

SIMON: You're just trying to get out of it.
 MAL: Get out of nothing. The whole point is that I wasn't arguing with you in the first place. (*Turning to JODY*) All I wanted to know was why you made such a big issue of your conservatism.
 JODY: I wasn't making a big issue out of it.
 MAL: And the reason I wanted to know why you were making such a big issue out of it was that if you didn't know why you were making a big issue then I did.
 SIMON: (*sneering*) You know do you?
 MAL: Well I'd be a pretty poor psychologist if I didn't.
 JODY: You have to be a psychologist to know something about other people do you?
 MAL: It helps.
 JODY: I suppose Dostoevsky had training did he?
 MAL: (*pompously*) Artistic insights are one thing. Empirical truths are another.
 JODY: Perhaps you'll be able to tell me then Mr Expert. Why are you making such an issue out of me making such an issue of my conservatism?
 MAL: That's not relevant.
 JODY: It's a new bloody question.
 MAL: Well if you're going to ask a new question keep it relevant to the old one.
 JODY: What an absurd thing to say.
 MAL: It's no sense arguing with you. You can't even follow the thread.
 JODY: Pick on someone your own size!
 COOLEY: Tell a quick joke Mack.
 MACK: Did you hear the one about Cinderella?
 MAL: (*sourly*) At twelve o'clock her tampax changed to a . . .
 MACK: Have I ever told you about the time I met Cooley in the Walkabout Bar at the International?
 MAL: No. Thank Christ.
 MACK: I got this telegram on a Thursday. Arriving tomorrow TAA Flight 845. 7.30. Meet at Cockpit. Cooley. Out of the blue. Too bad if I'd arranged to do anything else.
 COOLEY: We'd arranged it all weeks before.
 MACK: As it turns out I was pretty glad because Ruth was all set to cart me off for compulsory culture.
 COOLEY: Philistine.

MACK: I've got nothing against the old Mozart but I'd rather have him emerge from the stereo while I'm into some steak and a bit of red, but you can imagine how Ruth reacted to the news. Made my day!
 COOLEY: Made your day! When I saw you you were still quivering with fear!
 MACK: Crap! We went straight to the bar at the Walkabout and ordered a beer.
 SIMON: I thought it was a restaurant.
 MAL: (*still fuming*) There's a bar on one floor and a restaurant next to it.
 SIMON: Aren't you confusing it with the cafeteria downstairs?
 MAL: No I'm not. (*Pronouncing each word deliberately*) *There is a bar in the Walkabout!!*
 COOLEY: (*dogmatic, sending up MAL.*) There is a bar in the Walkabout. (*Politely, as MAL wheels around*) It's right over in the far corner.
 MACK: We'd hardly got the smell of hops into our nostrils when Cooley announces that he's randy.
 COOLEY: (*mock incredulous*) Me? The very first words he said were: (*Doing a Peter Lorre imitation*) 'Let's get ourselves a screw Cools.' Not, 'How are you, how's your Aunt Dimitri?' 'Let's get ourselves a screw.'
 MACK: That's crap.
 COOLEY: My success with women affects this little prick. Every time he sees me it's like a conditioned reflex. (*Imitating again*) 'Let's get ourselves a screw Cools.'
 MACK: The point is that as we cast our eyes over to the restaurant half of the deal we saw these two magnificent waitresses.
 COOLEY: Absolute ratshit. The bottom of the barrel.
 MACK: I seem to remember you being quite enthusiastic at the time.
 COOLEY: You're my friend. If you want something, I get it for you. That's how I operate.
 SUSAN: Nothing makes me sick.
 MACK: He went across, sat down and ordered a meal.
 COOLEY: Every time she came near the table I threw in a few quick quips to establish myself as a man of refinement and wit.

MACK: Such as: (*Imitating COOLEY*) 'How about a roll or two.'

(*He chuckles in imitation of COOLEY chuckling at his own weak joke.*)

COOLEY: The secret is to wait for the right question. 'Where have you flown in from?' she says. 'South Africa,' I reply —there'd been a flight from Capetown unloading when I came through the gates.

MAL: South Africa. Why the hell would anyone want to say they came in from South fucking Africa!

COOLEY: I never mix politics and sex. It was just after that first rash of heart transplants. 'South Africa,' she said. 'Yes,' I said, 'I'm Adolf Voerward, Dr. Christian Barnard's anaesthetist and this, (*indicating MACK*) is my colleague Dr Villiers Van der Graf,' I said.

MACK: (*as the waitress*) 'Are you here to work on heart transplants?' she said.

COOLEY: 'No,' I said. 'We're getting right out of hearts.'

MACK: 'Why's that?' she says.

KATH: (*looking at her watch and leaping up*) Oh the pizzas! Would anyone like some pizza?

MACK: Love some Kath, Cooley?

COOLEY: 'Well,' I said . . . yes thanks Kath . . .

KATH: Simon, Jody . . . some pizza.

(*The others are less enthusiastic. KATH goes to the kitchen.*)

COOLEY: 'Well,' I said, 'we've been losing a lot of patients on the operating table—of course we experiment on the Bantu . . .'

MACK: 'That's terrible.'

COOLEY: ' . . . and Barnard's blaming us. We don't feel he's taking into account the difficulties we're working under.'

MACK: 'What difficulties?' she asks.

COOLEY: 'Do you mind if I get technical?'

MACK: 'No,' she said, 'not at all.'

COOLEY: 'Well,' I said, 'we anaesthetists keep our patients alive by monitoring their heartbeat and when Christian whips out their heart, it becomes terribly terribly hard.'

(*There is some laughter, mainly from MACK and COOLEY. EVAN goes off to help KATH.*)

JODY: Did you manage to . . .

(*SIMON glares at her.*)

MACK: Get into them?

(*JODY nods, but as if to say 'That isn't quite how I'd put it'.*)

Cooley did, but my bird was biologically indisposed.

MAL: You've heard about the time I met the bastard in the Bistro?

(*COOLEY is very much aware of KERRY by this stage and aims his performance at her, without making it too obvious. He knows she is attracted by his consciously exaggerated male chauvinism.*)

COOLEY: There's no doubt about it. If you're after the straight fuck, no complications, that bistro is the best place in Melbourne. From Tuesday night onward you can't get in there for hard core twat. Medium to good quality secretarial stuff. (*To KERRY*) Well, no sooner had Malcolm arrived than this great bird walked through. 'You want my body,' I said, 'don't you?' Which is a pretty standard approach of mine in those sort of circumstances.

(*EVAN has entered, bearing pizzas. He stands by COOLEY's elbow. COOLEY notices him and breaks off.*)

KATH: If you'd like a bit of fresh air, take your food out onto the patio.

(*There is a drift to the patio. EVAN drags KERRY away from COOLEY and plonks her on the sofa.*)

KERRY: (*irritated by EVAN*) What's wrong?

EVAN: This party shits me.

KERRY: Do you want to go home?

EVAN: Do you?

KERRY: I promised I'd drop in and see Cam . . . I told you.

EVAN: You've been with him all the afternoon.

KERRY: We're working on his new environment. He needs me to check out the drawings.

EVAN: What! Are you doing his work for him now?

KERRY: Of course I'm not. He just hates sketching.

EVAN: It's about time you concentrated on your own work.

KERRY: What's that meant to mean?
 EVAN: Maybe the critics had a point.
 KERRY: You said you can't even understand the critics. Now you're trying to tell me they might be right.
 EVAN: I can understand words like sloppy and self-indulgent.

(Pause.)

What time are you coming home?
 KERRY: I thought we'd discussed all this.
 EVAN: I'm not putting a curfew on you. I just want to know whether it's worth me staying up.
 KERRY: I knew our marriage would be a disaster.
 EVAN: (stubbly and loud) It's not a disaster.
 KERRY: Why don't you put a ball and chain on me. That's what you want isn't it? Did you get my pizza?
 EVAN: (throwing the pizza on the floor) There's your pizza.

(EVAN storms out. DON approaches and sees the pizza on the floor.)

DON: Troubles?
 KERRY: Mmm.
 DON: So's Whitlam.
 KERRY: Mmm.
 DON: You'd have to be insane to vote DLP. You'd have to be a fascist, hate-mongering, racist, pope-loving, puritanical, life-hating, moralist, hung-up authoritarian prick, mentally retarded and insane to boot, before you could vote DLP. God help Australia.
 KERRY: Mmm . . .
 DON: How's Evan?
 KERRY: Terrible. It's always my fault! I'm supposed to forego any meaningful involvement with anyone else but him!
 DON: Oh.
 KERRY: I'm seeing a lot of this marvellous sculptor. Not in the slightest bit remote. One of those naturally warm, vital people. You can see it in his work. Must have you and Kath meet him.
 DON: (flatly) Great. What's his name.
 KERRY: Cam.
 DON: Cam White?

KERRY: His approach to the medium is very cerebral. In some ways the philosophy is more important than the work itself and legitimately so. Evan caught us.

DON: I see.

KERRY: It would have been so absurd not to sleep with him. What Evan won't understand is that the growth of a relationship is organic. Sex is often a natural part of the growth. Deep down I think that he concedes this, but he just can't stop himself acting out this compulsive male jealousy thing.

DON: Mmmm.

KERRY: It's so bloody immature.

(Pause.)

Have you been writing anything lately?

DON: Still fiddling around. I got a poem published last week.

KERRY: Marvellous. Where?

DON: Newspaper.

KERRY: (fake) Marvellous.

DON: It was shit.

KERRY: Cam thinks it's hard to make words enigmatic enough to make them a viable artistic medium any more.

DON: I don't know whether I'd agree with that.

KERRY: It's an interesting thought though isn't it? You'll have to meet him.

DON: (unenthusiastically) Yeah.

(COOLEY has seen EVAN stalk out and thinks the time might be opportune.)

COOLEY: (to KERRY) Hello gorgeous. Care for a screw?

DON: (to KERRY) He used to say fuck.

KERRY: (to COOLEY) Any particular reason for the change?

COOLEY: I get more fucks when I say screw.

KERRY: (to DON) Is he always as blunt as this?

DON: It's just a tough exterior. Underneath there's a sensitive vulnerable man.

KERRY: I don't believe it.

DON: He once fucked a woman with a tin leg out of sheer pity.

COOLEY: She was very well adjusted except that the knee cap squeaked.

COOLEY: (in the hall) Let's discuss it further . . .
 (SIMON looks at them going with disbelief and outrage. DON walks back inside munching a pizza. He looks for KERRY and COOLEY, realises what's happened and makes thumbing gestures in the direction of the bedroom, more, one suspects, in disgust at KERRY than at COOLEY. KATH comes up to him.)

KATH: You might fill a few of those empty glasses.
 DON: (irritably) They can fill them themselves. They've all got legs.

KATH: Jesus you shit me. You're the one who throws these bloody parties and you won't even accept the responsibility of looking after your guests.

DON: Get stuffed!
 (He storms out irritably to the kitchen and passes SUSAN on the way in.)

SUSAN: Can I do anything?

KATH: There's nothing much to do.

SUSAN: Do you want me to collect the plates?

KATH: No. They'll bring them in.
 (Pause.)

Have you worked out some arrangement with my husband?
 SUSAN: (laughing nervously) It's, er, not on.

KATH: Why not?

SUSAN: I suppose I was a little bit naive.

KATH: Yes,

SUSAN: In the circumstances. Do you often get strongly attracted to someone?

KATH: Not often.

SUSAN: I do. I don't quite know how to handle it.

KATH: So I've noticed.

SUSAN: The average man under thirty-five gets a sexual thought every five minutes. Did you know that?

KATH: No.

SUSAN: The average woman gets one every two hours. I think I must be oversexed.

KATH: Mmm.

SUSAN: When you think about it though, men are really inadequate. A turned-on woman could cope with ten men but I'd like to see the man who could cope with ten women.

KERRY: You would be one of the coarsest, most sex-obsessed persons I've ever met.

COOLEY: Actually I'm a fine sexual technician.

KERRY: Who says?

COOLEY: I says. (Under his breath, to DON) Piss off.

(DON goes, angry.)

KERRY: You might be overestimating yourself.

COOLEY: I might be.

KERRY: That's the first bit of modesty I've heard from you tonight.

COOLEY: I threw it in to intrigue you.

KERRY: I'm a little intrigued.

COOLEY: You're more than a little intrigued.

KERRY: Who says?

COOLEY: I says.

KERRY: How would you know?

COOLEY: I know a woman on heat when I see one.

KERRY: How?

COOLEY: Their eyes moisten.

KERRY: That's scarcely conclusive.

COOLEY: I have other tests.

KERRY: I have a husband.

COOLEY: He would be somewhere near Templestowe by now.

KERRY: I'm usually attracted to sensitive men.

COOLEY: Let's go before he gets back.

KERRY: Now?

COOLEY: Bloody oath. I'm flying back to Sydney tomorrow.

KERRY: It's very strange. This is the first time ever I've felt it would be right to go to bed with someone I've just met.

COOLEY: Crap.

KERRY: It's true.

COOLEY: Very flattering of you my dear, but it's all crap.
 KERRY: Usually it's an organic part of the whole relationship.

(COOLEY ushers KERRY towards the bedroom.)

COOLEY: Organ first, relationship later.

KERRY: (as she is going) That's a very interesting philosophical proposition.

They're biologically inferior. Have you ever felt yourself strongly attracted to women?

KATH: (*backing off*) No.

SUSAN: There's nothing to be ashamed of if you have.

KATH: (*quickly*) I haven't.

SUSAN: I used to feel like that till I started going to encounter groups.

KATH: Encounter groups?

SUSAN: Group gropes. That's where I lost all my hang-ups. You ought to go on one.

KATH: (*relaxing somewhat*) Whenever I do get attracted to another man I get so guilt-ridden I run a mile.

SUSAN: Enroll in a group.

KATH: I really don't want to sleep with them.

SUSAN: (*musings*) Kerry's really beautiful isn't she?

KATH: (*a little startled*) She's very attractive.

SUSAN: She's really beautiful. When I first saw her I wanted to go up to her and stroke her. A couple of months ago I would've felt guilty about that.

KATH: I think, er, Kerry's pretty conventional about sex. Prolific but conventional.

(EVAN enters.)

EVAN: Excuse me Kath. Have you seen Kerry?

KATH: No. Isn't she outside?

EVAN: I couldn't see her.

(DON enters.)

KATH. Don. Have you seen Kerry?

(DON shakes his head.)

EVAN: No reflection on the party Kath, but I think we might go home. I've, er, had a few late nights over the last couple of weeks and I think it's catching up with me.

KATH: I know the feeling. Don. Have you seen Kerry?

DON: (*slightly irritated*) No. I haven't.

EVAN: She's not outside.

DON: Have you tried round the other side. She might be looking at my native trees.

(EVAN looks at him and moves out to the patio.)

SUSAN: Shit. Where's Cooley?

KATH: (*accusingly, to DON*) Cooley's not with her is he?

DON: I wouldn't know.

KATH: Don. You know what their marriage is like!

DON: What Cooley does is his own bloody business!

KATH: You might have warned him to lay off!

DON: (*lying*) I did.

KATH: I'm sorry Susan, but he's a bloody animal!

SUSAN: (*truelly*) Yeah.

DON: (*to KATH*) What about Kerry!

SUSAN: If you think this is bad, you should have been at the last party. Ten minutes after we got there he had upset the hostess and had three of the men ready to toss him . . .

(EVAN strides through the kitchen again in the direction of the bedrooms. He looks grim and purposeful. The three in the kitchen look at each other. There is a ruckus offstage. COOLEY appears from the back half of the house with his shirt off and still struggling to zip up his fly. The noise continues in the background. COOLEY sees DON and indicates the bedrooms with his fingers.)

COOLEY: Talk about coitus interruptus!

(EVAN strides into the living room and motions COOLEY with his thumb.)

EVAN: All right! Get outside!

COOLEY: (*appealing to DON*) Call him off will you?!

EVAN: (*advancing on COOLEY and pushing him in the chest in the direction of the patio*) Get outside!

COOLEY: (*trying to maintain his decorum*) Look fella. Be civilised! You don't go beating up people just because they take a liking to your wife.

EVAN: (*pushing again*) Get outside!

COOLEY: (*retreating*) Get outside. Get outside. What are you? A fucking parrot! I don't care what the circumstances are. You don't go interrupting a man and woman at their most intimate moment. What kind of a bourgeois shit are you?

KATH: Stop it!

(KATH is not heard or heeded in the din. DON is quite enjoying it. So are MAL and MACK.)

EVAN: I'm going to hammer you boy.

COOLEY: Keep your hands off me. I wouldn't like to be in your shoes if you catch me. I'll sue you for assault. I'm a lawyer.

EVAN: I'll smash your teeth in.

DON: He's a dentist.

(KERRY walks in looking furious and dishevelled.)

KERRY: Stop this at once!

EVAN: Get out of my way!

KERRY: You're acting like a bloody adolescent!

EVAN: You're acting like a bloody nymphomaniac!

KERRY: If you're not prepared to grant me some degree of emotional autonomy then that's it!

EVAN: Emotional autonomy? When you start screwing oafs like that it's emotional insanity!

COOLEY: Oafs! Look boy. You can be as childish as you like but you just get your facts straight before you go calling people names!

EVAN: (to KERRY, but looking at COOLEY) Let's face it. When you start screwing boorish, load-mouthed oafs . . .

COOLEY: (indicating KERRY) What's so special about her in any case? I've scored Miss Queen of the Pacific two years in a row!

EVAN: (to KERRY) Get your things!

KERRY: If you think this scene has given you some kind of moral leverage over me you're wrong!

EVAN: Are you coming or aren't you?

KERRY: No. I'm not!

EVAN: I'll ask you once more!

KERRY: You can ask as many times as you like!

EVAN: (turning on his heel) Right!

KERRY: I'm not your personal chattel!

EVAN: And I'm taking steps to make sure I'm not yours!

KERRY: Are you threatening me?

EVAN: Work it out for yourself! Are you coming?

KERRY: No.

EVAN: I'll ask you once more.

KERRY: You can ask as many times as you like.

EVAN: All right if that's your final answer—that is your final answer?

KERRY: It is.

(EVAN leaves. COOLEY waits until he is out of earshot and bellows.)

COOLEY: Don't show your face in here again you shit!

(The guests look at COOLEY with looks ranging from disapproval to mild amusement.)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

The guests are on the patio eating supper. MACK wanders into the kitchen and turns up the TV.

TV: . . . but the DLP support for Mr Joshua following a state wide trend of 10 percent is expected to favour the Government. The importance of the DLP vote is again evident in the seat of Batman . . .

(COOLEY wanders in from the fridge, bearing several cans.)

COOLEY: Beer's holding out well. Party could kick on for hours yet.

TV: . . . where Mr McGrath Liberal is 3,000 votes behind the Labor representative Mr Garrick but the allocation for preferences from the strong polling DLP candidate Mr Darrick is likely to decide the issue. At this stage, the ALP's chances over all are slim. For the allocation of DLP preferences to date has decidedly favoured the Government, running as high as 95 percent in the Queensland seat of Lilley.

(The remainder of the announcement overlaps the subsequent dialogue. A new voice takes up the commentary.)

We are now back in the studios. It's perfectly clear that the key preferences in the election to date are those of the DLP, which is contesting more than 100 seats. It has been estimated that the DLP preferences could decide 22 of those seats. The DLP has been concentrating its attention on those seats in which it could oust a sitting Government member.

MACK: Look at that bloody DLP vote.

COOLEY: *(holding up a can)* Do you want one?

(MACK nods. COOLEY hands him a beer.)

My old man voted DLP.

MACK: Yeah! I had an argument with him one day. Didn't like the permissive society. Wanted a return to Catholic moral purity.

ACT TWO

COOLEY: He was the last of the great Catholic shaggers.

(COOLEY turns down the TV.)

He died on the job you know.

(Pause.)

By the time they dressed him they couldn't put his teeth back in.

MACK: Yeah.

(Pause.)

COOLEY: Have you any of those photos on you?

MACK: What photos?

COOLEY: Of me and your wife.

MACK: What do you reckon. I carry them around in my wallet?

(Pause.)

COOLEY: Did they turn out all right?

MACK: A little under-exposed.

COOLEY: Did I photograph well?

MACK: Jesus Cooley. I've just left my bloody wife.

COOLEY: Well it's a bit disconcerting for a man to know he has pornographic photographs of himself floating around.

MACK: They're selling very well.

COOLEY: Selling?

(Pause.)

What are they worth?

MACK: Five dollars for a set of six.

COOLEY: Save us a couple, will you?

MACK: Matt or gloss?

COOLEY: Matt.

(MACK notes the order in his diary. COOLEY looks somewhat surprised at his efficiency.)

MACK: Tell me something truthfully Cooley.

COOLEY: Of course.

MACK: Ruth's an awful bitch, isn't she?

COOLEY: One of the awfulest.

MACK: It's not my imagination—she is a moody, temperamental, sour, irritable bitch.

COOLEY: She is definitely a moody, temperamental, sour, irritable bitch.

MACK: I've done the right thing leaving her?

COOLEY: You've done the right thing leaving her . . . I thought you were thrown out?

MACK: I left. *(After a pause)* What's the scene like in Sydney?

COOLEY: So-so. Why?

MACK: I've got no particular reason to stay here.

(Pause.)

Will you answer something honestly?

COOLEY: What?

MACK: Am I a real kink?

COOLEY: Bloody oath.

MACK: Why do you think I did it?

COOLEY: Because you're a kink.

MACK: I think I was curious. She didn't respond to me so I wanted to see if she did with other men.

COOLEY: *(playing the good friend)* She didn't respond much to me.

MACK: Don't crap. I was in the bloody cupboard.

COOLEY: The trouble is you haven't had enough experience with women. Move in on that—what's her name?

MACK: Jody?

COOLEY: Mmm. She looks interested.

MACK: Her husband's here!

COOLEY: I'll get rid of him.

MACK: Do you really think she's interested?

COOLEY: Of course she is.

MACK: How will you get rid of him? Like you got rid of Evan?

COOLEY: Leave it to me. It's an art in which I have few peers.

(DON and MAL wander into the kitchen.)

DON: How's it going?

MACK: Fine if you're a Fascist.

MAL: Switch the bloody thing off.

(Nobody does. Pause.)

COOLEY: Well.

MAL: Well what?

COOLEY: I was just breaking a silence. Someone else can do it next time.

(Pause.)

MACK: Well.

COOLEY: Thank you.

MAL: Bloody intelligent conversation this is.

COOLEY: It's no use talking to you.

MAL: Why not?

COOLEY: You're in a shit because you've been swinging your dick at anything available and missing by yards.

MACK: As usual.

MAL: Shut your neck you little gnome.

MACK: Can't face the truth.

MAL: You've never got onto anything but that bitch of a wife of yours in your whole life.

MACK: *(crushed but defiant)* Hah!

COOLEY: *(to DON)* And it's no use talking to you either.

DON: Why not?

COOLEY: Something's happened to you.

DON: What?

COOLEY: Prematurely ossified brain or something.

DON: *(grinning, sending himself up)* You're referring to my new-found passion for native plants?

COOLEY: And slick brickies in high-density baby areas.

DON: *(still sending himself up)* You should see my mahogany gums. I got some nitrogen balls from the Nurseryman.

COOLEY: Nitrogen balls?

DON: Yeah. Fifty-eight cents a half pound. They decompose over eighteen months and release nitrogen surreptitiously to the roots. Makes the neighbours think you've got green fingers. *(To them all)* Do you want to have a look at them?

ALL: *(after a slight pause as they look at each other to decide whether he is joking)* No!

COOLEY: Time showed you two up didn't it? *(Thinking)* What is it . . . twelve, thirteen? When did I first meet the pair of you?

(*They muse and puzzle out the answer.*)

MAL: About fourteen years now.

COOLEY: About fourteen years. Some little prick was throwing a party.

MACK: Me.

COOLEY: I walked in the back door clutching my brown paper bag of bottles and watched in awe as Sutherland and Henderson, campus giants, womanisers, gave a virtuoso imitation of two men destined to leave their mark on the world. And now, fifteen years hence I have to wince with embarrassment as I watch one of them trying to organise some third-rate extra-curricular sex, with all the flair of a senile old bushwacker and the other one being badgered into the suburbs by a bourgeois little *Home Beautiful* wife.

MAL: (*sarcastically*) We're sorry we've disappointed you.

COOLEY: And I remember how grateful I was when you adopted me. Young Cooley. The little mouse. The groveling, gaping, wide-eyed little boot licker. The boy who ran and bought the contraceptives. Young Cooley. Rescued from the Catholic choir. Fuck me! What did I have to be ashamed of?

MAL: He looks rather beautiful when he's angry, don't you think?

DON: The fluorescent catches the fiery glint in his eye.

MAL: You can see why we found him irresistible.

COOLEY: For five years of my life I let myself be patronised by a pair of posturing, self-inflated, bullshit artists.

DON: When were you ever patronised?

COOLEY: When? I was fucking easy prey. Don and his nympho nurse. Don's little Prefect with improvised lay-back seats. Anywhere. Anytime. Go on. Remember that will you, you poor cunt.

DON: (*grinning*) I remember. I remember.

COOLEY: Little shit Cooley as he listens to big Don. (*Doing an imitation of himself*) Eyes boggling. Hero-worship dribbling out of the corner of his mouth. And here's Don. (*Doing an imitation of a gruff-voiced DON*) Ever stuffed a nympho Cools? Got one coming over tonight if you'd care to be in it. (*Imitating himself*) Gee Don. How do you know they are nymphos? (*Imitating DON*) They just can't get enough of it Grainger old cock. Anywhere. Anytime.

MACK: Was that the one he screwed in a traffic jam in St. Kilda road?

COOLEY: That story's another piece of Henderson crap!

DON: I didn't start it.

COOLEY: (*pointing to MAL*) No. Your mate here started that one. Very good mutual promotion between you two.

MAL: For Christ's sake. I just happened to make an offhand comment that she was so randy she'd be in it in a traffic holdup.

COOLEY: I spread it around for years. I made a legend out of the bastard . . .

DON: Some legend! I still run into people who look at me as if I'm some kind of insatiable sex fiend.

COOLEY: Not only the sex. The two great minds. (*Looking at MAL*) Sutherland here plotting the right strategic moment to enter politics so that he'll make his way to the Prime Ministership with minimum delay.

MAL: Crap!

COOLEY: And Henderson carrying on lengthy debates on the relative merits of publishing in Britain or Australia first.

DON: It's a pity the bastard didn't go into politics. He's got a far better grasp of the complexities of the game than most of the clowns I've known who've got endorsements.

MAL: I wouldn't go along with that Don, but I would go along with the fact that you've got talent and if you'd only pull your finger out, finish something and submit it for publication I'm sure you would get it accepted.

COOLEY: Here we go again. The way you two bastards lick each others' arses is really something.

MAL: (*irritated*) I'm not uncritical of the bastard. It's ridiculous that someone with his ability is teaching Fourth Form Social Studies in some tin pot high school at Doncaster.

DON: For Christ's sake let me fail in peace.

MAL: You don't get out of it that easily.

COOLEY: Neither do you shithead. Australia's future Prime Minister. Protector of the exploited. Encyclopaedia salesman!

MAL: Christ I only did it for a couple of months.

COOLEY: Eighteen if I remember exactly. And correct me if I'm wrong, but didn't you make enough money in that time to quit working for two years and finish your course?

MAL: We lived pretty frugally.

COOLEY: (*doing an imitation of MAL delivering a monologue sometime in the past*) There's one point in the routine—and this is where it's really beautiful—when you've got them wanting those encyclopaedias so badly that you can toy with them. You can really get them scared that you are going to scoop up that great glossy lifesize photograph of the twenty-four leather-bound volumes and tell them the deal's off. I used to pause for a second and watch them quiver with desire for that great useless farrago of facts. Then, very quietly, with a look of hurt doubt on my face, I'd say: 'Mr and Mrs Shitkicker—you don't really want the set do you?' 'Yes,' they'd scream, 'Stuff it in me kid. I want it. I want it. (*Taking an encyclopaedia from the book-case*) James Fygg 1695-1734 generally acknowledged as the first champion of England and fighting with bare fists, was born at Than, Oxfordshire. For years he was the leading pugilist and master of the noble art of self-defence. Stuff it in me kid. I want it.'

'Mr and Mrs Shitkicker, are you really enthusiastic, I mean really enthusiastic, because believe me it is better to close the deal right here and now if you're not.'

'We are, we are,' they'd scream, and fear would reddden the pupils of their eyes.

(*Loudly*) 'Then prove it. Come on. Prove it. Bounce up and down on your seats.'

And there they'd be. The miserable, manipulated turds. Bouncing up and down on their seats for what they'd lose. Fuck all.

(COOLEY resumes his normal voice.)

I'm glad to see you here tonight cheering the People's Party, Sutherland.

MAL: Shit. You might try to take into account the circumstances. Jenny was pregnant again and . . .

COOLEY: Go on, you hypocritical bastard, you were as hungry for the dollar as the next man, Sutherland. Hungrier.

MAL: You must be joking.

COOLEY: Well look at you now.

MAL: What do you mean?

COOLEY: You're making a fortune peddling bullshit.

DON: In all fairness I don't think lawyers are beyond reproach.

MAL: Beyond reproach is putting it mildly. The people that need lawyers the most can never fucking well afford them. Deny that.

COOLEY: I don't have to deny it. I'm not posing as the champion of the oppressed.

(*He walks out to the bathroom.*)

MAL: Cunt. At least I have a social conscience.

MACK: He just enjoys a good stir.

(*Silence. SIMON walks in.*)

SIMON: How are the elections going?

DON: It's not looking as good as it did earlier.

MACK: (*gloomily*) Postal votes always favour the Liberals.

DON: They've got more money to travel.

SIMON: Sometimes I don't think it matters much who wins. The country's run by the public service.

MAL: (*still simmering after his last encounter*) Don't be such a fucking cretin! Broad policy decisions are crucial. Why do you think we've got the most miserable Social Service benefits, the worst schooling, damn near the worst health of any industrial nation.

SIMON: (*petulantly*) Why don't you go and live in Russia!

(*He walks out to the patio.*)

MAL: (*looking at the others incredulously*) I'll hammer the cretin. I am going out there to hammer the cretin.

(*He follows him out. The women begin to re-enter from the patio.*)

DON: (*following him*) Lay off Mal. I've had enough for tonight.

MAL: (*as he goes out*) 'Why don't you go and live in Russia!' He's got to be defective. Has to be. What is he? An accountant?

MACK: (*following them*) Probably a genius at mental arithmetic.

KATH: The way they carry on you'd think politics was right at the core of their lives. The most Don ever does in a practical way is hand out a few how-to-vote cards.

JENNY: Mal's just the same. He doesn't even hand out cards.
KATH: We'll just have to resign ourselves to the fact that we've married a pair of . . .

SUSAN: (as KATH searches for the word) Bullshit artists.
(They laugh.)

JODY: (a little edgy at the treatment her husband is getting at their hands) I think that there's nothing wrong with a discussion but I don't think people should argue with people they disagree with.

KATH: Don't worry about Simon. They're pretty harmless.

JODY: (to JENNY) How is Mal with your children?

JENNY: Very good. Why?

JODY: He seems to have quite a temper.

JENNY: The only pleasures in his life are oysters and political arguments. Don't begrudge him that.

JODY: I don't think it does his cause any good. It only antagonises people.

KATH: Talking about children. We're having terrible trouble with Richard at the moment. He just will not do anything we tell him to do.

JENNY: Oh that's the 'balky' stage. What is he now? Three?

KATH: Just turned.

JENNY: Yes. They balk at everything. It's in Spock.

KATH: Did yours . . .

JENNY: Every one of them.

SUSAN: Don't let's talk babies. The men outside on politics, the women inside on babies. The all-Australian party.

JENNY: You wait till you have 'em. You'll prattle about them all the time.

SUSAN: I'm not having any.

(Pause. JENNY and KATH exchange glances.)

JENNY: Well, that's your decision I suppose. Personally, for all the trouble they've given me, I wouldn't be without them.

SUSAN: I'm afraid they just don't turn me on.

JENNY: (after another awkward pause) How can you tell what your real feelings towards children are until you've had them yourself?

SUSAN: That's like saying you ought to eat shit in case it tastes like watermelon.

JENNY: (terse) Having babies is not like eating shit!

SUSAN: I didn't mean it literally.

JENNY: Well if you don't mind me saying so, it was rather a stupid comparison.

SUSAN: Look. If motherhood is all that wonderful why get so stirred up about anyone who looks like escaping it?

JENNY: Who's stirred up?

SUSAN: You are.

JENNY: I'm not stirred up. I just find it hard to argue with people who have no experience of life other than . . . sex.

KATH: Look, why don't we, er, change the subject? We've had one upset tonight already.

(There is embarrassed silence.)

KERRY: I must apologise about Evan.

KATH: (taken aback) Yes he, er, sounded pretty upset.

KERRY: Yes.

KATH: Do you think it's safe to go home for a while?

KERRY: Oh yes. He's always exploding for some reason or other.

KATH: You can stay here if you like.

KERRY: Thanks Kath, but I've got somewhere to go.

JENNY: Why don't you leave him?

KERRY: (taken aback by the directness) Er, permanently?

JENNY: I don't know much about the background but one would gather that you're not at all interested in him.

KERRY: That's not true at all. It's just that there are aspects of other people that interest me as well.

JENNY: Have you got any children?

KERRY: No.

JENNY: I think it's wise to resolve things before you do.

KATH: (tongue-in-cheek) Jenny's got a bit of a headache.

KERRY: (to JENNY) Hasn't your husband ever been over-possessive?

KATH: I don't think that's Jenny's problem actually.

(JENNY glares at KATH, who, quite enjoying things, pretends blithely not to notice.)

SUSAN: (to JENNY) Don't you ever get strongly attracted to people?

JENNY: Yes, but I don't go . . .

(*She is going to say 'leaping into bed', but she is not willing to be quite that direct.*)

... doing anything about it.

SUSAN: Why not?

JENNY: Mal'd go off his head.

SUSAN: What about him? He's been trying to pick something up all night.

JENNY: Men are always trying to pick up something. It's in their makeup.

SUSAN: It's in our makeup too.

JENNY: Yes, but we can control it better.

(*Pause.*)

What particular aspect of Cooley attracted you? Much as I like him he's the last person I'd...

SUSAN: (*defending KERRY, almost protective*) I can understand Kerry being attracted to him. A lot of women find him attractive.

JENNY: He must have hidden talents.

(*There is a pause. JODY has been listening to the conversation with some fascination. She looks around tentatively.*)

JODY: Has he?

SUSAN: What?

JODY: Got...

(*She searches for the words.*)

KATH: Yes. For Christ's sake what is Cooley like in bed? I've listened to ten years of suggestion. (*To KERRY*) What are the facts?

KERRY: Don't look at me. I didn't get a chance to form an opinion.

SUSAN: (*matter-of-fact*) He's not all that big, but he's inventive, durable and has quite a fair recovery.

(*There is a pause as they digest the directness of this response. KATH feels a slight sense of liberation that she can talk about it.*)

KATH: Don plods on for hours. Bores me stupid.

SUSAN: The long slow grind. I didn't miss out on much.

KATH: What's Simon like, Jody?

JODY: Well he's not as big as my father...

(*They laugh.*)

SUSAN: Wow. That's progressive.

JODY: (*embarrassed but laughing*) I used to see him under the shower.

SUSAN: You can't always tell when they're in repose.

KERRY: I don't think size is all that important. I think it's much more important what type of communication exists on other levels.

SUSAN: Yes. I've known some fine little pricks in my time.

KERRY: (*looking at SUSAN, reproachfully but not angrily*) Seriously.

SUSAN: (*embarrassed and suddenly a little distracted under the gaze*) Yes. I was being facetious. People are more important than pricks.

KERRY: (*realising the impact she is having on SUSAN*) The most obvious proof of that is women being attracted to other women.

SUSAN: Mmm. That's right.

JODY: Does, er, much of it go on?

SUSAN: Oh yes.

JODY: Do they... er... lose interest in men?

SUSAN: Not necessarily.

JODY: It worries me a bit.

JENNY: It disgusts me.

SUSAN: (*to JENNY*) Why?

JENNY: The thought of touching another woman's body makes my flesh crawl.

KERRY: (*giving SUSAN encouragement that she never intends to follow up*) I think that the female body is infinitely more beautiful than the male.

SUSAN: That's right. Men are too square and knobbley.

JODY: How do women do it?

(*Pause.*)

SUSAN: Well. It all depends how...

(*She trails off as SIMON enters, puffs his pipe, and approaches the group.*)

SIMON: Don't, er, let me interrupt you. I've just come in to watch the television.

(Pause.)

Hum. Has anyone seen *Exterminating Angel*?

SUSAN: (nodding, as does KERRY) Mmm.

SIMON: Do you find Buñuel's early work disturbing?

SUSAN: Mmm.

SIMON: Mmm. Very powerful. Very elliptic.

(Embarrassed silence.)

KERRY: Excuse me.

(She moves towards the patio.)

SUSAN: (following her) I think I'll see what's going on out there too.

(JENNY follows them.)

JODY: (to JENNY, still irritated) Where exactly do you live if it's not being rude?

JENNY: (cool) We rent a house in Greensborough.

JODY: Are you going to buy?

JENNY: We're scarcely in a position to. We're four thousand dollars in debt.

KATH: Still?

JENNY: What do you mean still?

KATH: You've been four thousand dollars in debt for as long as I can remember. Mal's salary keeps on going up and up, but you're still four thousand dollars behind?

JENNY: Do you know how much Stephen cost us?

KATH: That was a long while ago.

JENNY: Over two thousand dollars!

JODY: Who's Stephen?

JENNY: Our eldest.

KATH: He was eight weeks premature.

JODY: Weren't you in medical benefits?

JENNY: (curtly) No we weren't.

JODY: Why not?

JENNY: (with heat) Because by the time I found out I was three months pregnant, we weren't married and Mal was working as a base grade clerk.

(There is an embarrassed pause. DON and MACK enter.)

DON: (cheerfully to KATH) Can I turn up the television now?

KATH: What about a record. Something we can dance to.

DON: (deviating obediently from his path to the television and going towards the stereo, still in a good mood) Fair enough. I'll agree to anything. Mack old cock, cast your eyes over all those ladies and select one. Simon. You too! SIMON: (going up to KATH as the music starts) I'd like to have a dance with the hostess if I may.

KATH: Thank you.

MACK: (to JODY) Have you had enough of me or will you chance it again.

JODY: (dancing with him) I don't like the sound of that.

DON: (walking up cheerfully to JENNY) Jenny?

JENNY: No thanks.

DON: Why not?

JENNY: I haven't danced for years.

DON: (blustering, cheerful) Well it's time you did!

JENNY: I don't know any of the modern movements.

DON: So what. Neither do I.

(DON holds out his hands to indicate that she should get up and dance.)

JENNY: I'd rather not!

DON: (treating it as a matter of pride) For Christ's sake get up and dance!

JENNY: Go away.

(DON stalks off to the other side of the room. KATH glares at DON.)

DON: (quietly, but angrily to KATH) Well fuck me! She sits there all evening with a face like Ghengis Khan! What am I supposed to do.

(KATH propels him in her direction. He goes, reluctantly.)

(Surlily) I'm sorry.

(Pause.)

For Christ's sake have a drink.

JENNY: I just get so depressed Don.

DON: (*gentler*) Come on. You've got four beautiful children, your husband is second Lieutenant to God and still rising.

JENNY: (*bitterly*) Our marriage is a farce.

DON: So is mine.

JENNY: No really. I'm just about going insane.

(*Pause.*)

I'd walk out if I had some place to go.

DON: You're an attractive woman.

JENNY: Yes. I can go up to a mirror any time I like to say, 'Jenny, you are an attractive girl.' And I am, but I've got no guts. Let's face it. I've been out of the human race for ten bloody years.

DON: (*scratching his head*) Yes, well er . . .

JENNY: Yeah. I know you're not the slightest bit interested but you can just sit there and listen.

DON: Yes, well er . . .

JENNY: It's got so bad that we avoid each other around the house. How's that for a marriage, eh?

DON: Beats mine.

JENNY: We both love the kids. We make love too. Sick isn't it?

DON: Separate.

JENNY: Mal can't afford to yet, when he does go I'll be a zapped-out fishwife and he'll be right on top of the shit heap and young enough to enjoy it.

DON: Have another drink.

JENNY: I've really lost it Don. All I can do these days is sit in a corner and hate other people for their competence. I hated your wife for being a good hostess earlier tonight. That's sick isn't it? It's getting so that the only people I can take are shits.

(DON reacts to the implication.)

The thing that gets me—that bastard is climbing up out of it on my shoulders and I just have to stand there and watch him do it.

DON: Finish your degree.

JENNY: Stuff my degree.

DON: I just thought—

(*He shrugs his shoulders.*)

JENNY: That's another thing that gets me about you lot. You crap on about a degree not being fit for anything but wiping your arse, but you'd cut off your balls for a Ph.D.

DON: I don't know what to suggest. Have an affair.

JENNY: You try having an affair after four kids have made your tits droop and your stomach look like someone's got stuck into a soggy steam pudding with a fucking whip. For God's sake—I've been trying for three bloody years. Knee touches under the table, haunting glances, I even got the plumber over the back to come and unblock the sink and all he said was 'How's your kids?'

DON: Yeah, well that's—

JENNY: Let's face it. If you had to choose between me and that flat-stomached melon-breasted tart out there, who would it be?

DON: (*shrugging*) Well it's all a matter of taste.

(COOLEY comes in from the patio. He notices MACK dancing with JODY, and looks across to SIMON.)

COOLEY: Mack!

MACK: Yeah?

COOLEY: (*nudging MACK in the side, looking knowingly at JODY*) Getting on with it I see. I think it's about time we swung into (*pointing to SIMON*) plan alpha.

(*He gives MACK another drunken dig in the ribs. MACK shakes his head. The music stops.*)

This isn't the time for cold feet m'boy!

JODY: (*not having seen the pointing to SIMON, etc.*) What's he talking about?

(MACK shrugs. COOLEY moves towards the main group.)

KATH: (*to SIMON*) How's the cellar going Simon?

SIMON: Well I'm afraid the halcyon days of the good cheap red are gone.

COOLEY: That's for sure. A few years ago you could bottle a really good red for under forty cents a bottle.

SIMON: A little raw but with real potential. I remember I did a trip around the Barossa Valley back in sixty-three—

COOLEY: Sixty-three. My God what a coincidence.

SIMON: Were you over there in sixty-three?

COOLEY: Bloody oath. The old Barossa was really great in those days.

SIMON: There was a dignified old-world air about the whole venture. Unlimited tasting, a variety of cheeses to nibble. It's gone very commercial now I'm afraid.

COOLEY: (*putting his arm around SIMON's shoulder*) I'm afraid you're right. Mind you my trip in sixty-three wasn't all roses. I got this stomach wog about halfway round the circuit and started shitting like a camel, actually, to be more accurate it was more of a dribble because I hadn't had anything but wine and cheese for days and the old sphincters didn't have anything solid to come to grips with. Stung like a bastard but I was bugged if I was going to let any stomach wog get the better of me so I stuffed a wad of newspaper down my daks and drove on. Did a quick change after each winery. I often pick up a stomach wog in South Australia. Do you have that sort of trouble over there?

SIMON: (*coolly*) No. Not really.

COOLEY: I really get uptight when some wog disrupts my biological rhythms. If I have a good solid shit at eight o'clock in the morning then the rest of the day falls into place. Do you shit at a regular time of the day Simon?

SIMON: (*getting agitated*) Look do we have to—

COOLEY: What about you Susy?

SUSAN: No.

SIMON: Do you really think excretion is an interesting topic of conversation?

COOLEY: Well we all have to do it.

SIMON: Yes but we don't have to talk about it.

COOLEY: What are you? An anal prude or something?

SIMON: I just don't enjoy talking about shitting.

COOLEY: You probably don't even enjoy shitting!

(*They laugh raucously.*)

SIMON: Excuse me Kath. It's getting pretty late. It's about time we went.

KATH: (*glaring at COOLEY*) Very glad you could come Simon.

SIMON: (*walking over to JODY*) I think it's time we went Jody.

JODY: (*protesting*) I'm just starting to feel relaxed.

SIMON: It's getting pretty late.

(*COOLEY has followed him over.*)

COOLEY: (*putting his arm around SIMON's shoulder*) Look I hope I haven't offended you old chap.

SIMON: No. I'm feeling pretty tired.

COOLEY: (*to JODY*) I thought I might have offended him. I was talking about my winery trips. You don't look very tired.

JODY: I'm not. I'm just starting to feel relaxed.

COOLEY: What a pity. I wonder if there's some way we could arrange to get Jody home.

MACK: I could drive her.

SIMON: I'd rather you didn't.

MACK: Won't touch another drop.

COOLEY: No. I think Simon's right, Mack old cock. You're well over the legal limit. What about a taxi?

JODY: (*to SIMON*) That's a good idea. I'll get a taxi.

SIMON: I'd prefer it if you came with me.

JODY: You go home and get some sleep dear. I'll get a taxi.

MACK: I can assure you Simon, that I'm in a fit state to drive.

SIMON: Jody. I'd prefer it if you'd come with me.

JODY: Why?

SIMON: I just would.

JODY: Are you worried about me doing something?

SIMON: Of course I'm not.

JODY: Then go home and get some sleep.

SIMON: Will you get your things and come.

JODY: I'll come when I'm ready.

SIMON: What am I going to tell the babysitter when I come home without you?

JODY: Stuff the babysitter.

(*SIMON moves across to KATH. KERRY is speaking into the telephone.*)

SIMON: Well, er, thanks again Kath. Jody's not very tired so, er, she'll stay a little while longer.

KATH: *(a little surprised)* Oh. Fine. I'm sorry about the er . . .

SIMON: *(finally giving vent to his frustrations, doing up his coat with the buttons in the wrong holes, while speaking loudly so the others can hear)* I must say that I'm surprised that University educated people can be so bloody uncouth. *(He leaves in high dudgeon. COOLEY thumbs him as he goes, winks at MACK, and goes to the bathroom.)*

KERRY: *(hanging up)* Thanks for the hospitality Don.

DON: You're going?

KERRY: Mmm.

DON: I'll drive you.

KERRY: Thanks, but I've rung a taxi. How are things between you and Kath?

DON: Fine. Are you going home? *(As KERRY shakes her head)* What are you going to do about Evan?

KERRY: What do you mean?

DON: He seems pretty upset.

KERRY: It's funny to hear you getting so worried about him.

DON: What do you mean?

KERRY: You were making a pretty determined effort to get me to bed yourself a year or two ago.

DON: That weakens my argument doesn't it?

KERRY: It's just one of those unfortunate cases where one partner in a marriage develops and the other doesn't.

DON: Kerry, you have the one attribute shared by all great artists.

KERRY: What?

DON: Humility.

KERRY: *(flaring)* Yes well I'm sick of being humble and I'm sick of that stubborn bloody stupid husband of mine hanging onto me like a leech—

DON: *(tapping her on the shoulder, cutting her off)* I'll get you a drink.

(Out in the kitchen, MAL is trying to get SUSAN drunk.)

SUSAN: Everywhere I go these days I put my foot in it.

MAL: *(still on the make)* Don't we all.

SUSAN: I try and be honest but you can't be. People have too many hang-ups. They hate you for it.

MAL: I know how you feel. People hate me for exactly the same reason.

SUSAN: No they don't. People hate you because you're a shit. Don't try and compare yourself to me.

MAL: *(putting his arm around her)* It's my defence mechanisms that are obnoxious. The real me is warm and gentle.

SUSAN: Yeah, well I've only noticed the mechanisms.

MAL: Pay that one. *(Chuckling)* Yes. Pay that one. You know I've got a real feeling that we hit it off.

SUSAN: *(surprised)* Us?

MAL: *(putting his arm around her)* I've got a feeling that underneath the wisecracks there's something pretty solid.

SUSAN: You've got about as much sensitivity as a geriatric wombat.

MAL: Pay that one.

(COOLEY returns from the bathroom. He whispers in KERRY's ear and goes over to SUSAN.)

COOLEY: You want to go Susy?

SUSAN: Why? Do you?

COOLEY: *(peeling off banknotes)* I think I'll stick around a bit longer. You catch yourself a taxi and I'll meet you back at the motel.

SUSAN: I don't want to go back to the motel.

COOLEY: Why?

SUSAN: I want to stay.

COOLEY: You want to stay? Why do you want to stay?

SUSAN: Why do you?

COOLEY: *(looking at MAL, unbelieving)* Do you want to get off with him?

(SUSAN looks at COOLEY as if to say 'What a thickheaded suggestion'.)

MAL: Why shouldn't she?

COOLEY: Really?

SUSAN: No.

(MAL looks hurt. He goes off to sit by himself.)

COOLEY: Well who?

SUSAN: *(lying, as she wants to get off with KERRY)* No one.

COOLEY: (*handing her the money*) I'll meet you back at the motel.

SUSAN: (*snatching the money and preparing to leave*) I hope she spits in your eye Cooley.

(COOLEY looks somewhat surprised at the vehemence of SUSAN's reaction. A taxi horn toots outside. KERRY waves to DON and walks through towards the door. She pauses to speak to everyone left at the party.)

KERRY: Well. It's been nice meeting you all.

COOLEY: (*surprised*) Hey. Just a minute.

KERRY: Got to run. Taxi's waiting. Thanks Kath.

(COOLEY follows her out to the patio. He gives up the chase. SUSAN can't help grinning a little.)

COOLEY: What are you laughing at?

MAL: (*smiggering*) Oh, how the mighty have fallen!

(COOLEY glares at MAL, goes up to SUSAN, grabs her arm and starts leading her to the bedrooms at the back. They are both drunk.)

SUSAN: What do you think you're doing?

COOLEY: What d'you think I'm doing?

SUSAN: I'll tell you one thing. You're not doing what you think you're doing.

COOLEY: We'll talk about it in here.

SUSAN: You can just miss out on it for one night in your life. I'm not someone you can just leap on top of when there's nothing else around.

COOLEY: (*turning on charm*) Hey listen. Baby. It's me. Cooley. Your old friend.

(*The last of this is heard as they move off-stage. DON wanders from the living room into the kitchen and watches the television. MAL is sitting on the stool.*)

MAL: Is it worth getting up to look at?

DON: (*shaking his head mournfully*) Frank McManus is singing 'When Irish Eyes Are Smiling'. Santamaria's just been granted honorary infallibility by the Pope and the

Ghost of Dan Mannix has been seen shitting on Trades Hall.

MAL: (*forlornly*) I thought this was going to be an immoral party.

DON: Something didn't quite jell.

MAL: Everyone talks permissive but when it comes to the crunch—

DON: Yeah.

MAL: Put a hand on a woman's bum you get crippled. Isn't that just too middle class?

JODY: (*drowsily*) Shut your neck.

MAL: Well look at you two. Itching to get into it but too gutless to try.

JODY: We're quite happy thank you.

(MACK indicates the bedrooms with his head. He and JODY drift off.)

MAL: (*mimicking*) We're quite happy thank you. The hypocrisy rampant in this society is staggering.

DON: You don't have to tell me.

JENNY: What bullshit.

DON: It isn't bullshit.

KATH: You won't stop 'em now. They're into the mutual admiration stage.

JENNY: Twelve glasses?

(KATH nods.)

MAL: Mindless people; following mindless rules.

DON: The conventional wisdom.

MAL: (*dubious*) Well yes.

KATH: (*to DON*) Why don't you lick his arse.

DON: That's not very nice! I'm not ashamed of the fact that out of all the people I know Mal is one of the two worth listening to.

MAL: I've said exactly the same thing about you— (*Sharply*) Who's the other one?

DON: Bob Hawke.

(*Pause.*)

The trouble with you two is that you never question the social institutions around you.

MAL: Marriage for instance. It would be very very difficult for man to conceive a more boring social institution than marriage.

JENNY: Boredom's not what's wrong with our marriage.

MAL: (*challenging her*) What is?

JENNY: The size of your prick.

(MAL is deflated. KATH is interested.)

KATH: What's wrong with the size of his prick?

JENNY: Nothing. He's got an obsession about it.

DON: Still?

JENNY: Still.

MAL: (*wounded*) If you don't mind.

JENNY: Well God Almighty—

MAL: If it's just an obsession then how come you never have an orgasm?

JENNY: How can I have an orgasm when I'm worrying about you worrying about the size of your member?

DON: Size has got bugger-all to do with it. Haven't you read the Yank research?

MAL: (*angry*) It's not small. I just think it is.

JENNY: And don't you bloody well deny that we spend half our waking hours worrying about money.

DON: Well he makes a bloody sight more money than I do.

JENNY: (*roaring*) We happen to have four kids.

DON: (*drunkenly righteous*) Even so.

KATH: To be quite frank Jenny, I can see why you're always in debt.

JENNY: I bet you can.

KATH: What's that meant to mean?

JENNY: Nothing, nothing. Carry on.

KATH: Let's face it. You are wildly and I mean wildly extravagant when it comes to spending on your kids.

JENNY: Is that so?

KATH: It's none of my business, but Don told me you spent over three hundred dollars on their Christmas presents.

JENNY: And who told Don.

MAL: I did.

KATH: That's insane.

MAL: She uses those kids as status symbols. Rip into the bitch.

JENNY: Well. If we're going to get personal just let me tell you that I think you are two of the tightest pair of bastards I know.

DON: (*offended*) Is that so?

MAL: For sure.

JENNY: It's none of my business but if you're going to make a big deal of inviting us all over you might feed us with something more substantial than chips and twisties.

KATH: (*hurt*) What about the pizzas.

(JENNY picks up a bowl of twisties and empties it behind the couch.)

JENNY: Couldn't stand to look at them a minute longer.

KATH: Well. Now that we're making an issue of things, we weren't very impressed with your splendid party catering the week after we lent you the money.

DON: (*shaking his head*) Bloody thirty dozen oysters. I nearly choked on them.

MAL: You were always the one who admired my ability to live for the moment.

DON: That was before you started doing it on my money.

JENNY: For God's sake write them a cheque Mal.

MAL: Right.

(MAL whips a cheque book out of his pocket with a flourish.)

DON: There's no need, I assure you.

(Nevertheless he takes the cheque which MAL has just written.)

(Surprised) Two dollars?

MAL: That's all that's in there. Jenny's just bought a swimming pool for the kids.

KATH: A swimming pool.

JENNY: A swimming pool. I won't have my kids being patronised by that bloody cretin down the street.

MAL: A bloody plumber and he's got a fifty-by-twenty filtered pool.

DON: For God's sake Jenny. A pool. Your whole life is centred around those bloody kids.

JENNY: What else can I centre it around? He gets me pregnant every eighteen months.

DON: (to MAL) Why in the hell do you get her pregnant every eighteen months?

MAL: She won't take the pill.

DON: (to JENNY) Why not?

JENNY: I get frigid.

DON: (to MAL) Use Silvertex.

MAL: (with distaste) Yuk!

DON: Withdraw.

MAL: I do.

DON: You do?

MAL: I make mistakes.

(Pause.)

Hey! Why do I make mistakes?

DON: Because you're a dumb cunt!

(He laughs uproariously.)

MAL: Hey! I've just had a flash of insight.

DON: What?

MAL: Look. I've got hang-ups about my dick. Right.

DON: Right.

MAL: So I have dozens of kids as a symbol to prove myself. Right?

DON: Right.

MAL: The more kids I have the more money she (indicating

JENNY) spends on them. Right?

DON: Right.

MAL: And the more worried we get about money, the harder it is for her to have orgasms, the more worried we get . . .

DON: You've finished!

MAL: Right.

DON: Right.

JENNY: Crap. You were worrying about the size of your prick long before we were broke.

MAL: Who's the bloody psychologist?

JENNY: Your mother said that the first words you ever said were 'Widdle dicky'.

DON: How about some hypnotherapy?

MAL: Hypnotherapy?

DON: (making the hand motions of a hypnotist) Despite what you see in the mirror you have a big dick, big dick.

MAL: Very bloody funny.

(MAL sees JODY standing in the hall. She's been there some time.)

MAL: What's happened to you?

JODY: Mack fell asleep.

(DON and MAL laugh.)

DON: He flaked.

MAL: Have a seat.

DON: We were just commenting on the size—

MAL: (quickly stepping in, not realising that she has heard it all in any case) The point that we were making is that everybody is hopelessly hung up about sex.

JODY: Including me.

MAL: Including especially you. Will you answer one question truthfully Don?

DON: I might.

MAL: How are you and Kath hitting it off?

DON: Hah!

MAL: There you are. And we all know why.

DON: Why?

MAL: Boredom. Put a male and female rat in a cage and they'll go at it hammer and tongs until the male drops from exhaustion. Put a new female in and the male starts up again. What conclusion do you draw from that?

DON: He's a victim of the rat race.

MAL: I think you can all see from that little anecdote that it's sheer insanity not to swap wives.

JODY: My husband and I enjoy it.

MAL: What? Swapping?

JODY: No, doing it.

MAL: You had me worried! Now listen: it should be the most natural thing in the world for me to say to you Don, 'Here Don. Take Jenny for the night.'

DON: I don't think we could fit three in the bed.

MAL: It should be natural now shouldn't it?

DON: Of course it should.

KATH: (grimly) It should. Should it?

DON: It should be the most natural thing in the world.
 KATH: It's funny how you never have the guts to champion wife-swapping until you've had a gutful of beer.
 MAL: Yes, I'm afraid that Don's greatest failing is his lack of moral courage.
 DON: Is that so?
 MAL: Look. I don't want you to take this as an insult fella, and what I say I say as a friend, but you are a weak turd.
 DON: (*loud*) I object to the use of the words weak and to a lesser extent turd.
 MAL: Ten years ago it was all eyes on Don and watch Mal go down screaming, booted out of Uni. Tail between my legs. And what'd you all feel then, eh? I'll tell you what you felt. You felt 'Serve you bloody well right Mal'. And you weren't the only one: and the point I'm making is that I think I can feel justifiably proud of the way I dug my toes in and fought back. Let's not be modest. I fought back against bastards who were hoping that I was down and I'd stay down—and now—using economic criteria, which admittedly are very poor criteria to use— (*Yelling*) I've shat on them. I've shat on the bastards and the bastard I've shat most on is Donald L. Henderson. I think you owe it to yourself to pull your finger out boy.
 DON: Now just a minute. Even when you were down I said: 'Mark my words. That man is down but not out. If any of us makes a million he will.'
 MAL: I remember that. I remember that. I was very flattered.
 DON: It wasn't meant as a compliment.
 MAL: I know how you meant it.
 DON: (*loud*) It was recognition of your talent for obsequiousness and bullshit.
 MAL: You can. You can . . . (*looking at his empty glass*) get me another beer.
 (*DON pours him a beer.*)
 One thing about you two. I can always discuss issues of relevance here. (*In the manner of a great compliment*) They are thinking people. (*To DON*) We've had bloody great times.
 DON: Remember Cooley's old man's pub?
 MAL: Do I what?

DON: Who put you on to it?
 MAL: Vince Serry.
 DON: (*laughing*) Vince! Fucking Vince.
 MAL: Bloody Vince?
 DON: What ever happened to old Vince?
 MAL: Wrote himself off on the Princes Highway.
 DON: They were great days.
 MAL: Bloody great days.
 DON: Mal: I'd like you to have Kath for the night.
 MAL: Don: I'd like you to have Jenny for the night.
 (*MAL staggers drunkenly across the room to embrace KATH. She hits him with an efficient short jolt to the stomach. He crumples onto the carpet.*)
 MAL: (*panting, winded*) I see.
 DON: What are you doing down there!
 (*He goes to help MAL up, but collapses on top of him. They laugh hysterically.*)
 MAL: They were great days.
 DON: Great days.
 KATH: Oh . . . they were great days . . . great bloody days weren't they. Then why the hell did I have to put you on an invalid's diet because you had ulcers at the age of twenty-five because you couldn't fucking well cope with your job or anything else for that matter and why did I have to cook all your meals and wash all your clothes? Eh? Because your little mummy hadn't told you that there's a fucking great world full of people out there who don't give a stuff about little Donnie Henderson, boy wonder, prematurely retired. Whizz kid. Adolescent genius, full grown bomb out. Fizzer. Squib.
 DON: Family man, school teacher, gardener, tree surgeon, handyman, good provider . . .
 KATH: (*undaunted*) I had to creep around our flat while Donnie Genius is tapping out his earth-shattering novel that was going to place him, and I quote, amongst the ranks of the all time fucking greats.
 DON: I've never said that. That's a lie. I have never in my life even suggested that I have any more than a modicum of talent. I have never etc. . . .

KATH: Delusions of grandeur weren't in the race! I had to wait seven fucking years before I was allowed to have a kid. Jesus Christ! I wasn't allowed to do pottery until last year because it was so mundane. You shit me Henderson. You shit me completely. I'm going to bed.

(*She starts to go.*)

MAL: Look Kath, I'd like to apologise.

KATH: (*turning on him*) You shit me even more.

MAL: (*whining*) What've I done?

KATH: You don't have to do anything Sutherland. You're just a born shit.

JENNY: Leave him alone.

KATH: You shit me too.

JENNY: The feeling's mutual.

KATH: And make sure we get that other ninety-eight dollars by the end of the week.

JENNY: You're incredible.

KATH: Well why shouldn't we get it? Your idiot of a husband's earning twice as much money as mine.

JENNY: Well that just shows you what an idiot your husband must be.

KATH: I'm going to bed.

JENNY: So you keep saying.

(*KATH storms off.*)

MAL: (*to DON, still with drunken goodwill*) We mustn't let this quarrel affect our relationship.

DON: I swear I didn't say that I thought I was potentially one of the great novelists of our time.

MAL: You said it to me once.

DON: When?

MAL: In the Albion.

DON: (*emphatically*) I certainly didn't mean it.

KATH: (*off*) If you think our marriage is so bloody boring then get out, and take your kid with you.

MAL: (*indignant*) It's not my kid.

DON: She's talking to me, I think.

MAL: (*looking at JODY*) What are you laughing at?

JODY: Nothing.

MAL: (*as the thought strikes him*) Did you hear any of the stuff about my problem?

JENNY: (*laughing too*) For Christ's sake come home, stupid.

JODY: (*drunkenly, beckoning MAL*) C'mere.

(*MAL staggers across to JODY.*)

MAL: (*belligerently*) What?

JODY: I wasn't laughing about your little problem. I've got a little problem myself.

MAL: What?

JODY: Little breasts.

MAL: Really.

JODY: Really bad.

MAL: Yeah?

JODY: I go berserk with jealousy whenever Simon sees another woman's breasts.

MAL: That they are bigger than yours?

JODY: They're all bigger'n mine.

MAL: Breasts aren't important.

JODY: That's what I tell myself. Do you like bums?

MAL: Love bums.

JODY: Got a good bum.

MAL: Well there you are. Nature compensates. I've got a good head.

JODY: (*dubious*) D'you think so?

MAL: Do you really still have a good time with your husband?

JODY: Yes we—

MAL: Really?

JODY: It was getting stale for a while so we started doing it less often and we found the old zest came back.

MAL: I bet your husband thought of that.

JODY: It works.

MAL: (*nodding*) Let's see your tits.

JODY: No.

MAL: I'm interested.

JODY: Let's see your . . . problem.

MAL: No.

JODY: I'm interested.

MAL: Tell you what. We'll go down to the bedroom.

(*They stagger off arm in arm.*)

MAL: Jody and I are going down to the bedroom.
 JENNY: (*with forebearance*) You and Jody are going home.
 JODY: (*to MAL*) When I first met you I thought you were really obnoxious.

MAL: People often make that mistake about me.

(*They embrace passionately. EVAN strides in.*)

EVAN: (*grimly*) Where's Cooley?

DON: (*surprised*) Down in the back room.

(*EVAN strides off resolutely.*)

Don't wake the baby.

(*DON goes across to JODY and MAL who are embracing, and taps MAL on the shoulder.*)

Hey, Evan's come back.

MAL: (*stopping the embrace*) Really?

DON: Hmm. I think he's looking for Kerry.

MAL: Kerry's gone.

DON: (*pointing to the bedroom*) Be a good chap and go and tell him.

MAL: (*tagging off*) What do you want me to tell him.

DON: (*embracing JODY, who doesn't seem to mind the change of partner*) Kerry's gone.

(*MAL staggers off and yells at the top of his voice.*)

MAL: Jesus I'm hungry. Hey Kath, how about some Cornflakes. You can afford a plate full of those, you mean bitch.

(*MACK backs on, half conscious, pursued by EVAN, who is about to punch him.*)

MACK: It's me, ME! I'm Mack.

EVAN: I'm sorry Mack.

(*He goes off to look for COOLEY. MACK staggers across to a bean chair and passes out.*)

MAL: (*off*) Hey lay off. Lay off you mad bastard.

(*A scuffle is heard.*)

EVAN: (*off*) Where's my wife?

COOLEY: (*off*) I have just about had enough of you.

MAL: (*off*) Kerry's gone.

EVAN: (*off*) Where?

MAL: (*off*) I haven't got a clue. I was just told to tell you.

Jesus I'm hungry. Are you hungry Susan?

KATH: (*off*) Stop that noise. You've woken Richard.

EVAN: (*entering*) Don.

(*DON breaks the embrace. JODY goes down to MACK.*)

DON: Oh, hello Evan.

EVAN: Has Kerry gone?

DON: I think she has.

EVAN: All right Cam baby. Get ready for an assault on your artistic sensibility.

(*The conversation is now overlapping and confused. EVAN storms out. COOLEY comes onstage looking disgruntled, nursing a bloody nose or a black eye.*)

DON: Looks like you took a hammering.

COOLEY: (*indignant*) Has he gone? He got me when I was putting on my daks.

KATH: (*off*) They've woken the baby.

SUSAN: (*off*) Isn't he gorgeous?

KATH: (*off*) I thought you didn't like babies.

SUSAN: (*off*) I like other people's.

COOLEY: This is the last party of yours I come to Henderson.

KATH: Good!

COOLEY: If people can't settle their differences in a civilised way then it's pretty poor. Pretty bloody poor.

(*He goes off to finish dressing.*)

MAL: (*reciting off the packet*) 'Extra G. High protein cereal with iron!' That's what I need. Iron in my soul and lead in my pencil. Every day your body uses protein to build and maintain healthy tissue, but your body can't store protein. Right, body! Here comes some protein.

JENNY: (*to MAL*) Come on. We're going home.

MAL: I'm ingesting protein.

(*SUSAN appears.*)

SUSAN: *(to DON)* He looks a bit like you.

DON: *(to JODY)* I'll call you a taxi.

JENNY: We'll give Jody a lift home.

DON: Would you? That would be fine.

KATH: *(appearing)* Richard's upset.

DON: All right. I'll go and nurse him.

KATH: If you could cut the noise down it'd be a help.

JENNY: Sorry Kath. I'm just trying to shift this oaf here.

MAL: Anyone else like some Extra G?

JENNY: *(pushing him towards door)* I'll give you some when we get home.

MAL: We've only got Weeties. I need the protein. Your body can't store it.

JENNY: Jody are you coming?

JODY: Thanks for the party Kath. Haven't enjoyed myself so much for years. I'm going to vote Labor next election.

MAL: *(to JODY)* You're a sweetie. A real sweetie.

(They go out the door.)

JENNY: Thanks Kath.

KATH: See you Jenny.

COOLEY: *(appearing with SUSAN in his grip)* Where's Mal?

(DON points out the door.)

(Taking SUSAN and leaving) Mal!

SUSAN: Thanks Kath.

COOLEY: *(off)* You saw it all. I might need you as a witness when I take that bastard to court.

DON: *(to KATH)* You go to Richard will you? I'll just fix up Mack.

(He throws a blanket over MACK.)

MACK: *(momentarily recovering consciousness)* Great party!

DON: *(wearily)* Tremendous.

(There is a banging at the window which makes him jump.)

MAL: *(off)* See you later Nabokov!

(MAL chuckles loudly and raucously. DON grins and thumbs his voice. Silence. DON goes to the television set and turns up the sound.)

TV: The Prime Minister Mr Gorton and the Country Party Leader Mr McEwen both claimed to have been returned to office with a narrow majority in today's Federal Election. Mr Gorton claimed victory on the basis of 63 seats.

(DON snaps off the television set. He takes out a packet of cigarettes but it is empty. He finds a butt in an ashtray, puts it in his mouth and flops down on the sofa. He lights a match.)

MACK: *(raising his head)* Fucking great party.

(DON sits there a moment, ruefully. The match burns his finger. He flicks it out.)

DON: Shit!

END

Some explanation on the preferential voting system may be useful to the reader. The voter must place a number against every name on the ballot paper, in order of preference. In the counting process, the first count looks only to the first preference. If no candidate has gained a majority, the votes given to the least successful candidate are then distributed according to the second preferences indicated on his papers. The process of elimination continues until one candidate has gained a majority of votes.

ASIO, The Australian Security Intelligence Organisation.

ALBION, THE, a hotel in the inner Melbourne suburb of Carlton, quite close to Melbourne University and on the same block as the Pram Factory theatre.

AUSTRALIA PARTY, a small political party which originated in 1966 as Liberal Reform Group with opposition to Australia's military involvement in Vietnam as its central policy. In the 1969 elections, it attempted to reach 'those independent-minded voters throughout the country who were tired of the "machine" politics of the two main contenders for power, but who found themselves unable to accept the antics and aspirations of the DLP'.

BUNUEL, LUIS (b. 1900), one of the grand old men of European cinema, this Spanish film director has been consistently concerned with the unlovely aspects of the bourgeoisie. See *The Exterminating Angel*.

CAIRNS, KEVIN, right-wing Liberal Party sitting member for Lilley in 1969, returned in the election.

DLP, the Democratic Labor Party, formed by anti-Communist elements within the Labor Party in the 1950s, a numerically small political party which nonetheless wielded considerable power in elections, thanks to preferential voting system. DONCASTER, a North-eastern suburb of Melbourne, about twelve miles from the city.

EXTERMINATING ANGEL, THE (*El Angel Exterminador*, 1962), a film of Luis Buñuel, dealing with a party at which the guests find themselves mysteriously unable to leave.

GAIR, VINCENT, the DLP leader and senator in 1969.

GORTON, JOHN GREY, Prime Minister of Australia and Liberal Party leader in 1969, returned in the election.

HAWKE, BOB, in 1969, the industrial advocate for the Australian Council of Trade Unions, to become president of the ACTU in January 1970; a Rhodes Scholar.

MCEWEN, JOHN, Country Party leader and Deputy Prime Minister in 1969.

MACKAY, MALCOLM, right-wing Liberal Party sitting member for Evans (N.S.W.) in 1969, returned in the election.

MCMANUS, FRANK, a senator prominent in the DLP.

MANNIX, DANIEL (1864-1963), Roman Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne from 1917 until his death, an outspoken anti-Communist and DLP supporter.

SANTAMARIA, BARTHOLOMEW AUGUSTUS, born in Melbourne in 1915, a leading spirit in the anti-Communist activity which led to the formation of the DLP in the 1950s; not himself a member of the DLP, he ardently supported it in weekly television broadcasts and in the activities of the National Civic Council, of which he was president.

WHITLAM, GOUGH, Labor Party leader and leader of the Federal Opposition in 1969. Subsequently Prime Minister, 1972-75.