you <i>mean</i> you weird little man!	
VASILY:	Nothing. 'Little pig little pig, let me come in, No no by the hair on my chinny chin chin!'	160
	[<i>Pause.</i>]	
MASHA:	Stop <i>crying</i> Olga!	
ANFISA:	[<i>off</i>]. This way old man. Come on in, your boots are clean ...	
	[<i>Enter ANFISA and FERAPONT with a big pink cake on a trolley.</i>]	165
	Look Irina, from the council, from Mikhail Ivanych Protopopov ... A cake!	
IRINA:	How nice. Will you thank him for me?	
FERAPONT:	What's that?	
IRINA:	[<i>loud and clear</i>]. I said please thank him for me!	170
OLGA:	Nanny, give him a slice of cake. Go on Ferapont, they'll give you a slice of cake downstairs.	
FERAPONT:	You what?	
ANFISA:	Come along old man, let's go, cake time ...	
	[<i>Exit ANFISA and FERAPONT with the cake.</i>]	175
MASHA:	I don't like that Mikhail Ivanych Potty-popov or whatever he's called. You shouldn't have invited him.	
IRINA:	I didn't.	
MASHA:	Well that's alright then.	
	[<i>Enter IVAN with a SOLDIER very much bearing aloft a silver samovar.</i>]	180
IVAN:	My dearest girls.	
OLGA:	[<i>at once</i>]. A samovar! A <i>silver</i> samovar! [<i>Escapes to the hall, upset.</i>] How much did that cost him?	
NIKOLAY:	[<i>at once, laughing</i>]. Told you!	185
MASHA:	Ivan Romanych are you insane?	
	[<i>Beat.</i>]	

IVAN:	My dearest, sweetest girls. You're all I have in the world. To me you're the most precious ... I'm going to be sixty soon and soon I'm going to be an old man, a lonely insignificant old – What I'm trying to say is there's nothing good left in me except for my love for you, and if it weren't for you I'd have given up long ago ... [To IRINA.] My little bird, I've known you since the day you were born, I carried you in my arms the day you were born ... I loved your late mother.	190 195
IRINA:	But you can't give me such expensive presents!	
IVAN:	Expensive presents? Get out! [To the SOLDIER.] Get it out of here!	
	[The SOLDIER takes the samovar into the hall and leaves.]	
	'Expensive presents!'	
	[Enter ANFISA, talking as she crosses the room.]	200
ANFISA:	Girls, a colonel we don't know has just arrived downstairs. He's already taken his coat off and he's coming up here to meet you. Irinka, you be on your best behaviour won't you ... And it's well past lunchtime and nobody's even sat down to eat, oh dear oh dear ...	
	[Exit ANFISA on the other side, still talking.]	205
NIKOLAY:	That'll be Vershinin.	
	[Enter ALEXANDER.]	
	[Stands.] Lieutenant-Colonel.	
ALEXANDER:	Afternoon. [To IRINA and MASHA.] Alexander Ignatevich Vershinin. I'm delighted to see you again ... But you're all grown up!	210
IRINA:	Thank you for coming, please sit down.	
ALEXANDER:	I'm delighted, really delighted ... But. Weren't there three of you? I remember three little girls. I don't remember your faces exactly, but I'm sure Colonel Prozorov had three little girls, I distinctly remember seeing you there, sitting in a row ... How time flies!	215
NIKOLAY:	Alexander Ignatevich is from Moscow.	
IRINA:	Moscow? You're from Moscow?	
ALEXANDER:	That's right, I was an officer in the same brigade as your father. [To MASHA.] Now your face I think I do remember ...	220
MASHA:	Well I don't remember yours.	
IRINA:	Olya! Olya come back! The new colonel is from Moscow!	
	[OLGA comes into the living room.]	
ALEXANDER:	So you're Olga Sergeyevna, the eldest ... You're Masha ... And you must be the youngest, Irina ...	225
OLGA:	You're really from Moscow?	
ALEXANDER:	Yes, I trained and served there for a long time but now I've been given my own battery here – so here I am. I don't remember you individually, I just remember there were three of you. Three sisters. Your father, on the other hand, I just have to close my eyes and I can see him, like he's standing alive in front of me. I used to visit you in Moscow ...	230

OLGA:	And I thought I remembered everyone ...	
ALEXANDER:	My full name is Alexander Ignatevich.	
IRINA:	Alexander Ignatevich from Moscow!	235
OLGA:	We're moving there you know.	
IRINA:	We'll be there by the autumn. It's our home town, we were born there.	
	<i>[They laugh, happy.]</i>	
MASHA:	It's so unexpected, someone from home ... Wait! Wait! Now I remember! Don't you remember Olya, everyone used to joke about the Lovesick Major? You were still a lieutenant then and you were in love with someone, and everyone used to tease you by calling you Major ...	240
ALEXANDER:	<i>[laughs]</i> . That's right. That's me ... the Lovesick Major ...	245
MASHA:	You didn't have a beard then ... You've really aged!	
ALEXANDER:	Well, when I was the Lovesick Major I was young and in love. Not any more.	
OLGA:	But you don't have a single grey hair. He's aged but he's not old.	
ALEXANDER:	All the same, I'm turning forty-three this year. Have you been away from Moscow long?	250
IRINA:	Eleven years ... Masha why are you crying! Oh no, now I'm going to cry too ...	
MASHA:	Just ignore me. And where did you live?	
ALEXANDER:	Old Basmannaya Street.	255
OLGA:	So did we! We were born there ...	
ALEXANDER:	Later I moved to Nemetskaya Street. From there when you walk to the Red Barracks you have to cross a dark little bridge. If you stop and stand still you can hear the water rushing away beneath you. It's a sad place for a man to be alone.	260
	<i>[Pause.]</i>	
OLGA:	But here! Here you have a wonderful wide river, a real river! Yes but it's always cold. It's cold and there are millions of mosquitoes.	
ALEXANDER:	No! It's a good, healthy climate here. The forest, the river ... And so many birch trees. Lovely humble birches, my favourite trees. It's a nice place to live. The only strange thing is that the station is twenty kilometres out of town ... And no one seems to know why.	265
VASILY:	I do.	
	<i>[Everyone looks at him.]</i>	270
	Because if the station were near then it wouldn't be far, and if it's far then it can't be near.	
	<i>[Awkward silence.]</i>	
NIKOLAY:	Our resident joker, Vasily Vasilich ...	
OLGA:	I've remembered you now. I remember ...	275
ALEXANDER:	I knew your mother.	
IVAN:	A wonderful woman.	
IRINA:	Mummy is buried in Moscow.	

OLGA:	When we move back we're going to put flowers on her grave.	
MASHA:	But I'm already beginning to forget her face, it's terrible ... I suppose people won't remember us either. They'll forget us.	280
ALEXANDER:	Yes. They'll forget. But that's life, there's nothing to be done about it. Everything we think is serious, meaningful and important will be forgotten, or eventually won't seem important at all.	
	[Pause.]	285
	The strange thing is we can't know what will or won't be considered meaningful and important in the future. In Copernicus's or Columbus's own time everyone thought their discoveries were useless, absurd, heretical even, and that some empty rubbish written by some empty nutter was the truth. Maybe one day our own lives too will be looked back on as strange, uncomfortable, stupid, unhygienic, <i>wrong</i> even ...	290
NIKOLAY:	Who knows? Maybe they'll say we lived elevated lives and remember us with respect. Torture and capital punishment are illegal now, we're not fighting any wars ... But there's still so much suffering!	295
VASILY:	Blah blah blah ... Don't give the Baron any lunch, he lives off hot air.	
NIKOLAY:	Leave me alone Vasily Vasilich ... It's getting boring.	
VASILY:	Blah blah blah ...	
NIKOLAY:	But doesn't the fact that we acknowledge this suffering demonstrate social progress, when poverty and sickness used to be considered normal, even acceptable?	300
ALEXANDER:	Yes. Yes of course.	
IVAN:	You just said they'll think our lives were elevated, but human beings themselves are so small. [Stands.] Look how small I am. You have to say my life is elevated to make me feel better.	305
	[ANDREY plays the violin.]	
MASHA:	That's our brother Andrey playing!	
IRINA:	He's the clever one! He's going to be a professor. Daddy was a military man but his son wanted to be an academic.	
MASHA:	It was Daddy's idea.	310
OLGA:	He's sulking because we've been teasing him today. It seems he's a little in love ...	
IRINA:	With a local girl. She'll be here for lunch, probably.	
MASHA:	Urgh but just wait till you see her clothes! It's not that they're ugly or unfashionable, they're just <i>weird</i> . All these bright, clashing colours, and so much make-up! Andrey isn't in love, he does have some taste after all. He's just trying to annoy us. Besides, I hear she's going to marry Protopopov, he's the Chairman of the Local Council. Well good luck to them, they're perfectly matched ... [Calls.] Andrey!	315
	[ANDREY stops playing the violin.]	320
	Andrey come here a minute! Just for a minute!	
	[Enter ANDREY. He is sweating. He has a handkerchief with which he wipes his face and hands.]	
OLGA:	This is our brother, Andrey Sergeich.	

ALEXANDER:	Vershinin.	325
ANDREY:	Prozorov. So you're the new battery commander?	
OLGA:	Alexander Ignatich is from Moscow!	
ANDREY:	Really? Congratulations. Now my sisters will never leave you alone.	
ALEXANDER:	I'm sure they're bored of me already.	
IRINA:	Look at this little picture frame Andrey gave me for my birthday! [<i>A frame.</i>] He made it himself!	330
ALEXANDER:	That's ... A very nice frame.	
IRINA:	And that big one there, on the piano, he made that one too.	
OLGA:	He's not just the clever one, he's the talented one.	
	[ANDREY <i>tries to slip out.</i>]	335
	He plays the violin, and he makes all sorts of things, he can really do anything he sets his mind to ... Andrey come back! He's always sneaking off ...	
	[MASHA and IRINA <i>bring ANDREY back.</i>]	
MASHA:	Back you come!	340
ANDREY:	Please let me go ...	
MASHA:	You're so sensitive! Everyone used to call Alexander Ignatevich the Lovesick Major and he didn't mind.	
ALEXANDER:	Not at all!	
MASHA:	And now I'm going to call you the Lovesick Violinist!	345
IRINA:	Or the Lovesick Professor!	
OLGA:	He's in love! Andryusha's in love!	
IRINA:	Andryushka's in love he's in love he's in love!	
IVAN:	[<i>sneaks up behind ANDREY and grabs him</i>]. 'Andrey and Natasha sitting in a tree ...'	350
ANDREY:	Okay stop now stop ... I said stop!	
	[<i>Beat.</i>]	
	[<i>Wipes his face.</i>] I didn't sleep last night and I'm feeling a little ... I was reading till four in the morning and when I went to bed these thoughts were just going round and round in my head ... And the sun comes up so early here it just creeps into the bedroom ... I'm planning to translate a book from the English this summer but ...	355
ALEXANDER:	You read English?	
ANDREY:	Oh yes. Our father, bless him, piled what he called 'a proper education' on us. I know it sounds silly but after he died I began to put on weight, like my body had been liberated ... Thanks to him we know French, German and English, and Irina knows Italian too. But it cost so much ...	360
MASHA:	Knowing three languages in this place is an unnecessary luxury. No, worse, it's like some superfluous ... I don't know, like a sixth finger or something. We know a lot of useless things.	365
ALEXANDER:	Useless things? [<i>Laughs.</i>] You know a lot of useless things? But I don't think there's anywhere in the world, or ever could be anywhere in the world, that doesn't need intelligent and educated people. That's why it's our duty to see more and know more than our parents and grandparents saw and knew. [<i>Laughs.</i>] And you're complaining about your education!	370

MASHA:	[<i>takes off her hat</i>]. I'm staying for lunch.	
IRINA:	Wow ... Someone should have written that down ...	
	[ANDREY <i>has vanished</i> .]	375
NIKOLAY:	I agree that in the future life will be beautiful. But you <i>can</i> take part in it now, even from this distance you can prepare for it, you have to work.	
ALEXANDER:	Yes. But look at all these flowers! And what a lovely house. Your father's old quarters? I'm jealous. I've spent my whole life creeping about in poky little quarters with a few chairs and one sofa, and the stoves always smoke. I've never had flowers like these in my home ... Ah well ...	380
NIKOLAY:	I'm telling you, you have to work. You're probably thinking that the German has got all emotional, but actually I'm as Russian as you are and I don't even speak German. So ...	385
	[<i>Pause</i> .]	
ALEXANDER:	Do you ever wonder what would happen if we could live our lives all over again but be fully conscious of it the second time? I bet we'd try to do everything differently, or at least would know to create a different world for ourselves, somewhere like this surrounded by flowers and light ... I have a wife and two little girls, and on top of that my wife is. Unwell ... But if I could live my life again I definitely wouldn't get married! Oh no!	390
	[<i>Enter FYODOR</i> .]	395
FYODOR:	Dearest little sister! Many congratulations to you on your birthday! I wish you sincerely, from the bottom of my heart, health and happiness and everything a young lady of your age could desire. Allow me to present, by way of a humble gift, this little book. [<i>A book</i> .] The history of our very own secondary school, written by: me. It's just a small thing, practically inconsequential, scribbled in my idle hours ... But read it anyway. [<i>To the room</i> .] Afternoon everyone! [<i>To ALEXANDER</i> .] Fyodor Ilyich Kulygin, classics teacher at our secondary school. [<i>Back to IRINA</i> .] In this insignificant chronicle you'll find a list of all our graduates from the past fifty years. Isn't that interesting? <i>Feci quod potui, faciant meliora potentes</i> . [<i>Kisses MASHA</i> .] I have done what I could, let those who can do more.	400
IRINA:	But you gave me this for Easter.	
FYODOR:	No! Did I? [<i>Laughs</i> .] Well give it back then, or, yes, give it to the Colonel. Take it, Colonel. Read it some time when you've got nothing better to do.	410
ALEXANDER:	Thank you. [<i>Stands</i> .] Well I'm so pleased to have ...	
OLGA:	You're leaving? No don't go!	
IRINA:	You have to stay and have lunch with us!	
OLGA:	Yes please stay!	415
ALEXANDER:	[<i>laughs</i>]. Well if you insist ... I seem to have interrupted your birthday party. I'm sorry, I didn't know and didn't congratulate you.	
	[<i>Goes into the hall with OLGA</i> .]	

FYODOR:	Sunday at last, the day of rest! And so we shall rest, and we shall make merry, each according to their age, circumstances, inclinations ... It's finally spring, the carpets will be taken up for the summer and put away till the winter ... With mothballs and insect powder. The curtains, also, should be put away with the carpets ... I'm happy today, I'm in an excellent mood. Masha, we need to be at the headmaster's by four, he's arranged a little outing for the teachers and their ...	420
MASHA:	I'm not going.	
FYODOR:	You're not going? Why?	
MASHA:	I'll tell you later.	
FYODOR:	But Masha.	430
MASHA:	Okay okay, I'll go! [<i>Moves away.</i>] But please just leave me alone ...	
FYODOR:	Excellent. After which we'll go back to the headmaster's for dinner. Despite his old age that man is above all things a sociable man, an inspiration. Yesterday after the meeting, he said to me: 'I'm tired, Fyodor Ilyich! Tired!'	435
	[<i>Beat.</i>]	
	That clock is seven minutes fast. Yes, he said, 'I'm tired.' Extraordinary.	
	[<i>ANDREY plays the violin.</i>]	
	[<i>Enter OLGA.</i>]	440
OLGA:	Lunch is ready! We're having pie.	
FYODOR:	Here you are, dear Olga! You know, yesterday I worked from first thing in the morning till eleven at night, I'm completely exhausted and I'm still so happy! [<i>They go into the hall together.</i>] Dearest Olga ...	
IVAN:	Pie? Excellent!	445
MASHA:	Just make sure you don't drink anything. Do you hear me? It's bad for you to drink.	
IVAN:	Who do you think you are? My mother?	
MASHA:	All the same, don't you dare drink!	
IVAN:	It really doesn't matter.	450
MASHA:	I said don't you dare! [<i>Soft.</i>] Another evening being bored to death at the headmaster's.	
NIKOLAY:	Don't go. Simple.	
IVAN:	Yes, don't go darling.	
NIKOLAY:	I wouldn't if I were you.	455
MASHA:	Oh 'Don't go don't go!' I hate my life.	
	[<i>Goes into the hall with IVAN.</i>]	
IVAN:	Come on now!	
VASILY:	[<i>on his way to the hall</i>]. Blah blah blah ...	
NIKOLAY:	Stop it Vasily!	460
VASILY:	Blah blah blah ...	
FYODOR:	[<i>a toast</i>]. Welcome, Colonel! I'm a teacher by profession but in this house I can be myself, Masha's husband ... She's a really good person, a really really good person ...	

ALEXANDER:	[a toast]. Good health! [To OLGA.] It's so nice to be here with you!	465
	[IRINA and NIKOLAY alone in the living room.]	
IRINA:	Masha's depressed again ... She got married at eighteen when she thought Fyodor was the most intelligent man in the world. She doesn't think that any more. He is the kindest, but not the most intelligent ...	470
OLGA:	Andrey! Lunch!	
	[ANDREY stops playing the violin.]	
ANDREY:	[off]. Coming!	
	[Enter ANDREY. He goes to the hall.]	
NIKOLAY:	What are you thinking about?	475
IRINA:	Nothing. I don't like that friend of yours, Vasily. I'm sort of afraid of him to be honest. When he talks he doesn't make any sense.	
NIKOLAY:	He can be a bit weird. I find him annoying but feel sorry for him at the same time ... Mostly I feel sorry for him. I think he's shy ... When we're alone together he can be really funny and nice, but when other people are around he goes strange, gets argumentative ... Don't go! Wait until they've all sat down at least. Let me be with you for a moment ... What are you thinking about?	480
	[Pause.]	
	You're twenty, I'm not quite thirty. It's amazing to think how much life we have left to live, so many days, day after day, full of my love for ...	485
IRINA:	Nikolay. Don't.	
NIKOLAY:	Sometimes I'm overwhelmed by this feeling, a thirst, a yearning, to live, to struggle, to work, and this feeling has folded somehow with my feelings for you. Irina. Because you're beautiful, life is beautiful too ... What are you thinking about?	490
IRINA:	Maybe life seems beautiful to you, but for me and my sisters it hasn't been very beautiful. It's choked us, like weeds ... I'm going to cry. Stop it. [Stops. Smiles.] We need to do something, really do something that makes a difference. That's why we're unhappy, because we don't have work that we care about. We were born into a world that hates work and doesn't care about anything ...	495
	[Enter NATASHA. A pink dress and a green belt.]	
NATASHA:	They've sat down already ... I'm late ... [A mirror.] Hair alright at the back ... Irina! Happy birthday! [Kisses her emphatically.] You have so many guests! I feel all self-conscious.. . Hello Baron.	500
OLGA:	[coming in]. Here you are Natasha! How are you?	
	[They kiss. NIKOLAY and IRINA to the hall.]	
NATASHA:	I didn't know it was a big party, I'm sort of embarrassed ...	
OLGA:	Don't say that, we're all family and friends. [Soft.] But Natasha, you're wearing a green belt!	505

NATASHA:	So? Is it bad luck?	
OLGA:	No, it just looks a bit weird, with the dress I mean ...	
	<i>[They go into the hall.]</i>	
NATASHA:	<i>[upset]</i> . It does? But it isn't really green is it? More of a metallic neutral dull colour, don't you think?	510
	<i>[Everyone at the table in the hall. The living room is empty.]</i>	
FYODOR:	<i>[a toast]</i> . Happy birthday Irina! Here's to finding a nice young man!	
IVAN:	Don't forget Natasha Ivanovna, she needs a nice young man too.	
FYODOR:	I thought Natasha Ivanovna already had a nice young man.	515
	<i>[Laughter.]</i>	
MASHA:	<i>[taps her glass with her knife]</i> . Live fast, die young, that's what I say.	
FYODOR:	C-minus for behaviour Masha ...	
ALEXANDER:	This is delicious. What's it made of?	
VASILY:	Cockroaches.	520
IRINA:	Eurgh-ugh ... That's disgusting ...	
OLGA:	It's so nice to be at home! We're having roast turkey and apple pie later, you should all stay for dinner.	
ALEXANDER:	Can I stay for dinner too?	
IRINA:	Yes please!	525
NATASHA:	They're very informal here.	
IVAN:	'Andrey and Natasha sitting in a ...'	
ANDREY:	Stop it!	
	<i>[Laughter.]</i>	
	<i>[Enter ALEXEY and VLADIMIR with a huge bouquet of flowers. ALEXEY has a camera.]</i>	530
ALEXEY:	Oh no. They're already eating.	
VLADIMIR:	Are they? Oh no. They are ...	
ALEXEY:	Wait a second!	
	<i>[A photograph: the lunch party.]</i>	535
	And just one more ... Ha – that's excellent ...	
	<i>[A photograph: VLADIMIR posing with the flowers.]</i>	
	Okay! Let's go.	
	<i>[They go into the hall with the flowers and are greeted noisily.]</i>	
ALEXEY and VLADIMIR:	'Happy birthday to you! Happy birthday to you!'	540
ALL:	'Happy Birthday dear Irina, happy birthday to you-ou!'	
	<i>[Applause.]</i>	

VLADIMIR:	Happy birthday darling! Isn't the weather glorious? Like a miracle. I was out walking all morning with the secondary-school boys. I've started teaching gymnastics there.	545
	<i>[A photograph: the three sisters.]</i>	
ALEXEY:	You can move now Irina! <i>[Laughs.]</i> You look gorgeous by the way, really gorgeous ...	
	<i>[A photograph: the soldiers.]</i>	
	And here, I've got a little present for you. It's a spinning top, it makes the most amazing sound. Listen ...	550
	<i>[The top sings through the house ...]</i>	
IRINA:	Oh how beautiful ...	
	<i>[... Softens ...]</i>	
	<i>[... Settles ...]</i>	555
MASHA:	<i>[sings soft].</i> 'On a curved white shore grows a green oak tree, with a golden chain wound round and round ...	
	<i>[... Is silent.]</i>	
	'A golden chain wound round and ...' Why am I singing that? I woke up singing and I can't get it out of my ...	560
FYODOR:	Thirteen! Thirteen people at the table!	
VLADIMIR:	I hope no one here is superstitious?	
	<i>[Laughter.]</i>	
FYODOR:	Thirteen at table means there are secret lovers ... Not you I hope, doctor?	565
	<i>[Laughter.]</i>	
IVAN:	The things I could tell you ... But look! Natasha Ivanovna is blushing! I can't begin to imagine why ...	
	<i>[Loud laughter.]</i>	
	<i>[NATASHA runs into the living room, ANDREY after her.]</i>	570
ANDREY:	It's okay, just ignore them! Wait, please wait ... Please ...	
NATASHA:	I don't know what's wrong with me but they treat me like some kind of joke! I know it was rude to storm off I know it was but I couldn't take it I couldn't I – <i>[Cries.]</i>	
ANDREY:	Please don't cry, please don't. I promise they're just joking, they don't mean it. Really, they're all good kind people and they love me and they love you. Come over here, they can't see us over here ...	575
NATASHA:	All these posh people and these posh parties ... I'm so ashamed ...	
ANDREY:	You're so sweet. You're so young and so sweet and so beautiful. Please don't cry! Trust me, just trust me ... It's like my heart is filling	580

up and spilling over it's amazing ... They can't see us! They can't,
I promise. I don't know why I fell in love with you or when I fell in
love with you, I don't know anything except that I want you to marry
me. Please marry me! I love you I love you ... Never was a girl
so loved ...

585

[A photograph: ANDREY and NATASHA kiss.]

EXTRACT 2

Adapted from *Absurd Person Singular* by Alan Ayckbourn

These notes are intended to help you understand the context of the drama.

The play is in three acts and the extract is adapted from the opening of Act One. The play was first performed in Scarborough, England, in June 1972.

The play is set at Christmas in the home of SIDNEY and JANE HOPCROFT, fawning social climbers who are people pleasers. They have invited three couples to their Christmas soirée, although only DICK and LOTTIE POTTER are actually their friends. The other two couples are influential people, whom the socially inept HOPCROFTs wish to impress. However, rather than being a relaxed social gathering, there is a tense, awkward atmosphere throughout the extract.

CHARACTERS

SIDNEY HOPCROFT	a businessman, social climber, 30s
JANE HOPCROFT	his long suffering wife, 30s
RONALD BREWSTER-WRIGHT	an influential banker
MARION BREWSTER-WRIGHT	RONALD's wife
EVA JACKSON	troubled wife of influential GEOFFREY JACKSON
DICK and LOTTIE POTTER	friends who are heard but never seen

ACT ONE

[SIDNEY and JANE HOPCROFT's kitchen of their small suburban house. Last Christmas.

JANE is wiping the floor, cupboard doors, working surfaces – in fact, anything in sight – with a cloth. She sings happily as she works. She wears a pinafore and bedroom slippers, but, under this, a smart new party dress. She is unimaginatively made up and her hair is tightly permed. She wears rubber gloves to protect her hands.

5

As JANE works, SIDNEY enters, a small dapper man of about the same age. He has a small trimmed moustache and a cheery, unflappable manner. He wears his best, rather old-fashioned, sober suit. A dark tie, polished hair and shoes complete the picture.]

10

SIDNEY: Hallo, hallo. What are we up to out here, eh?

JANE: [without pausing in her work] Just giving it a wipe.

SIDNEY: Dear oh dear. Good gracious me. Does it need it?

[SIDNEY goes to the back door, turns the yale knob, opens it and sticks his hand out]

15

SIDNEY: Still raining, I see.

JANE: Shut the door, it's coming in.

SIDNEY: Cats and dogs. Dogs and cats. [He shuts the door, wiping his wet hand on his handkerchief. Striding to the centre of the room and staring up at his digital clock] Eighteen-twenty-three. [Consulting his watch] Eighteen-twenty-three. Getting on. Seven minutes – they'll be here.

20

JANE: Oh. [She straightens up and looks round the kitchen for somewhere she's missed]

25

SIDNEY: I don't want to disappoint you but we're not going to be out here for our drinks, you know.

JANE: Yes, I know.

SIDNEY: The way you're going ...

JANE: They might want to look ...

30

SIDNEY: I doubt it.

JANE: The ladies might.

SIDNEY: [chuckling knowingly] I don't imagine the wife of a banker will particularly choose to spend her evening in our kitchen. Smart as it is.

35

JANE: No?

SIDNEY: I doubt if she spends very much time in her own kitchen. Let alone ours.

JANE: Still ...

SIDNEY: Very much the lady of leisure, Mrs Brewster-Wright. Or so I would imagine.

40

JANE: What about Mrs Jackson?

SIDNEY: [doubtfully] Well – again, not a woman you think of in the same breath as you would a kitchen.

JANE: All women are interested in kitchens. [She turns to the sink]

45

SIDNEY: [ironically] Oh, if you're looking for a little job ...

JANE: What's that?

SIDNEY: A small spillage. My fault.

JANE: [very alarmed] Where?

SIDNEY: In there. On the sideboard.

50

JANE: Oh, Sidney. [*She snatches up an assortment of cloths, wet and dry*]
 SIDNEY: Nothing serious.
 JANE: Honestly.

[*SIDNEY goes to the back door, opens it, sticks a hand out*]

SIDNEY: Dear oh dear. [*He closes the door and dries his hand on his handkerchief*] 55
 JANE: [*returning*] Honestly.
 SIDNEY: Could you see it?
 JANE: You spoil that surface if you leave it. You leave a ring. [*She returns her dish cloth to the sink, her dry cloths to the drawer and takes out a duster and a tin of polish*] Now that room's going to smell of polish. I 60
 had the windows open all day so it wouldn't.
 SIDNEY: Well then, don't polish.
 JANE: I have to polish. There's a mark. [*She goes to the door and then pauses*] I know, bring the air freshener. 65
 SIDNEY: Air freshener?
 JANE: Under the sink.

[*JANE exits*]

SIDNEY: Dear oh dear. [*He opens the cupboard under the sink, rummages and brings out an aerosol tin. He is one of those men who like to read all small print. This he does, holding the tin at arm's length to do so. Reading*] 'Shake can before use.' [*He does so. Reading*] 70
 'Remove cap.' [*He does so. Reading*] 'Hold away from body and spray into air by depressing button.' [*He holds the can away from his body, points it in the air and depresses the button. The spray hisses out over his shirt front*] Dear oh dear [*He puts down the tin, wipes his shirt-front with a dishcloth. JANE enters*]
 JANE: What are you doing?
 SIDNEY: Just getting this to rights. Just coming to terms with your air freshener. 80
 JANE: That's the fly spray.
 SIDNEY: Ah.
 JANE: Honestly. [*She takes the canister from him and puts it on top of the washing machine*]
 SIDNEY: My mistake. 85
 JANE: For someone who's good at some things you're hopeless.
 SIDNEY: Beg your pardon, beg your pardon.

[*JANE puts away duster and polish*]

[*Checking his watch with the clock*] Four and a half minutes to go.
 JANE: And you've been at those nuts, haven't you? 90
 SIDNEY: Nuts?
 JANE: In there. In the bowl. On the table. Those nuts. You know the ones I mean.
 SIDNEY: I may have had a little dip. Anyway, how did you know I'd been at those nuts? Eh? 95
 JANE: Because I know how I left them. Now come on, out of my way. Don't start that. I've got things to do.
 SIDNEY: [*closing with her*] What about a kiss then?
 JANE: [*trying to struggle free*] Sidney ...

SIDNEY:	Come on. Christmas kiss.	100
JANE:	Sidney. No, not now. What's the matter with you? Sidney ... [<i>She pauses, sniffing</i>]	
SIDNEY:	What's the matter now?	
JANE:	What's that smell?	
SIDNEY:	Eh?	105
JANE:	It's on your tie. What's this smell on your tie? [<i>They both sniff his tie</i>]	
	There. Can you smell?	
SIDNEY:	Oh, that'll be the fly spray.	
JANE:	Fly spray?	
SIDNEY:	Had a bit of a backfire.	110
JANE:	It's killed off your after-shave.	
SIDNEY:	Eighteen-twenty-eight. Two minutes.	
JANE:	[<i>nervous again</i>] I hope everything's all right.	
SIDNEY:	When?	
JANE:	For them. I want it to be right.	115
SIDNEY:	Of course it's right.	
JANE:	I mean. I don't want you to be let down. Not by me. I want it to look good for you. I don't want to let you down ...	
SIDNEY:	You never have yet ...	
JANE:	No, but it's special tonight, isn't it? I mean, with Mr and Mrs Brewster-Wright and Mr and Mrs Jackson. It's important.	120
SIDNEY:	Don't forget Dick and Lottie Potter. They're coming, too.	
JANE:	Oh, well, I don't count Dick and Lottie. They're friends.	
SIDNEY:	I trust by the end of this evening, we shall all be friends. Just don't get nervous. That's all. Don't get nervous. [<i>He consults the clock and checks it with his watch</i>] One minute to go. [<i>The front door chimes sound</i>] They're early. Lucky we're ready for them.	125
JANE:	Yes. [<i>In a sudden panic</i>] I haven't sprayed the room.	
SIDNEY:	All right, all right. You can do it whilst I'm letting them in. Plenty of time.	130
JANE:	It doesn't take a second.	
	[<i>JANE snatches up the air freshener and follows SIDNEY into the sitting-room. A silence. JANE comes hurrying back into the kitchen. JANE puts away the air freshener, removes her pinny, straightens her clothing and hair in the mirror, creeps back to the kitchen door and opens it a chink. Voices are heard. One is a jolly hearty male voice and one a jolly hearty female voice. They are DICK and LOTTIE POTTER, whom we have the good fortune never to meet in person, but hear whenever the door to the kitchen is open. Both have loud, braying distinctive laughs. JANE closes the door, cutting off the voices, straightens her hair and dress for the last time, looks at a mirror on the wall, grips the door handle, takes a deep breath, is about to make her entrance into the room when she sees she is still wearing her bedroom slippers</i>]	135
	Oh.	145
	[<i>She takes off her slippers, puts them on the table and scuttles round the kitchen looking for her shoes. She cannot find them. She picks up the slippers and wipes the table with their fluffy side, where they have made a mark</i>]	
	Oh.	150

[She hurries back to the door, opens it a fraction. Jolly chatter and laughter is heard. JANE stands for a long time, peeping through the crack in the door, trying to catch sight of her shoes. She sees them. She closes the door again. She stands lost]

Oh. Oh. Oh.

155

[The door opens. Loud laughter from off. SIDNEY comes in laughing. He closes the door. The laughter cuts off abruptly]

SIDNEY: *[fiercely, in a low voice]* Come on. What are you doing?

JANE: I can't.

SIDNEY: What?

160

JANE: I've got no shoes.

SIDNEY: What do you mean, no shoes?

JANE: They're in there.

SIDNEY: Where?

JANE: By the fireplace. I left them so I could slip them on.

165

SIDNEY: Well, then, why didn't you?

JANE: I didn't have time. I forgot.

SIDNEY: Well, come and get them.

JANE: No ...

SIDNEY: It's only Dick and Lottie Potter.

170

JANE: You fetch them.

SIDNEY: I can't fetch them.

JANE: Yes, you can. Pick them up and bring them in here.

SIDNEY: But I ...

JANE: Sidney, please.

175

SIDNEY: Dear oh dear. What a start. I say, what a start. *[He opens the door cautiously and listens. Silence]* They've stopped talking.

JANE: Have they?

SIDNEY: Wondering where we are, no doubt.

JANE: Well, go in. Here.

180

SIDNEY: What?

JANE: *[handing him her slippers]* Take these.

SIDNEY: What do I do with these?

JANE: The hall cupboard.

SIDNEY: You're really expecting rather a lot tonight, aren't you?

185

JANE: I'm sorry.

SIDNEY: Yes, well it's got to stop. It's got to stop. I have to entertain out there, you know. *[He opens the door and starts laughing heartily as he does so. SIDNEY goes out, closing the door]*

[JANE hurries about nervously, making still more adjustments to her person and checking her appearance in the mirror.

190

At length the door opens, letting in a bellow of laughter. SIDNEY returns, carrying JANE's shoes]

[Behind him] Yes, I will. I will. I'll tell her that, Dick ... *[He laughs until he's shut the door. His laugh cuts off abruptly. Thrusting JANE's shoes at her, ungraciously]* Here.

195

JANE: Oh, thank goodness.

SIDNEY: Now for heaven's sake, come in.

JANE: *[struggling into her shoes]* Yes, I'm sorry. What did Dick say?

SIDNEY: When?

200

JANE:	Just now? That you told him you'd tell me.	
SIDNEY:	I really can't remember. Now then, are you ready?	
JANE:	Yes, yes.	
SIDNEY:	It's a good job it's only Dick and Lottie out there. It might have been the Brewster-Wrights. I'd have had a job explaining this to them. Walking in and out like a shoe salesman. All right?	205
JANE:	Yes.	
SIDNEY:	Right. <i>[He throws open the door, jovially]</i> Here she is. <i>[Pushing JANE ahead of him]</i> Here she is at last.	
	<i>[Hearty cries of 'Ah ha' from DICK and LOTTIE]</i>	210
JANE:	<i>[going in]</i> Here I am. <i>[JANE and SIDNEY exit]</i>	
SIDNEY:	<i>[closing the door behind him]</i> At last.	
	<i>[A silence. A long one. SIDNEY returns to the kitchen. Conversation is heard as he opens and closes the door. He starts hunting round the kitchen opening drawers and not bothering to shut them. After a second, the door opens again, and JANE comes in]</i>	215
JANE:	<i>[as she enters]</i> Yes, well you say that to Lottie, not to me. I don't want to know that ... <i>[She closes the door]</i> What are you doing? Oh, Sidney, what are you doing? <i>[She hurries round after him, closing the drawers]</i>	220
SIDNEY:	Bottle-opener. I'm trying to find the bottle-opener. I can't get the top off Lottie's bitter lemon.	
JANE:	It's in there.	
SIDNEY:	In there?	
JANE:	Why didn't you ask me?	225
SIDNEY:	Where in there?	
JANE:	On the mantelpiece.	
SIDNEY:	The mantelpiece?	
JANE:	It looks nice on the mantelpiece.	
SIDNEY:	It's no use having a bottle-opener on a mantelpiece, is it? I mean, how am I ...? <i>[The door chimes sound]</i>	230
JANE:	Somebody else.	
SIDNEY:	All right, I'll go. You open the bitter lemon. And shake the bottle first.	
	<i>[SIDNEY opens the door. Silence from the room. He goes out, closing it]</i>	235
JANE:	<i>[to herself]</i> Bitter lemon – shake the bottle first – bitter lemon – shake the bottle first ... <i>[She returns to the door and opens it very slightly. There can now be heard the chatter of five voices. She closes the door and feverishly straightens herself. The door opens a crack and SIDNEY's nose appears. Voices behind him]</i>	240
SIDNEY:	<i>[hissing]</i> It's them.	
JANE:	Mr and Mrs Brewster-Wright?	
SIDNEY:	Yes, Ronald and Marion. Come in.	
JANE:	Ronald and Marion.	
SIDNEY:	Come in.	245
	<i>[SIDNEY opens the door wider, grabs her arm, jerks her through the door and closes it]</i>	

JANE:	[as she is dragged in] Bitter lemon – shake the bottle first ...	
	[Silence. Another fairly long one. The door bursts open and JANE comes rushing out. Murmur of voices]	250
	[Over her shoulder] Wait there! Just wait there! [She dashes to the sink and finds a tea towel and two dish cloths]	
	[RONALD enters, followed by an anxious SIDNEY. RONALD is holding one leg of his trousers away from his body. He has evidently got drenched]	255
SIDNEY:	Oh dear oh dear. I'm terribly sorry.	
RONALD:	That's all right. Can't be helped.	
JANE:	Here's a cloth.	
RONALD:	Oh, thank you – yes, yes. [He takes the tea towel] I'll just use this one, if you don't mind.	260
SIDNEY:	Well, what a start, eh? What a grand start to the evening. [With a laugh] Really, Jane.	
JANE:	I'm terribly sorry. I didn't realise it was going to splash like that.	
RONALD:	Well, tricky things, soda siphons. You either get a splash or a dry gurgle. Never a happy medium.	265
JANE:	Your nice suit.	
RONALD:	It's only soda water. Probably do it good, eh?	
JANE:	I don't know about that.	
RONALD:	[returning the tea towel] Thanks very much. Well, it's wet enough outside there. I didn't expect to get wet inside as well.	270
SIDNEY:	No, no ...	
JANE:	Terribly sorry.	
RONALD:	Accidents happen. Soon dry out. I'll run around for a bit.	
SIDNEY:	I'll tell you what. I could let you have a pair of my trousers from upstairs just while yours dry.	275
JANE:	Oh, yes.	
RONALD:	No, no. That's all right. I'll stick with these. Hate to break up the suit, eh? [He laughs. So do SIDNEY and JANE. MARION comes in]	
MARION:	All right, darling?	280
RONALD:	Yes, yes.	
MARION:	Oh! [She stops short in the doorway] Isn't this gorgeous? Isn't this enchanting.	
JANE:	Oh.	
MARION:	What a simply dishy kitchen. [To JANE] Aren't you lucky.	285
JANE:	Well ...	
MARION:	It's so beautifully arranged. Ronnie, don't you agree? Isn't this splendid.	
RONALD:	Ah.	
MARION:	Just look at these working surfaces and you must have a gorgeous view from that window, I imagine.	290
SIDNEY:	Well ...	
MARION:	It must be stunning. You must look right over the fields at the back.	
SIDNEY:	No – no.	
JANE:	No, we just look into next door's fence.	295
MARION:	Well, which way are the fields?	
JANE:	I've no idea.	

MARION:	How extraordinary. I must be thinking of somewhere else.	
SIDNEY:	Mind you, we've got a good ten yards to the fence ...	
RONALD:	On a clear day, eh?	300
SIDNEY:	Beg pardon?	
MARION:	Oh look, Ronnie, do come and look at these cupboards.	
RONALD:	Eh?	
MARION:	Look at these, Ronnie. [<i>Opening and shutting the cupboard doors</i>] They're so easy to open and shut.	305
JANE:	Drawers – here, you see ...	
MARION:	Drawers! [<i>Opening them</i>] Oh, lovely deep drawers. Put all sorts of things in these, can't you? And then just shut it up and forget them.	
SIDNEY:	Yes, yes, they're handy for that ...	
MARION:	No, it's these cupboards. I'm afraid I really do envy you these. Don't you envy them, Ronnie?	310
RONALD:	I thought we had cupboards.	
MARION:	Yes, darling, but they're nothing like these. Just open and shut that door. It's heaven.	
RONALD:	[<i>picking up a booklet from the counter</i>] Cupboard's a cupboard. [<i>He sits and reads</i>]	315
JANE:	[<i>proudly</i>] Look. [<i>Going to the washing machine</i>] Sidney's Christmas present to me ...	
MARION:	[<i>picking up the air freshener from the top of the washing machine</i>] Oh lovely. What is it? Hair spray?	320
SIDNEY:	No, no. That's the fly spray, no. My wife meant the machine. [<i>He takes the spray from her and puts it down</i>]	
MARION:	Machine?	
JANE:	Washing machine. Here ...	
MARION:	Oh, that's a washing machine. Tucked under there. How thrilling. What a marvellous Christmas present.	325
JANE:	Well, yes.	
MARION:	Do tell me, how did you manage to keep it a surprise from her?	
SIDNEY:	Well ...	
MARION:	I mean, don't tell me he hid it or wrapped it up. I don't believe it.	330
SIDNEY:	No, I just arranged for the men to deliver it and plumb it in.	
JANE:	They flooded the kitchen.	
MARION:	Super.	
JANE:	You see, it's the automatic. It's got – all the programmes and then spin-drying and soak.	335
MARION:	Oh, good heavens. Ronnie, come here at once and see this.	
RONALD:	[<i>reading avidly</i>] Just coming ...	
MARION:	[<i>bending to read the dial</i>] What's this? Whites – coloureds.	
JANE:	Beg pardon?	
MARION:	What's this? Minimum icon? What on earth is that?	340
JANE:	No, minimum iron.	
MARION:	Don't tell me it does the ironing too.	
JANE:	Oh, no, it ...	
MARION:	Ronnie, have you seen this extraordinary machine?	
RONALD:	Yes. Yes ...	345
MARION:	It not only does your washing, it does your ironing.	
SIDNEY:	No, no ...	
JANE:	No ...	
MARION:	[<i>to JANE</i>] We shall soon be totally redundant. [<i>She picks up the spray and fires it into the air and inhales</i>] What a poignant smell. It's almost too good to waste on flies, isn't it. Now where ...? It's a little	350

like your husband's gorgeous cologne, surely?
 JANE: Oh, well ... [*The doorbell chimes*]
 MARION: Oh, good gracious. What was that? Does that mean your shirts are
 355
 cooked or something.
 SIDNEY: No, front doorbell.
 MARION: Oh, I see. How pretty.
 SIDNEY: Somebody else arrived.
 JANE: Yes, I'd better ...
 SIDNEY: Won't be a minute. 360
 JANE: No, I'll go.
 SIDNEY: No ...
 JANE: No, I'll go.

[JANE *hurries out, closing the door*]

MARION: I do hope your Mr and Mrs Potter don't feel terribly abandoned in 365
 there. They're spendidly jolly, blooming people, aren't they?
 SIDNEY: Yes, Dick's a bit of a laugh.
 MARION: Enormous. Now, you must tell me one thing, Mr Hopcraft. How on
 earth did you squeeze that machine so perfectly under the shelf? Did
 you try them for size or were you terribly lucky? 370
 SIDNEY: No, I went out and measured the machine in the shop.
 MARION: Oh, I see.
 SIDNEY: And then I made the shelf, you see. So it was the right height.
 MARION: No, I mean how on earth did you know it was going to be right?
 SIDNEY: Well, that's the way I built it. 375
 MARION: No. You don't mean this is you?
 SIDNEY: Yes, yes. Well, the shelf is.
 MARION: Ronnie!
 RONALD: Um?
 MARION: Ronnie, darling, what are you reading? 380
 RONALD: [*vaguely consulting the cover of his book*] Er ...
 SIDNEY: Ah, that'll be the instruction book for the stove.
 RONALD: Oh, is that what it is. I was just trying to work out what I was reading.
 Couldn't make head or tail.
 MARION: Darling, did you hear what Mr Hop – er ... 385
 SIDNEY: Hopcraft.
 MARION: Sidney, isn't it? Sidney was saying ...?
 RONALD: What?
 MARION: Darling, Sidney built this shelf on his own. He went out and
 measured the machine, got all his screws and nails and heaven 390
 knows what and built this shelf himself.
 RONALD: Good.
 SIDNEY: I've got some more shelves upstairs. For the bedside. And also, I've
 partitioned off part of the spare bedroom as a walk-in cupboard for
 the wife. And I'm just about to panel the landing with those knotty 395
 pine units, have you seen them?
 MARION: Those curtains are really the most insistent colour I've ever seen.
 They must just simply cry out to be drawn in the morning.

[JANE *sticks her head round the door*]

JANE: Dear – it's Mr and Mrs Jackson. 400
 SIDNEY: Oh. Geoff and Eva, is it? Right, I'll be in to say hallo.
 MARION: Geoff and Eva Jackson?

SIDNEY:	Yes. Do you know them?	
MARION:	Oh yes. Rather. Darling, it's Geoff and Eva Jackson.	
RONALD:	Geoff and Eva who?	405
MARION:	The Jacksons.	
RONALD:	Oh, Geoff and Eva Jackson. [<i>He goes and studies the washing machine</i>]	
MARION:	That's nice, isn't it?	
RONALD:	Yes?	410
JANE:	Are you coming in?	
SIDNEY:	Yes, yes.	
MARION:	Haven't seen them for ages.	
JANE:	They've left the dog in the car.	
SIDNEY:	Oh, good.	415
MARION:	Have they a dog?	
JANE:	Yes.	
MARION:	Oh, how lovely. We must see him.	
JANE:	He's – very big ...	
SIDNEY:	Yes, well, lead on, dear.	420
	[<i>JANE opens the door. A burst of conversation from the sitting room. JANE goes out. SIDNEY holds the door open for MARION, sees she is not following him and torn between his duties as a host, follows JANE off</i>]	
	We'll be in here. [<i>He closes the door</i>]	425
MARION:	Ronnie ...	
RONALD:	[<i>studying the washing machine</i>] Mm?	
MARION:	Come along, darling.	
RONALD:	I was just trying to work out how this thing does the ironing. Don't see it at all. Just rolls it into a ball.	430
MARION:	Darling, do come on.	
RONALD:	I think that woman's got it wrong.	
MARION:	Darling ...	
RONALD:	Um?	
MARION:	Make our excuses quite shortly, please.	435
RONALD:	Had enough, have you?	
MARION:	We've left the boys ...	
RONALD:	They'll be all right.	
MARION:	What's that man's name?	
RONALD:	Hopcraft, do you mean?	440
MARION:	No, the other one.	
RONALD:	Oh, Potter, isn't it?	
MARION:	Well, I honestly don't think I can sit through many more of his jokes.	
RONALD:	I thought they were quite funny.	
MARION:	And I've never had quite such a small drink in my life.	445
RONALD:	Really? My drink was pretty strong.	
MARION:	That's only because she missed the glass with the soda water. Consider yourself lucky.	
RONALD:	I don't know about lucky. I shall probably have rheumatism in the morning.	450
	[<i>SIDNEY sticks his head round the door. Laughter and chatter behind him</i>]	
SIDNEY:	Er – Mrs Brewster-Wright, I wonder if you'd both ...	

- MARION: Oh, yes, we're just coming. We can't tear ourselves away from your divine kitchen, can we, Ronnie? [*Turning to RONALD, holding up the fingers of one hand and mouthing*] Five minutes. 455
- RONALD: Righto.
- [*They all go out, closing the door.*
Silence.
JANE enters with an empty bowl. She hurries to the cupboard and takes out a jumbo bag of crisps and pours them into the bowl. She is turning to leave when the door opens again and SIDNEY hurries in, looking a little fraught] 460
- SIDNEY: Tonic water. We've run out.
- JANE: Tonic water. Down there in the cupboard. 465
- SIDNEY: Right.
- JANE: Do you think it's going all right?
- SIDNEY: Fine, fine. Now get back, get back there.
- JANE: [*as she goes*] Will you ask Lottie to stop eating all these crisps? Nobody else has had any. 470
- [JANE goes out closing the door behind her.
SIDNEY searches first one cupboard, then another, but cannot find any tonic]
- SIDNEY: Oh dear, oh dear.
- [SIDNEY hurries back to the party closing the door behind him. After a second JANE enters looking worried, closing the door behind her. She searches where SIDNEY has already searched. She finds nothing] 475
- JANE: Oh. [*She wanders in rather aimless circles round the kitchen*]
- [SIDNEY enters with a glass and a slice of lemon in it. He closes the door] 480
- SIDNEY: Is it there?
- JANE: Yes, yes. Somewhere ...
- SIDNEY: Well, come along. She's waiting.
- JANE: I've just – got to find it ... 485
- SIDNEY: Oh dear, oh dear.
- JANE: I tidied them away somewhere.
- SIDNEY: Well, there was no point in tidying them away, was there? We're having a party.
- JANE: Well – it just looked – tidier. You go back in, I'll bring them. 490
- SIDNEY: Now that was your responsibility. We agreed buying the beverages was your department. I hope you haven't let us down.
- JANE: No. I'm sure I haven't.
- SIDNEY: Well, it's very embarrassing for me in the meanwhile, isn't it? Mrs Brewster-Wright is beginning to give me anxious looks. 495
- JANE: Oh.
- SIDNEY: Well then. [*SIDNEY goes back in*]
- [JANE stands helplessly. She gives a little whimper of dismay. She is on the verge of tears. Then a sudden decision. She goes to a drawer

and brings out her housekeeping purse. She opens it and takes out some coins. She looks at the clock.] 500

JANE: Nineteen-twenty-one. [*Hurried calculation*] Thirteen – fourteen – fifteen – sixteen – seventeen – eighteen – nineteen ... seven-twenty-two. [*She hurries to the back door and opens it. She holds out her hand, takes a tentative step out and then a hasty step back again. She is again in a dilemma. She closes the back door. She goes to the cupboard just inside the door and, after rummaging about, she emerges holding a pair of men's large wellington boots in one hand and a pair of plimsolls in the other. Mentally tossing up between them, she returns the plimsolls to the cupboard. She slips off her own shoes and steps easily into the wellingtons. She puts her own shoes neatly in the cupboard and rummages again. She pulls out a large man's gardening raincoat. She holds it up, realises it's better than nothing and puts it on. She hurries back to the centre of the room buttoning it as she does so*] Nineteen-twenty-four. [*She returns to the back door, opens it and steps out. It is evidently pelting down. She stands in the doorway holding up the collar of the coat and ineffectually trying to protect her hairdo from the rain with the other hand. Frantically*] Oh ... [*She dives back into the cupboard and re-emerges with an old trilby hat. She looks at it in dismay. After a moment's struggle she puts it on and hurries back to the centre of the room*] Twenty-five. 505 510 515 520

[JANE returns to the back door, hesitates for a second and then plunges out into the night, leaving the door only very slightly ajar. After a moment, SIDNEY returns still clutching the glass] 525

SIDNEY: Jane? Jane! [*He looks round, puzzled*] Good gracious me. [*He peers around for her*]

[EVA comes in. In her thirties, she makes no concessions in either manner or appearance]

EVA: May I have a glass of water? 530

SIDNEY: Beg your pardon?

EVA: I have to take these. [*She holds out a couple of tablets enclosed in a sheet of tinfoil. She crosses to the back door and stands taking deep breaths of fresh air*]

SIDNEY: Oh, yes. There's a glass here somewhere, I think. 535

EVA: Thanks.

SIDNEY: [*finding a tumbler*] Here we are. [*He puts it down on the washing machine*]

[EVA stands abstractedly staring ahead of her, tearing at the paper round the pills without any effort to open them. A pause. SIDNEY looks at her] 540

Er ...

EVA: What? Oh, thanks. [*She closes the back door and picks up the glass*]

SIDNEY: Not ill, I hope?

EVA: What?

SIDNEY: The pills. Not ill? 545

EVA: It depends what you mean by ill, doesn't it?

SIDNEY: Ah.

EVA: If you mean do they prevent me from turning into a raving lunatic, the answer's probably yes. [*She laughs somewhat bitterly*] 550

SIDNEY: [*laughing, too*] Raving lunatic, yes – [*He is none too certain of this lady*] – but then I always say, it helps to be a bit mad, doesn't it? I mean, we're all a bit mad. I'm a bit mad. [*Pause*] Yes. [*Pause*] It's a mad world, as they say.

EVA: [*surveying the pills in her hand which she has now opened*] 555
 Extraordinary to think that one's sanity can depend on these.
 Frightening, isn't it? [*She puts them both in her mouth and swallows the glass of water in one gulp*] Yuck. Alarming. Do you know I've been taking pills of one sort or another since I was eight years old.
 What chance does your body have? My husband tells me that even 560
 if I didn't need them, I'd still have to take them. My whole mentality is geared round swallowing tablets every three hours, twenty-four hours a day. I even have to set the alarm at night. You're looking at a mess. A wreck. [*She still holds the glass and is searching round absently as she speaks, for somewhere to put it*] Don't you sometimes long to be 565
 out of your body and free? Free just to float? I know I do. [*She opens the pedal bin with her foot and tosses the empty glass into it*] Thanks.

[*She puts the screwed up tinfoil into SIDNEY's hand and starts for the door. SIDNEY gawps at her*]

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