

# Julia Flips Her Lid

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A play about Ideas.

**By Douglas Lockhart**

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# JULIA FLIPS HER LID

**A play about ideas in two acts by  
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## **Characters**

<b>Julia</b>	<b>ex-wife of David (does not appear)</b>
<b>David</b>	<b>ex-husband of Julia</b>
<b>Rose</b>	<b>wife to be of David</b>
<b>Martin</b>	<b>son of Julia &amp; David</b>
<b>Vitali</b>	<b>Russian friend of Rose's</b>
<b>Mary</b>	<b>colleague of David's</b>

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## **ACT ONE**

### **Scene One-----Rose's lounge/Afternoon**

***Music by Brahms (violin concerto in D?) is playing before curtain rises. Scene is split between bedroom (stage left), lounge (centre stage), and kitchen (stage right) of ROSE'S house in the country. The bedroom and kitchen interiors are not visible. It is summer, mid-day. French doors (centre stage) lead out into a garden.***

***The lounge is quite untidy, mostly because of discarded clothes, but it is interestingly furnished with, in particular, a dish-laden Welsh dresser that doubles as a wine and spirit cabinet with assorted bottles and glasses on show, a deal table with straight-backed chairs, a two-***

**seater sofa, with a low occasional table before it, and a fat plaster Buddha on a pedestal. There is a bathroom off the kitchen stage right - sound effects of flushing on occassionally. Front door is off lounge stage left.**

**ROSE is on stage by herself, sprawled out on the sofa reading a book. She is a woman in her early forties, has her hair wrapped in a towel, and is wearing a dressing gown. Her feet are bare. The door bell sounds. Carrying the book with her, Rose exits stage left. The caller is her boyfriend, David, a man of the same vintage. Music fades as they greet one another.**

**ROSE:** (out of sight) It's you!

**DAVID:** It's me!  
(sound of smooching)

**ROSE:** Naughty boy!  
(More smooching)

**They enter the lounge; DAVID has an arm around ROSE'S waist**

**DAVID:** (spins ROSE around) You smell distinctly edible!

**ROSE:** I'm just out of the bath.

**DAVID:** That's a tempting line.

**ROSE:** When did you ever need tempting? (smiles and pushes DAVID away) Later!

**DAVID continues to stare at ROSE**

**ROSE:** (laughing) What?

**DAVID:** You're beautiful.

**ROSE:** If only!

**DAVID:** You are to me.

**ROSE:** (ROSE turns away with mock annoyance, throws herself down into a corner of the sofa and looks up surprised) You still here?

**DAVID:** What did I say?

**ROSE:** (opens her books and pretends to read) You are to me!

**DAVID:** (leans over back of sofa) Without reservation . . . thee most beautiful woman in the world.

**DAVID bends down and kisses ROSE. She accepts his kiss, looks at him for a moment, then again pushes him away. He laughs and heads towards the**

**dresser. ROSE turns and watches him pour himself a large whisky, then returns to her book. Glass in hand, DAVID turns and stands sipping at his drink**

- DAVID:** Ready for the onslaught?
- ROSE:** *(as if reading)* I've bought enough food to feed an army.
- DAVID:** An army *plus* Martin.
- ROSE:** *(looks up)* He's a growing boy!
- DAVID:** I can't get a word out of him. Just clams up. Nods. It's like he's never heard of the English language.
- ROSE:** He's naturally shy. *(Gestures at dresser)* Pour me one of these, would you. Small. I don't want to end up on my ear before dinner.
- DAVID:** Or on your back.
- ROSE:** Don't be coarse!
- DAVID:** *(laughs and sets about pouring ROSE'S drink)* It's like he's lost his brain!
- ROSE:** *(sarcastically)* That would never do!
- DAVID:** *(comes over with her drink, hands it to ROSE, but remains standing)* You ask him a question and he just grunts at you. It's infuriating.
- ROSE:** It's hormones.
- DAVID:** Huh! There's more to it than that.
- ROSE:** Julia?
- DAVID:** *(sighs)* He's got such a good brain. Top of everything. Always top.
- ROSE:** You think Julia's got at him?
- DAVID:** She's capable of it. *(Laughs)* You know what? I think he's still a virgin. Hard to believe I know . . .
- ROSE:** You would prefer he wasn't?
- DAVID:** I wasn't. At seventeen. You?
- ROSE:** Don't be cheeky!
- DAVID:** *(huffs a laugh)* Really?
- ROSE:** We were *all* virgins at seventeen. Back then. Well, almost all. I knew one girl who wasn't.
- DAVID:** *(with a smirk)* I got lucky.

**ROSE:**           *(almost under her breath)* The girl I'm thinking of wasn't so lucky, believe me.

**DAVID:**           She had a kid?

**ROSE:**           Two. In quick succession. She left school soon after. We never saw her again.

**DAVID:**           *(manufactured look of alarm)*  
Christ, what was her name?

**ROSE:**           *(quickly)* Don't be silly!

**DAVID:**           *(changes to serious tone after pause)* They're hardly out of puberty and they're at it.

**ROSE:**           *(puts her book down)* Can you imagine the pressure they're under? I wouldn't want to be a young girl nowadays.

**DAVID:**           We're all children of our age, Rose.

**ROSE signals that she wants DAVID to sit down. He acquiesces, puts an arm round her shoulder**

**ROSE:**           *(studies his face)* You okay? I thought you looked a bit tired when you came in.

**DAVID:**           More jaded than tired. Jaded and disappointed by my fellow human beings. The department's heaving with politics.

**ROSE:**           Why are universities such stupid places?

**DAVID:**           They're no different from anywhere else, Rose.

**ROSE:**           Mary seems to cope with it all.

**DAVID:**           Mary is a shining example to us all. And the students like her. *(Adds quickly)* She's agreed to pick up Martin in town at eleven tomorrow.

**ROSE:**           To avoid Julia?

**DAVID:**           They had a tiff. Over you. Mary said she liked you and that set Julia off.

**ROSE:**           Why has she got it in for me?

**DAVID:**           Because Julia is Julia. Need I say more?

**ROSE shakes her head and looks away**

**DAVID:**           It was through Mary that I met Julia.

**ROSE:**           You've already said.

**DAVID:** Have I? When?

**ROSE:** Some weeks back.

**DAVID:** (*bemused*) She'll head the department some day. She's got a *very* good mind.

**ROSE:** (*smiling*) And a good figure. Pity her dress sense is so appalling. Where does she get those awful cardigans?

**DAVID:** (*chuckles to himself*) Maybe she and Vitali will hit it off.

**ROSE:** He's too intense. Too . . . Russian. Anyway, she seems quite content with her lot.

**DAVID:** Yes, intellectually. Emotionally?

**ROSE:** You think so? She's said something?

**DAVID:** Not directly. But I've got eyes. Ears. I sense she's lonely at times.

**ROSE:** I like her. She's very genuine. (*laughs*) Maybe they will hit it off.

**DAVID:** She would find Vitali's mysticism difficult to put up with. I know I do.

**ROSE:** It's not mysticism, David. He's no mystic, I can assure you of that.

**DAVID:** What? He's tried to get into your nickers?

**ROSE:** Of course not!

**DAVID:** He likes women. Said so without prompting the last time we talked.

**ROSE:** He's not like that. Not with me.

**DAVID:** (*dead pan*) Novels.

**ROSE:** Educated Russians read novels, David.

**DAVID:** (*picks up the book ROSE has put down*) So what are we reading today? Oh, God! Not Lawrence?

**ROSE:** You obviously don't like Lawrence?

**DAVID:** I did him at school. How do you think I ended up doing what I do?

**ROSE:** He's brilliant. He understood women.

**DAVID:** (*dirty laugh*) Not the impression I got.

**ROSE:** He was sensitive to a woman's feelings.

**DAVID:** He was a raunchy bastard!

**ROSE:** SORRY, he was the opposite of that. He just couldn't stand the hypocrisy that had grown up around sex. *(Half laugh)* He was in fact a bit of a puritan.

**DAVID:** That's not how he's talked about. How he's remembered.

**ROSE:** Can I read you a few lines?*(She takes the book from him, opens it at random and scans the pages)* This'll do: "As Ursula passed from girlhood towards womanhood, gradually the cloud of self-responsibility gathered upon her. She became aware of herself, that she was a separate entity in the midst of an unseparated obscurity, that she must go somewhere, she must become something. And she was afraid, troubled. Why, oh why must one grow up, why must one inherit this heavy, numbing responsibility of living an undiscovered life? This was torment indeed, to inherit the responsibility of one's own life."

**DAVID:***(DAVID throws his head back and laughs)* That's exactly why I don't like Lawrence - he was a pretentious fart, Rose! I read novels to escape, not wallow in self-recrimination.

**ROSE:** *(pauses)* That's not self-recrimination!

**DAVID:** Self-conscious recrimination?

**ROSE:** It's got nothing to do with recrimination. Surely you can see that?

**DAVID:***(with a hint of a smile)* So what's it about?

**ROSE:** *(pulls back to look at DAVID)* You're winding me up.

**DAVID:***(laughs)* I can't help it - you get so serious!

**ROSE returns to her book and they sit in silence**

**DAVID:** Vitali sounds just like Lawrence at times.

**ROSE:** *(without looking at David)* Vitali's old school. He reads novels as a means to understand life, not escape from it. And he doesn't miss much, I can tell you. *(A glance)* He's very perceptive.

**DAVID:** Why? What's he been saying?

**ROSE:** About what?  
**DAVID:** Me. Us.  
**ROSE:** (*closes book again*) Nothing! I don't think you've actually come up in conversation.  
**DAVID:** (*looking out into audience*) He didn't warm to me; I could tell. When we spoke, he interrogated rather than probed.  
**ROSE:** When you get to know him . . .  
**DAVID:** I very much doubt that'll ever happen. Some people just don't click.  
**ROSE:** You're sometimes a little hasty in your judgements, David.  
**DAVID:** Perhaps.  
**ROSE:** Anyway, when's the last time you actually sat down and read any kind of novel?  
**DAVID:** (*quickly, with a smile*) You shouldn't judge a book by its cover, Rose.  
**ROSE:** (*punches David lightly*) Oh, very droll.  
**DAVID:** When do I have the time to read novels?  
**ROSE:** You *make* time, David.  
**DAVID:** Sorry. I prefer non-fiction. Facts are more reliable.  
**ROSE:** (*sighs*) Mr factuality.  
**DAVID:** It's the life I chose, Rose. And it's a pretty good life the truth being told.  
**ROSE:** Too many facts drag the life out of us.  
**DAVID:** It would be a pretty mean existence without facts, Rose.  
**ROSE:** I'm not envisaging a world without facts.  
**DAVID:** That's not what I meant.  
**ROSE:** No, but it's what you said. *Fact.*  
**DAVID laughs, but does not reply**

**ROSE:** Facts don't go anywhere. They terminate in themselves.  
**DAVID:** Example?  
**ROSE:** (*pauses*) The moon. The moon is what, 93 *something* million miles from the Earth. Right? Fine. Then what? The argument doesn't go any further than that, David. It



needn't go any further. The factual buck stops right there. In that sense its sterile.

**DAVID:** (*frowns*) That sounds like something Vitali would come up with. Is it? Is that how he describes me? As factually sterile?

**ROSE** *stares at DAVID and blinks, but does not reply. She's obviously a little taken aback by his attitude*

**DAVID:** Well, is it?

**ROSE:** You haven't come up in conversation. At least not in that way. Only as a *fact*.

**DAVID:** (*laughs and holds up his hands in defence*) Okay, okay.

**ROSE:** What brought this on?

**DAVID:** I caught him looking at me in a not too friendly way.

**ROSE:** You're quite mistaken.

**DAVID:** (*sighs*) Facts are the meat and potatoes of my existence, Rose. They're my bread and butter.

**ROSE:** Your bread and butter *and* your meat and potatoes?

**DAVID:** (*frowning*) You really are in form, aren't you? (*Gets up and heads for the dresser to refill his glass*) I'm beginning to think you've got it in for me. (*looks round*) We aren't having second thoughts, are we?

**ROSE:** Don't be silly!

**DAVID:** (*turns back to dresser*) I never cease to be amazed by the way women read out their emotions. Nothing's ever straightforward. It's always a zig-zag business.

**ROSE:** We're wired up differently.

**DAVID:** (*turning*) You can say that again.

**ROSE:** (*dead pan*) We're wired up differently.

**DAVID** *grimaces. Lights slowly fade and go out. Music starts up, then it too fades and ceases. Lights come back up slowly*

## **Scene Two-----Rose's lounge after early evening meal.**

**ROSE and DAVID are lying stretched out at opposite ends of the sofa, their legs intermeshed. DAVID has a glass of something in his hand. There is the debris of a meal on the occasional table. The light beyond the french doors has now mellowed.**

- DAVID:**       *(looks at his watch)* By this time tomorrow we'll be hitched.
- ROSE:**       For our sins . . .
- DAVID:**       *(laughs)* That has to be a non sequitur.
- ROSE:**       I take after my mother.
- DAVID:**       God forbid!
- ROSE:**       I'm joking, of course. *(As an afterthought)* But I am like her in some ways. You can't avoid being a little like your parents.
- DAVID:**       Your mother's the most illogical person I've ever come across.
- ROSE:**       You know what they say: If you want to know how the daughter will turn out, then look at the mother.
- DAVID:**       You're nothing like your mother.
- ROSE:**       Be warned, I may turn into her.
- DAVID:**       I'll take my chances on that.
- ROSE:**       *(after a pause)* Logic's a tool, David; it isn't anything in its own right.
- DAVID:**       *(Frowns, then laughs)* Where did that come from?
- ROSE:**       What you said about my mother.
- DAVID:**       I'm a rationalist, Rose. Rational thought is logical by definition; it's the foundation of certainty. It eliminates waste and saves time.
- ROSE:**       My kind of truth tends to be ambiguous. Ambiguity isn't illogical. It just tends to leave things, certain things, up in the air for their own good.
- DAVID:**       Who mentioned truth?
- ROSE:**       It's what we're all after, isn't it?
- DAVID:**       *(amused)* You think so?
- ROSE:**       You aren't interested in what's true?

**DAVID:** There's a helluva difference between 'truth' and what's true, Rose. 'Truth' is a loaded term. It's in the eye of the beholder. The 'true' is generally factual in nature.

**ROSE:** *Touche.*

**DAVID:** *(smiles)* Language can be tricky.

**ROSE:** And ambiguity?

**DAVID:** *(pauses)* The basis of poetry and an excuse - more often than not - for not thinking things through.

**ROSE:** Love is ambiguous. You don't have to think love through.

**DAVID:** *(claps his hands quietly in appreciation)* Well played.

**ROSE:** It isn't a contest.

**DAVID:** Well played nonetheless.

***They sit looking at one another***

**DAVID:** We're sitting here like an old married couple.

**ROSE:** *(quickly)* You would know more about that than I do.

**DAVID:** Ouch.

**ROSE:** *(frowning)* There shouldn't be anything wrong with being an old married couple.

**DAVID:** There is when one of you is called Julia.

**ROSE:** Is she really taking things so badly?

**DAVID:** Julia is Julia.

**ROSE:** But why? You've been divorced for over a year for God's sake. Separated for a year before that.

**DAVID:** It's in Julia's nature to be possessive. I found that out when it was too late. *(Moves his head about on his neck as if to loosen it)* She's not happy, so I can't be happy. It was okay as long as I was on my own, as she is on her own.

**ROSE:** She must have known you were seeing other people.

**DAVID:** So long as it didn't turn serious.

**ROSE:** You know that for sure?

**DAVID:** You get to know a person after twelve years.

**ROSE:** It took twelve years to find out?

**DAVID:** You don't find out all in one hit.  
It's incremental.

**ROSE:** How will you view me in twelve years I wonder?

**DAVID:** You took twelve minutes.

**ROSE:** I'm *that* transparent!

**DAVID:** And beautiful.

**ROSE cocks her head and stares at DAVID.**

**DAVID:** What?

**ROSE:** What about my reading habits?

**DAVID:** I'll put up with them.

**ROSE:** (*West country accent*) I'm ever so grateful, sir.

**DAVID:** I'll wean you away from Lawrence. I promise.

**ROSE:** (*West country accent*) You do me too great an honour, sir.

**DAVID:** I have my wily ways.

**ROSE:** (*looks away from DAVID/reverts to ordinary accent*) I don't doubt it.

**DAVID:** (*surprised*) Do I detect an edge?

**ROSE:** (*looking at DAVID again/West country accent*) Me thinks you presume too much, sir.

**DAVID:** (*frowns*) I'm joking, Rose.

**ROSE:** (*looks out into audience, then back at DAVID*) I still don't get it. Why so intent in making you suffer? Me?

**DAVID:** She doesn't know how to let go. Won't let go. I'm not sure which it is. It's either psychological dependency or sheer vindictiveness. I suspect the latter.

**ROSE:** The *letter* I got from her was awful.

**DAVID:** I'm sorry you had to experience that. She surprises even me at times.

**A longish pause**

**ROSE:** Martin's turned out okay.

**DAVID:** Except that he hardly speaks. I don't know where I am with him at the moment.

**ROSE:** He's confused. It's an age thing.

**DAVID:** It's like she's cut the tongue out of his head. I sometimes think she's psychically abused him.

**ROSE:** You were getting on reasonably well. What went wrong?

**DAVID:** I'd *love* to know.

**ROSE:** How is he with his mother?

**DAVID:** I'm not sure. He doesn't mention her much. Clams up even more if I start talking about her.

**ROSE:** I like him, David. I think he likes me.

**DAVID:** He thinks you're 'cool'. Said as much in one of his bursts of conversation.

**ROSE:** In spite of Julia?

**DAVID:** He's not a complete idiot.

***There is a silence.***

**ROSE:** Nothing's ever plain sailing, is it? Too much bloody baggage floating around.

**DAVID:** (*grins*) There's something in your past I should know about?

**ROSE:** There's *always* something the other doesn't know about.

**DAVID:** Ooooooooo. . .

**ROSE:** It's how things are.

**DAVID:** (*makes to get up*) I need a top up. You?

**ROSE:** (*shakes her head, watches him head for the dresser*) I'd prefer you didn't.

**DAVID:** (*looks round frowning*) Really? Why?

**ROSE:** You've already had quite a bit.

**DAVID:** You're keeping tabs!

**ROSE:** No. I just prefer it when you haven't had too much.

**DAVID:** (*mystified*) What's too much?

**ROSE:** Five or six scotches followed by most of a bottle of wine over dinner and then more scotch. . . . I'd like you to have a clear head for tomorrow. That's all.

**DAVID nods, accepts ROSE'S argument and returns to the sofa. ROSE immediately snuggles in against him. They sit like this for some seconds**

**ROSE:** When I was a little girl I used to fantasise about getting married. A white dress and all that.

**DAVID:** (*chuckles*) It isn't, is it?

**ROSE:** (*turns to look at him*) That would be a problem?

**DAVID:**           *(smiling)* Well, you're not exactly

...  
**ROSE:**           *(Quickly)* Pure?

**DAVID:**           Virginal.

**ROSE:**           Same difference.

**DAVID:**           You know what I meant.

**ROSE:**           Sullied?

**DAVID:** I meant nothing of the kind!

**ROSE:**           Of course you did. The bride  
should not wear white if she's no longer a  
virgin.

**DAVID:**           *(permissive tone)* Wear  
whatever you like, Rose. That kind of thing  
no longer has any meaning.

**ROSE:**           Maybe it should. Mean something.  
*(Looks out at audience)* Used to be you  
weren't even allowed to see the bride in her  
finery until the day of the wedding.

**DAVID:**           *(laughs)* I'm sleeping with her  
the night before her wedding. *(Corrects  
himself)* Have already slept with her the  
afternoon before her wedding. I think that  
rather cancels out tradition.

**ROSE:**           Maybe we should have arranged  
things differently.

**DAVID:**           *(trying to be funny)* No nookie  
before the nuptials?

**ROSE:**           *(pulls back to look at David)* A  
little more respect for the occasion?

**DAVID:**           *(surprised)* You're serious! Aren't  
you? Look, if you'd said something . .

**ROSE waves her hands in front of  
her face, then covers her face with her  
hands and leans forward**

**DAVID:**           *(pulls her in)* Silly thing!

**ROSE:**           *(straightens up)* I think I'll have  
that drink after all.

**DAVID rises quickly and heads for  
the dresser**

**ROSE:**           A large one.

**DAVID:**           *(looks back)* Are you sure?

**ROSE does not reply. She begins to  
cry softly, little shudders passing  
through her frame**

**DAVID:**           *(comes back quickly and stands  
looking down at ROSE)* For God's sake,  
Rose! What's the matter?

**ROSE:**           *(tearfully)* Nothing. I'm just being silly.

**DAVID:**        You are having second thoughts. Aren't you?

**ROSE:**           *(looks up smiling)* No, no. Nothing like that!

**DAVID:**        Then what's the matter?

**ROSE:**           Are you?

**DAVID:**        What? Having second thoughts? You've got to be joking! I can't wait to get hitched to you.

**ROSE:**           *(smiles through her tears)* You really mean that?

**DAVID:**        *(with sincerity)* Of course. I'd be a right mug to let you get away, kid.

***Lights dim slowly and music comes up with ROSE and DAVID looking at one another.***

### **Scene Three\_\_\_\_\_Rose's lounge later that evening**

***Lights come up and music fades. DAVID is busy clearing the occasional table and ROSE is attempting to tidy up the lounge. He has a blue j-cloth draped over his right shoulder. She straightens up from lifting some clothes from a chair and sways a little. It is now dark beyond the french doors.***

**ROSE:**           Oops!

**DAVID looks across at her and laughs**

**ROSE:**           I think I've over done it. *(Plonks herself down on a nearby chair clutching the clothes she's lifted)*

**DAVID:**        *(continues with his chore)* Julia's teetotal. Not even a sherry.

**ROSE:**           *(gulps a laugh)* That must have helped!

**DAVID:**        All she needed to do was find God and she'd have had the trifecta.

**ROSE:**           God and?

**DAVID:**        *(muses)* God, bitchiness and irrationality.

**ROSE:** I almost feel sorry for her.  
**DAVID:** You needn't be.  
**ROSE:** No one's born that way.  
**DAVID:** Julia's the exception.  
**ROSE:** You know that for sure?  
**DAVID:** Members of the family let it out  
of the bag.  
**ROSE:** When?  
**DAVID:** When I asked.  
**ROSE:** They came straight out with it?  
**DAVID:** After a little coaxing. They all  
knew I was having a hard time.  
**ROSE shakes her head and makes  
to get up.**  
**DAVID:** Look, go to bed. I'll finish up  
here.  
**ROSE:** (*little voice*) Are you sure?  
**DAVID:** I'm an old hand at this, Rose. An  
old hand.  
**ROSE:** (*standing*) You're so  
domesticated. It's almost unnerving.  
**DAVID:** (*laughs*) Lucky for you I am.  
**ROSE remains standing. DAVID  
lifts tray and goes through to the  
kitchen, then returns.**  
**DAVID:** You still here?  
**ROSE:** So what went wrong? You must  
have loved her. Once.  
**DAVID:** (*j-cloth in hand David  
contemplates ROSE'S question*) I thought  
she was terrific when we first met. She was a  
looker, Rose, and I *mean* a looker. Turned  
heads wherever she went. Still does. What I  
didn't know was that she could also turn on a  
sixpence, to use a phrase of my pommy  
father's. She could be loving one minute and  
hateful the next.  
**ROSE:** She changed when you got  
married?  
**DAVID:** No, not really. I just didn't take  
in what she was really like. As you said, I  
was in love. Love *is* blind.  
**ROSE:** We're *all* idiots. I've had my  
moments.  
**DAVID:** Martin has yet to experience the  
joys of adulthood.



**ROSE:** As least I know now where he got his looks from.

**DAVID:** (*playing peeved*) Thank you very much!

**ROSE:** (*brightly*) I'm marrying you tomorrow.

**DAVID:** I'm glad to hear it!

**ROSE:** Why?

**DAVID:** (*laughs and stops what he's doing*) What do you mean, why?

**ROSE:** What do you see in me? What do you really know about me?

**DAVID:** I know it's time you were in bed.

**ROSE:** (*smiling*) That's all you ever think about.

**DAVID:** It's what keeps the world going round, and round, and round . . .

**ROSE:** (*closes her eyes and opens them again quickly*) Oh, God! (*Sits down with a thump*)

**DAVID:** (*laughs and comes over to Rose*) Upsadaisy! That's it.

**DAVID takes ROSE around the waist and leads her towards the bedroom. As they disappear inside, he throws the blue j-cloth out into the lounge where it falls to the floor. Lights dim, go out, and music comes up**

**Scene Four\_\_\_\_\_Rose's lounge the following morning. Light beyond french doors is again bright.**

***Music fades/lights come up. Present on stage are ROSE and DAVID, MARTIN, MARY and VITALI. Glass in hand, VITALI is standing next to MARY, chatting. He has good English, but a fairly strong Russian accent. MARY isn't exactly frumpish, but she isn't far off it; she's wearing sensible shoes, a skirt and blouse and a rather long, shapeless cardigan. ROSE and DAVID are sitting together on the sofa. MARTIN is sitting by himself at the back of the room next***

**to the dresser. There is now an array of wine bottles in evidence. MARTIN is seen to fill his glass with red wine. The table is now laden with sandwiches, etc**

**MARY:** (to VITALI) One glass of wine is about all I can take. I've never been much of a drinker.

**VITALI:** Wine reveals who we are, Mary. (Looks round at DAVID) Isn't that so, David?

**DAVID:** (off-handedly) If you say so.

**VITALI:** (to MARY) My father taught me to drink wine when I was Martin's age.

**DAVID:** (playfully) I drink wine to hide my fear of other people, Vitali. I'm *terribly* inhibited.

**ROSE:** (elbows DAVID ) You're about as inhibited as a chimpanzee on heat!

**Laughter. MARTIN'S laugh is a little louder than that of the others.**

**DAVID:** (turns and points a finger at MARTIN) You've had enough young man! (Then to everyone) If he goes home drunk his mother will read the riot act with me.

**VITALI:** (to DAVID) Young men have to learn to drink, David. You must teach him, like my father taught me.

**DAVID:** (distractedly) I've already told him he's had enough.

**VITALI:** I mean drink with him.

**DAVID:** (to VITALI) If he has another drink he'll be flat on his back. (Turns back to MARTIN with warning look) I mean it. No more.

**MARTIN ignores his father and takes another gulp of wine**

**DAVID:** (to ROSE) You speak to him for God's sake; he's in one of his 'I hate my father' moods.

**ROSE gets up and goes over to MARTIN. What she's saying to him is too low to be heard. She pulls a chair over and sits with him)**

**VITALI:** (to DAVID) He is a fine boy, David. He has good, steady eyes.

**DAVID:** (with crooked smile) They're none too steady at the moment.

**VITALI does not respond**

**DAVID:** (to everyone) He can be a belligerent little bugger at times.

**MARTIN raises his glass in salute**

**VITALI:** We never learn from another, only from ourselves.

**DAVID:** (dismissively ) Very philosophical I'm sure.

**MARTIN:** You tell'im, dad.

**An audible sigh from DAVID**

**MARTIN:** (To VITALI) I did learn to drink from my father. Ask my mother.

**DAVID:** (Turns quickly in response) That's quite enough out of you!

**ROSE gets up and stands between them as if trying to shield them from one another.**

**VITALI:** (to everyone) Do you know why Bacchus is always laughing? (Prods at his chest and continues) It is because he knows what we are inside.

**DAVID:** (with a touch of belligerence) And what might that be?

**VITALI:** Afraid, David. We are all afraid we will be found out.

**DAVID is just about to reply when ROSE intervenes**

**ROSE:** I don't think Martin's too well, David. Could you help me with him, please?

**DAVID:** (gets up) Ten-thirty in the morning and he's pissed as a newt!

**MARTIN:** I am *not* pissed!

**ROSE:** (trying to pacify DAVID) He just needs to lie down for a bit.

**DAVID:** (as they lead MARTIN toward bedroom) Don't you go chucking up in there!

**Door to bedroom closes behind them, but muffled voices can still be heard, followed by MARTIN'S retching. ROSE appears and races across to the kitchen. There is the sound of running water. ROSE appears again with a basin and cloth and re-enters bedroom. Bedroom door closes.**

**VITALI:** (shrugs matter-of-factly ) It is how we learn.

**Muffled sound of retching**

**MARY:**           *(grimaces)* You're a romantic,  
Vitali.

**VITALI:** Getting drunk is a practical lesson in  
how to live. It is how a boy learns to become  
a man.

**MARY:**           Kids these days get drunk every  
other night. Doesn't teach them anything.

**VITALI:** The first time I got drunk I got drunk  
while talking to my father about life, and  
love. And death. He kept filling my glass and  
we talked on and on until I could no longer  
hold my head up. And so he put me to bed.  
And he kissed me. And I fell asleep.

**MARY does not reply. She stands  
frowning her incomprehension at  
VITALI**

**VITALI:** My getting drunk with my father was a  
kind of initiation, Mary. We talked man to  
man and I glimpsed who my father really  
was. That's what was important on that  
occasion. Not what I learned about myself,  
but what I learned about him.

**MARY:**           Kids these days learn everything  
they need from one another. They are their  
own mentors.

**VITALI:** And what do they learn? I will tell you.  
They learn *nothing*, because they *know*  
nothing.

**MARY:**           They don't listen any more, Vitali.

**VITALI:** If no one speaks from in here (*prods at  
his chest with index finger*) Then no one  
listens.

**MARY:**           Yes, but . . .

**Door to bedroom opens and DAVID  
and ROSE appear. DAVID is carrying the  
basin and heads off through the kitchen  
to the bathroom. ROSE lets out an  
audible breath and joins MARY and  
VITALI**

**MARY:**           Is he okay?

**ROSE:**           *(makes a face)* He is now.  
*(Sound of toilet flushing)* David is so angry.

**An uneasy silence.**

**DAVID:**          *(comes back into lounge)*  
Disgusting!

**ROSE:**           An hour's sleep will see him  
okay.

**DAVID:** I knew this would happen. I specifically told him to not drink too much. So what does he do?

**VITALI:** He slaps your face.

**DAVID:** Exactly!

**MARY:** He was very quiet on the drive over. I asked him if there was anything wrong. He said everything was fine.

**DAVID:** (*off-hand*) Julia's been at him.

**MARY:** You can't blame Julia for everything, David!

**ROSE is obviously interested in the exchange.**

**DAVID:** The boy's a mirror.

**MARY:** It could be something you've done, or said.

**DAVID:** (*smiling*) Little me!

**MARY looks away and shakes her head.**

**DAVID:** (*turning away*) I need a drink!

**VITALI'S laugh has a derisive note. DAVID throws him a glance**

**MARY:** (*to ROSE*) I haven't seen much of Julia recently. She hasn't 'phoned. I haven't made any effort. It's been . . . awkward.

**ROSE:** Because of me?

**MARY nods rapidly**

**ROSE:** I hope we never have the occasion to meet.

**DAVID:** (*returns, glass of wine in hand*) It's got to be Julia. She must have drummed up some new lie at the last minute.

**ROSE:** What could she say about you now that was so . . . revealing?

**DAVID:** Julia can be very inventive.

**VITALI:** (*looking around*) It is as if she is in the room.

**ROSE:** (*shudders*) Don't say things like that, Vitali!

**DAVID places an arm round ROSE'S shoulder; she glances at him and smiles wanly**

**VITALI:** (*suddenly*) I feel like walking. David?

**DAVID:** Not me, ol' son. Sorry.

**ROSE:** (*quickly*) I'll come.

**DAVID is surprised, but doesn't say anything. VITALI proffers a hand and Rose takes it. Smiling at one another, they leave through the french doors. DAVID and MARY are left facing one another, at a distance**

**MARY:** (when the sound of voices has died away) Coffee?

**DAVID:** Yeh, why not?

**MARY heads for kitchen. DAVID, glass in hand, eases himself into a corner of the sofa and stares out into audience. Then he puts his head back, closes his eyes and groans. He remains like this for some seconds**

**MARY:** (MARY re-enters lounge) I've put on the jug.

**DAVID:**(eyes still closed) I never get it right, do I. Not with Julia. Not with you . . .

**MARY:** (hands pushed into the pockets of her cardigan, MARY stands looking down at DAVID) I still love you. I think I'll always love you.

**DAVID:** (opens his eyes and looks at her) Don't say things like that. Please. Not now. Not today.

**MARY:** I can't help what I feel.

**DAVID:** (abruptly) And I can't help what I don't feel!

**MARY is obviously hurt by the remark**

**DAVID:** (as if to justify what he has just said) I never mentioned love, Mary. Neither did you. Not at any time.

**MARY:** You should have been able to tell.

**DAVID:** Oh, please!

**MARY:** (pause) Julia's found out. Hasn't she?

**DAVID:** I don't think so. If she had she'd have clobbered me with it by now.

**MARY:** A woman can tell.

**DAVID:** Not always.

**MARY does not reply; she continues to stare down at DAVID.**

**DAVID:** You seriously think she would have kept that kind of juice to herself?

**MARY:** (after a pause) If I'd told you how I felt I'd have lost you.

**DAVID:** (sits forward exasperatedly) Lost me? You told me you didn't want anything serious. These were your exact words!

**MARY:** They were what you wanted to hear.

**DAVID:** (raises hands to head and stares ceiling wards) Dear God! Why can't a women ever say what she actually means!

**MARY:** We're different from you lot.

**DAVID:** (huffs a laugh) And where have I heard that before! (Is suddenly alarmed) You haven't told Rose, have you?

**MARY:** (adamantly) Of course not! She's the last person in the world I'd want to hurt. (Points finger at him) So don't you hurt her.

**DAVID:** The jug's boiling.

**MARY heads into kitchen**

**DAVID:** (to himself) Oh, God! (He sits cogitating, his expression constantly changing)

**MARY:** (MARY returns with two mugs of coffee. She hands one to David and stands back) I wasn't the only one, was I?

**DAVID:** (quickly, smiling) I never promised you a rose garden.

**MARY:** What was that, a badly executed Freudian slip?

**DAVID blinks rapidly, but does not reply**

**MARY:** I wasn't, was I?

**DAVID:** (pauses) You know damned fine you weren't.

**MARY:** Why?

**DAVID:** (irritated) I don't know why. I was angry, I suppose. I wanted to get back at her.

**MARY:** She said you'd been playing around for years . . . anything that'd let you near it.

**DAVID:** That is rubbish. You know it is.

**MARY:** You're a terrible flirt, David.

**DAVID:** I flirt, yes. I admit to that. Most people do if given half a chance.

**MARY:** I thought I meant something to you.

**DAVID:** (*exasperated look*) You did!

**MARY:** But there were others.

**DAVID:** (*exasperated*) Of course there were! I was being unfaithful to *Julia* - does it really matter how many other people I was being unfaithful with?

**MARY:** I thought you were being unfaithful with me.

**DAVID:** (*laughs outright*) That made it okay?

**MARY:** It made it okay for me!

**DAVID:** (*after a pause, and innocently*) I didn't realise it had become that serious for you. I really didn't. I'm sorry.

**MARY:** You looked into my eyes and couldn't tell that I loved you? That I cared for you?

**DAVID:** I didn't . . .

**MARY:** Care?

**DAVID does not reply**

**MARY:** Julia hates you with an almost perfect hatred.

**DAVID:** I can imagine.

**MARY:** I don't think you do. Not quite.

**DAVID:** (*staring up at MARY*) Why should I care? She made my life a bloody misery for *twelve* years. It's a wonder I didn't strangle the bitch!

**MARY:** (*matter of factly*) You're saying you didn't start the ball rolling?

**DAVID:** Is that what she's said?

**MARY:** In as many words.

**DAVID:** (*adamantly*) It's *not* true, Mary! I reverted to type in self-defence. (*Takes sip of coffee and looks up with pained expression*) She was so beautiful, yet so *bloody* sexless. An ice queen. (*Hesitates, looks away, then back*) She had been going through the motions with me. When I woke up to that fact it was too late.

**MARY turns away; it is as if she can't bear to hear any more**

**DAVID:** Look, I'm sorry. I *really* am . . .

**MARY turns back; her face is expressionless**



**DAVID:** Can you find it in yourself to forgive me? I just didn't catch on . . .  
**Lights fade slowly and music comes up**

**Scene Five \_\_\_\_\_ Rose's lounge  
later the same day**

**Music fades and lights come up. VITALI is seated on sofa with ROSE - there is a plate of sandwiches on the occasional table in front of the sofa. Deal table is set for five. DAVID is standing at french doors looking out. MARY is absent.**

**ROSE:** To get drunk is not an act of valour, Vitali. Martin's going to have a very sore head when he wakes up.

**VITALI:** (*muses*) . . . Not valour, necessity.

**ROSE:** (*comical Russian accent*) In what way necessity, Boris?

**VITALI:** It is necessary for us to have our values scrambled. Like eggs. Before anything of value can appear.

**DAVID:** (*looks round with a laugh*) That's your definition of maturity?

**VITALI:** (*to David*) Young boys values are pig shit, David. They have only ideas. They believe this, they believe that. If they believe in something, you must believe the same thing or be classed as a reactionary, as an old foggie. They also have dick for brain and that makes things worse.

**DAVID:** (*highly amused*) Beautifully put!

**ROSE takes hold of VITALI'S arm and leans against him affectionately; it is as if she's offering support against DAVID**

**VITALI:** (*to no one in particular*) Human beings are not made out of ideas.

**DAVID:** (*turns to face VITALI*) Maturity is a balancing of ideas, surely.

**VITALI:** Ideas are only mature *after* the eggs have been scrambled. Many times.

**Bedroom door opens and MARTIN appears. He pads zombie-like in the direction of the bathroom**

**DAVID:**           *(nods in MARTIN'S direction)* He must be feeling pretty mature right this minute.

**As MARTIN heads into kitchen, MARY exits from kitchen. She touches MARTIN'S arm sympathetically as they pass.**

**DAVID:**           *(to MARY)* Looks almost human, doesn't he?

**MARY:**           Don't be mean!

**ROSE:**           He needs to eat something.

**DAVID:**           I doubt he could keep it down.  
*(Places a hand to his ear and listens exaggeratedly)*

**Sound of toilet flushing. MARTIN re-appears; he pads back to bedroom without a glance**

**DAVID:**           You okay?

**MARTIN:**         *(without looking)* Yeh.

**ROSE:**           Want something to eat?

**MARTIN:**         *(hesitates)* Not right now, Rose.  
Later.

**DAVID:**         *(looks at watch)* It's already gone twelve, Martin. Later is almost upon us.

**MARTIN:**         *(wide-eyed)* Okay, okay!

**ROSE:**           *(waits until bedroom door closes)*  
Don't be so hard on him!

**DAVID:**           Hard! Me?

**MARY:**           You're always at him.

**DAVID:**         *(hands held up in self-defence)*  
They're ganging up on me, Vitali. Help!

**ROSE:**           *(to DAVID)* You can be very impatient at times.

**DAVID:**         *( to VITALI in throw away tone)*  
And *still* she wants to marry me.

**VITALI:** You are a lucky man, David.

**DAVID:**           Correction, Vitali. *I* want to marry her.

**VITALI glances at ROSE, then back at DAVID**

**DAVID:**         *(while looking at ROSE)* I think she's secretly afraid of losing her freedom.

**ROSE:**           I'm not secretly afraid of losing anything! If I thought getting married to you wasn't the right thing to do, I wouldn't do it. Simple as that.

**DAVID:**         *(smiles)* That's my girl.

**VITALI:** I was married once. It didn't work out.

**ROSE:** Why not?

**VITALI:** Soul is made out of life, Rose. If there is no proper life, there is no soul. I had no life with her.

**DAVID:** Must be wonderful being Russian. You can say just about anything and it always sounds important. (*Looks around*) Is it the accent, do you think.

**VITALI:** (*laughs good naturedly*) I'm not talking blobs of light, David. I'm talking about what we are, or are not, in our hearts.

**DAVID:** (*with the merest touch of a smile*) You left her?

**VITALI:** (*sad voice*) No, she died in a terrible factory accident.

**DAVID:** (*taken off guard*) Oh, I'm . . . I'm sorry. I didn't . . .

**VITALI:** (*quickly*) I tell a lie; I left her.

**DAVID smiles and dips his head in acknowledgment of having been caught out**

**ROSE:** You left her to find your soul?

**VITALI:** No, to grow a soul. We do not enter life with a soul, Rose. We come in empty-handed. And if we have no proper life, we leave the same way. *That*, is damnation.

**DAVID:** (*astonished*) That's a new one on me!

**VITALI:** (*to DAVID*) You have been spared meeting someone who has no soul?

**DAVID:** How could you possibly tell?

**VITALI:** There is no life in them, David. They are empty inside.

**DAVID is about to respond when the telephone rings. ROSE pushes herself up out of the sofa and goes to answer it**

**DAVID:** (*to MARY who is hovering in background*) Do sit down, Mary.

**ROSE:** (*turns with 'phone in hand and makes a wry face*) It's for you, David. (*Silently articulates JULIA*)

**DAVID:** (*takes phone from ROSE*) What can I do for you, Julia? (*Pauses*) Oh, come on, don't start that again. (*Listen for some seconds stone-faced*) I'm sorry, Julia, I have

neither the time nor the patience to listen to this kind of nonsense over and over again. Particularly not today. Not now. (*Listens for a few more seconds*) You know damned fine what's happening today! I'm getting married this afternoon. (*More listening*) That, Julia, is below the dignity of a response. Goodbye. (*Hands phone back to ROSE*)

**ROSE:** (*shakes her head*) What a cheek!

**DAVID:** She's demented. I couldn't repeat some of the things she just said.

**ROSE:** What could she possibly hope to gain from such a call?

**DAVID:** Disruption. She's a spoiler.

**ROSE:** (*resolutely*) Time we made a move, don't you think?

**Lights dim and music comes up.**

## INTERVAL

# ACT TWO

**Scene One** \_\_\_\_\_ **Rose's lounge, late afternoon.**

**Lights come up on empty stage; music continues, but diminishes slowly as scene develops. Sound of cars approaching. Sound of car doors slamming. Cast enter stage left. ROSE enters lounge first. She is stone-faced and stiff in her movements. Next comes DAVID, followed by MARY and VITALI. ROSE carefully removes the jacket of a neat little suit she is wearing, hangs it over the back of one of the chairs, and disappears into the bedroom. VITALI goes to dresser, opens a bottle of vodka and proffers it to DAVID. DAVID declines and helps himself to a whisky. MARY heads into kitchen and there is the sound of water running. ROSE comes back into lounge and crosses to kitchen without a word. DAVID seats himself on sofa and sips at his whisky. VITALI is now standing at the french doors, vodka in hand,**

**looking out into garden. Music fades. There is the sound of the toilet flushing**

**DAVID:** (*humorous tone*) Couldn't have been much worse, could it?

**VITALI:** (*looks round*) Very difficult for Rose; and for Martin.

**DAVID:** A touch of your 'scrambled eggs', eh?

**VITALI huffs a laugh**

**DAVID:** (*as ROSE comes back into lounge*) Now you know what it's all about.

**ROSE:** Mad bitch!

**DAVID:** (*to no one in particular*)  
Fabulously dramatic!

**ROSE disappears back into bedroom followed by MARY. Door is left open**

**DAVID:** Wasn't the policeman wonderful! So full of tact and sensitivity. (*Imitates policeman*) Excuse me sir, there's a woman outside claiming to be your ex- wife. Are you blah blah blah. (*Pauses*) I experienced the cliché 'his heart sank' in that moment, Vitali.

**VITALI:** The blood drained from your face.

**DAVID:** (*huffs a laugh*) My life flashed before my eyes like I've heard happens to dying men. I examined, instantly, and in minute detail, at the speed of light, every word I had ever said to that women, every consciously and unconsciously perpetrated act she might even inadvertently claim to have concerned her, and I could find nothing to warrant her conjuring a policeman into existence on the day of my wedding to Rose.

**VITALI:** (*corrects DAVID*) Five policemen.

**DAVID:** In that moment of time, only one policeman, Vitali. Unbeknownst to me the other four were braving Julia's uncertain temperament in the registry carpark.

**VITALI:** The older policeman was very brave. He stood right next to the car and talked with Julia.

**DAVID:** (*factiously*) It's dangerous enough talking to Julia at any time, but when she's got a shotgun barrel in her mouth you've got to be particularly careful.

**Sound of jug drumming in background brings MARY out of the bedroom. She stops.**

**MARY:** Who's for tea, coffee?

**The two men decline.**

**VITALI:** She did not intend to die.

**DAVID:** Who can say what Julia does, or does not, intend, Vitali.

**VITALI:** Martin was not afraid of her.

**DAVID:** (*with wonderment*) Martin was, well, *extraordinary*. He didn't hesitate. If he hadn't been there God knows how it would all have ended up.

**VITALI:** No one was more surprised than Julia.

**DAVID:** Except perhaps *me*. Who'd have believed he had it in him?

**VITALI:** He was *in* his skin.

**DAVID:** I *hated* having to leave him there, but there was nothing else for it. She screamed that I wasn't to be allowed near her. (*Looks toward bedroom*) Rose was devastated.

**VITALI:** Rose is strong.

**DAVID:** (*frowns and continues*) The 'phone call was bad enough - I mistakenly thought that was Julia's final assault on reason.

**There is the sound of a car approaching.**

**DAVID:** (*gets up*) That must be Martin. Already?

**ROSE rushes out of bedroom. David follows her off stage left. VITALI remains at french doors - he does not turn. There is the sound of MARTIN being greeted by ROSE and DAVID. DAVID can be heard saying: "Well done, well done." All three enter lounge as MARY comes out of kitchen with two mugs.**

**DAVID:** (*to VITALI*) The hero returns!

**VITALI turns. He is unsmiling and silent. MARTIN throws a glance at his father. MARY, mugs in hand, stands watching.**

**ROSE:** (*with her arm linked through MARTIN'S*) This boy deserves a medal!

**DAVID:** (*jocularly*) Will a glass of red suffice? I'll pour it myself!

**MARTIN signals that he doesn't want a drink**

**ROSE:** What happened that you got back so quickly?

**MARTIN:** She's sedated. Be out for eight hours or more. There was no point in my staying around - there was no point in my going with her in the first place.

**MARY:** Where is she? The Royal?

**MARTIN:** Calvery.

**DAVID:** (*raises eyes to ceiling and looks away*) How suitable.

**MARY proffers mug to ROSE and she takes it.**

**DAVID:** (*to MARTIN*) You did what I couldn't do. She didn't want me anywhere near her.

**MARTIN:** She's not a nice person, dad. I told her so. The last thing she heard me say was that I never wanted to see her again.

**DAVID:** (*taken aback*) Oh, dear God! You shouldn't have said that . . .

**MARTIN:** (*softly*) You did.

**DAVID:** (*quickly*) Not the same thing. She's your mother. She's nuts, but she loves you. Needs you.

**MARTIN:** In a *twisted* kind of way she needs me.

**DAVID:** She's been a good mother to you.

**MARTIN:** I knew something was going to happen; I just didn't know what.

**DAVID:** You knew? You should have said something!

**MARTIN:** I thought the telephone call was it.

**ROSE:** The whole thing was planned, David. It was a vicious, consciously directed act. She knew Martin would be there and she didn't give a damn. That says it all for me.

**DAVID remains silent**

**MARTIN:** I'm not going back to that house, dad. That's it as far as I'm concerned.

**DAVID grimaces and looks at ROSE**

**ROSE:** You can stay here until things are sorted out.

**DAVID is obviously not in favour of the solution, but says nothing**

**MARTIN:** *(catches his father's reaction)*  
Don't worry, I won't outstay my welcome. I'll be gone before you know it.

**DAVID:** Where? Where will you go?

**MARTIN:** I'll get a flat. A job.

**DAVID:** And give up on uni? Not a chance!

**MARTIN:** There's more to life than uni, dad.

**DAVID:** I'll sort something out. *(Raises his hands to terminate any argument)* Leave it with me. *(To VITALI)* What I want to know is where she got that bloody shotgun from! There was never one in the house when I was around.

**ROSE:** She's had plenty of time to find one. Buy one.

**DAVID:** *(to MARTIN)* Did you know she had one?

**MARTIN shakes his head.**

**DAVID:** *(to ROSE)* Vitali doesn't think she intended to do herself any harm. I'm not so sure.

**ROSE:** *(turns to VITALI)* The gun was loaded, Vitali. The police checked it.

**VITALI:** As you said, planned. For effect.

**ROSE:** *(after an audible outbreath)*  
Anyone vaguely hungry?

**DAVID:** I think I would prefer to get smashed. Care to join me Vitali?

**VITALI declines.**

**ROSE:** Not a good idea, David.

**DAVID:** *(mischievously)* Just a little bit smashed?

**MARY:** Ever the joker.

**DAVID:** *(ignores MARY)* What will it be then? Cards? Scrabble?

**MARTIN:** Not funny, dad.

**DAVID:** *(edgily)* What would you prefer? Hysterics?

**MARTIN:** D-a-d . . .

**ROSE:** Don't be an ass, David.



**VITALI** *quietly opens french doors and slips out into the garden*

**DAVID:** Someone has just deserted the sinking ship.

**ROSE** *stares at DAVID, but remains silent.*

**DAVID:** *(in response to ROSE'S look)*  
She's accomplished her aim, Rose. She's stopped us from getting married.

**ROSE:** Going on with the ceremony just to spite her was not a good idea, David.

**DAVID:** She got her way. *That* sticks in my craw.

**ROSE:** I don't hold you responsible.

**DAVID:** *(annoyed tone)* And I don't intend to get smashed. I just need a bloody drink. Okay?

**ROSE:** *(tensely)* So long as it doesn't turn into six.

**DAVID:** *(angrily as he heads for dresser)*  
So what if it does?

**ROSE** *does not reply. She stares at DAVID for a moment, then heads for bedroom and slams the door behind her*

**DAVID:** *(looks round)* Oh, Christ!

**MARY:** Well done.

**DAVID:** Don't *you* start!

**MARTIN:** I need some air. *heads for french doors)*

**(DAVID watches MARTIN leave)**

**MARY:** *(hisses)* You really are an idiot!

**DAVID:** I haven't *done* anything for Christ sakes!

**MARY:** *(glowering at DAVID)* Your insensitivity is mind boggling.

**DAVID:** She's not the only one who's hurting!

**MARY:** *(staring at DAVID fixedly)* You would have gone through with it? Wouldn't you? You would have gone through with it just to spite Julia.

**DAVID:** I was angry.

**MARY:** Just to spite Julia?

**DAVID:** Yes! To spite Julia. But not only that. To show we could not be brow-beaten. It galls me to think we had to postpone everything because of that mad bitch.

**MARY:**           *(relents slightly)* Rose deserved better than that.

**DAVID:**          She was just as angry as I was. She was fuming when we left to drive back here.

**MARY:**          That was then, David. This is now. The shock of it all has set in.

**DAVID:**          Hence my need of a bloody drink!

**MARY:**          Hence she's not responsible for what she said.

**DAVID is silent. He stands uncertainly, looking around.**

**MARY:**          Your flippancy is a problem, David. Curb it!

**DAVID:**          That's the man she wants to marry!

**MARY:**          I rather think that is the man she's scared of marrying.

**DAVID:**          *(turns quickly, frowning. Low voice)* Have you two been talking?

**MARY:**          Not at all.

**DAVID:**          You had a right old gossip in there earlier. Jesus! *(Hisses)* You didn't say anything about us?

**MARY:**          Of course not!

**DAVID:**          What did she say?

**MARY:**          About what?

**DAVID:**          Me.

**MARY:**          We didn't talk about you much. We talked more about Julia and her wicked ways.

**DAVID:**          *(looks away, then back)* I'll bet.

**MARY:**          *(flat voice)* Insensitive and self-centred.

**DAVID:**          Is that what she said?

**MARY:**          No, it's what I'm saying.

**DAVID does not reply**

**MARY:**          What is it with you men? What's the matter with the lot of you?

**DAVID:**          It isn't a crime to not react like a woman.

**MARY:**          Vitali listens. That's what you have to learn to do. You're too busy planning your next clever remark!

**DAVID:**          *(dismissively)* Vitali believes we have souls for Gods sake!

**MARY:** That is *not* what he said and you damn well know it!

**DAVID:** (*with a sigh*) Oh, whatever. (*Takes a deep breath*) Should I go in to her?

**MARY:** That's up to you.

**DAVID:** (*pauses*) I love her, Mary.

**MARY:** Don't tell me. Tell her!

**DAVID** *hesitates, then heads for bedroom. Lights dim slowly and go out. Music comes up*

## Scene Two \_\_\_\_\_ Rose's lounge much later

*Lights come up and music fades. Present on stage are VITALI and MARY. MARY is stretched out on the sofa; she has the book Rose was reading on her lap. VITALI is seated on an upright chair. He is in his shirt sleeves, and has no shoes on. Light beyond the french doors is of early evening*

**MARY** (*looks round at Vitali and shakes her head*) What a day!

**VITALI:** It hasn't rained.

**MARY:** (*huffs a laugh*) I could shake David at times. He's so . . . .

**VITALI:** Handsome?

**MARY** *glances at VITALI, but does not reply*

**VITALI:** A long walk will do them all good.

**MARY:** I hope so. Rose was very upset with David.

**VITALI:** Rose is not stupid.

**MARY:** (*puts book down on her lap*) David doesn't realise how he hurts people with that continual levity of his.

**VITALI:** It is his way of avoiding pain.

**MARY:** He deplores subjective responses.

**VITALI:** (*after a longish pause*) Everything was a great puzzle to me when I first come to the West, Mary. So many negatives. To be funny you had to be

negative. To be clever you had to be negative. I listened, I watched. Everything was laced with negativity. In Russia we enjoy sad things, but not negative things. Even with all the sorrow we have had, we have not turned into life-haters.

**MARY:** You think of us as life-haters?

**VITALI:** Life has become a game for your intelligentsia. Do not say what you mean, do not mean what you say.

**MARY:** (*surprised*) That's a rather bleak view of the Western mind.

**VITALI:** It is your idea of truth that is bleak. It has become compulsory to see everything without colour.

**MARY:** (*smiling*) We're a culture of rationalists, Vitali. We've given up on fairy tales.

**VITALI:** A culture without fairy tales lacks flexibility.

**MARY:** (*didactically*) I'm not referring to 'fairy tales' in a literal sense, Vitali. I'm referring to systems of reasoning that get you nowhere. In particular, religious ideas.

**VITALI:** Russia is again a very religious country. Rationality failed to eradicate the need for God.

**MARY:** (*surprised tone*) Are you religious? Do you believe in God?

**VITALI:** I believe in life.

**MARY:** (*laughs*) We don't have much choice, do we? It's all there is.

**VITALI:** Yes, but in the West life has turned into a distraction from life. There is little joy in being alive.

**MARY:** I wouldn't go *that* far. There's plenty to be joyous about.

**VITALI:** Joy is not pleasure, Mary. It is a how we are inside, but do not realise it. Joy is the hidden part of our nature.

**MARY:** (*frowns*) David doesn't like when you speak like that. I can't say I blame him.

**VITALI:** That is why he wants Rose. Julia has knocked the senses out of him.

**MARY:** (*little laugh*) That's a variation on something we actually say. But you're not wrong. Julia is all but sexless.

**VITALI:** Not sex, Mary. (*articulates carefully*)  
The senses. He has lost sense of his senses.  
He is all *mind*.

**MARY:** The senses are purely subjective,  
Vitali. Feelings bedevil us. (*Grimaces*) I  
know!

**VITALI:** To feel something deeply is not to be  
bedevilled - it is to touch the hem of what we  
are inside.

**MARY:** (*unconvinced tone*) And what  
might that be, Vitali?

**VITALI:** Joy, of course.

**MARY half laughs, looks as if she is  
about to say something, but changes her  
mind and shakes her head.**

**VITALI:** (*dead pan tone*) I hear voices, Mary.

**MARY:** (*alarmed*) Don't say things like  
that, Vitali!

**VITALI:** (*straight faced*) Not in my head, Mary.  
Out there. (*Points at french doors without  
taking his gaze away from her*) They're back  
from their walk.

**MARY looks from french doors to  
VITALI and smothers a laugh with her  
hand. ROSE, MARTIN and DAVID  
appear and enter lounge by french doors**

**DAVID:** You two look comfortable!

**VITALI:** I slept.

**MARY:** I tried, but couldn't. Where's  
Martin?

**ROSE:** He's having some time to  
himself. It's a beautiful evening. You should  
have come with us. We had a right old  
ramble.

**MARY:** (*solicitously*) That's good.

**ROSE collapses into sofa at  
MARY'S feet. DAVID remains standing**

**ROSE:** I need a coffee.

**DAVID:** I'll get it. Anyone else?

**VITALI and MARY decline**

**MARY:** (*to ROSE when DAVID is in  
kitchen*) That's more like it!

**ROSE:** (*with raised eyebrows*) He's  
promised to be good. (*looks at VITALI, then  
back at MARY*) So what have you two been  
talking about. Apart from the obvious.

**MARY:** Joy. We were talking about joy.

**ROSE:** Not a lot of that around here, I'm afraid.

**VITALI:** Joy is very patient, Rose.

**ROSE:** Isn't it supposed to be spontaneous, Vitali. Here one minute, gone the next?

**VITALI:** Only because we are here one minute, gone the next.

**ROSE:** I'm sorry, I don't . . .

**VITALI:** We are not much *here*.

**ROSE:** Here?

**VITALI:** In any real sense.

**ROSE:** I'm pretty much here right this minute I can tell you.

**VITALI:** Yes, you are fully charged. Like a battery.

**ROSE:** A battery?

**VITALI:** Like Martin was with Julia.

**ROSE frowns, waits for VITALI to continue**

**VITALI:** He walked to the car and faced his mother. He told her to put the gun down and stop her nonsense. She obeyed instantly. No argument. No games with her face or eyes.

**MARY:** He shamed her into stopping her nonsense.

**VITALI:** No, no. He came out of hiding and forced her to do the same.

**DAVID appears at entrance to lounge and stands listening**

**MARY:** Out of hiding?

**VITALI:** (*pauses*) Two policemen were behind Julia's car, low down so as not to be seen. One was to the right of the registry doorway speaking into his radio, two were speaking with Rose and David at the registry entrance. Martin was with me. And then suddenly Martin was not with me.

**DAVID:** (*from entrance to lounge*) He walked straight over to Julia's car and half shouted something at her. I couldn't hear what it was.

**VITALI:** And it was all over like that. (*Snaps his fingers*)

**ROSE:** He was . . . wonderful. I couldn't believe it was the same person as earlier.

**DAVID:** He caught Julia off guard. She couldn't keep up the charade with him at her elbow.

**VITALI:** She had forgotten her son was present?

**DAVID:** (*hesitates*) I hardly think so.

**VITALI:** Then what happened?

**DAVID:** How should I know!

**VITALI:** It was not the same Martin.

**DAVID:** You're talking in riddles again, Vitali.

**ROSE:** He was *very* calm, I'll give you that.

**DAVID:** The little blighter was probably still half cut!

**VITALI:** No, no. He was not the same Martin, David. He came out of hiding and Julia crumpled.

**DAVID:** (*bemused*) What the hell are you talking about?

**VITALI:** (*unsmiling*) Ask Julia.

**DAVID:** Julia? I doubt very much I'll ever talk to that woman again!

**VITALI:** (*softly*) Ask her.

**DAVID:** Ask her what?

**VITALI:** What she saw.

**DAVID:** (*utterly confused*) Saw? She *saw* Martin looking in at her and her nerve gave out.

**VITALI:** (*questioningly*) Julia's nerve gave out?

**DAVID:** (*to ROSE, grudgingly*) He has a point.

**ROSE:** (*to VITALI*) She woke up to what she was doing?

**VITALI:** No. She just . . . woke up.

***Lights dim slowly and go out. Music comes up.***

**Scene Three \_\_\_\_\_ Lounge,  
late evening.**

***It is dark beyond the french doors.***

***DAVID and ROSE are alone. They are in the process of tidying the lounge,***

***stacking dishes and taking them through to the kitchen, etc***

**DAVID:** (*shouts to ROSE, who is in the kitchen*) Alone! At last!

**ROSE:** (*enters lounge*) Mary's offer to put Martin up was a God's send. It gives us a breathing space.

**DAVID:** (*stands still for a moment*) I wonder what Julia will do when she realises Martin has bailed out?

**ROSE:** (*contemptuously*) Serves her right.

**DAVID:** I could get a restraining order on the basis of what's happened.

**ROSE:** (*over her shoulder as she heads back into kitchen*) Do it!

***They work silently at their tasks. When they re-engage, ROSE is in the lounge and DAVID is in the kitchen***

**ROSE:** (*shouts*) You weren't really serious about going through with the ceremony? Were you?

**DAVID:** (*comes back into lounge*) Couldn't have done it even if we'd wanted to - the next lot were already waiting in the wings. God knows what they made of it all!

**ROSE:** (*stops what she's doing*) You would have gone through with it?

**DAVID:** (*continues working*) I was angry. I didn't want Julia to get her own way.

**ROSE:** I could have happily killed her myself.

**DAVID:** (*stops what he's doing*) I thought for a moment you were going to tackle her. You twitched in her direction.

**ROSE:** It crossed my mind. (*Takes hold of back of chair*) For a moment.

**DAVID:** Good sense prevailed.

**ROSE:** Fear prevailed.

**DAVID:** I was more numb than afraid.

**ROSE:** She might have turned the gun on you.

**DAVID:** Only if she had really intended to kill herself.

**ROSE:** We'll never know.

**DAVID:** No, we won't; will we?



**ROSE:** It helped concentrate my mind on what we were doing..

**DAVID:** Oh, she's good at that, Rose. She has the knack of forcing anyone in her presence to reflect on what they really want, on who and what they are. It's a kind of deadly gift.

**ROSE:** Maybe that's what Vitali was on about when he said that Martin came out of hiding.

**DAVID:** I'm not much interested in what Vitali thinks, or does not think.

**ROSE:** His riddles aren't really riddles, David. I'm sure you're well aware of what he's getting at most of the time.

**DAVID:** You may not have notice, but when it comes to Vitali, Mary's of much the same opinion as myself.

**ROSE:** I had noticed, actually.

**DAVID:** *(smiling)* You can't pull the wool when Mary's around.

**ROSE:** *(stops to speak)* As you say, she's got a good mind.

**DAVID:** She ought to do her PhD. Its obvious to everyone she'd walk it.

**ROSE:** You've encouraged her?

**DAVID:** Of course!

**ROSE:** *(moves with disinterest towards the little wedding jacket she has discarded earlier)* How did you put up with Julia for so long?

**DAVID:** *(busily moving around)* Someone like Julia hypnotises you into thinking there's something wrong with you. *(Stops)* Guilt becomes a companion. You end up looking for ways to appease the other. Endlessly.

**ROSE:** *(flat tone)* I know that space.

**DAVID:** You don't speak much about the past.

**ROSE:** *(stops)* I've no reason to - it was messy. I prefer to forget.

**DAVID:** *(pauses)* You're so much more mature than I am.

**ROSE:** What makes you think that?

**DAVID:** Oh, I don't know. Just about everything?

**ROSE:** (*huffs a laugh*) Marriage curtails experience, David. And you had a career to nurture.

**DAVID:** (*lightly*) I sometimes think I've missed out on all the fun.

**ROSE:** (*with knowing glance*) Little you know!

**DAVID:** All those one night stands?

**ROSE:** You've already admitted to having had your moments.

**DAVID:** (*coily*) Eventually.

**ROSE:** And after Julia?

**DAVID smiles, but does not reply**

**ROSE:** (*straightforward tone as she holds her little wedding jacket up and inspects it*) You've slept with Mary? Haven't you?

**DAVID remains silent, motionless**

**ROSE:** Wasn't hard to work out, David. You should see the way she looks at you.

**DAVID:** (*uncertain tone*) It was before you and I met.

**ROSE:** (*glances at David as she folds jacket carefully*) I'm glad to hear it!

**DAVID:** Did she say something?

**ROSE:** Didn't have to - stood out a mile.

**DAVID:** I wasn't trying to hide it from you.

**ROSE:** (*holds jacket tight in against her body*) I'm not worried about Mary, David. She's an honourable soul. It happened. It's over. End of story.

**DAVID:** (*is standing very straight*) That's . . . very pragmatic of you.

**ROSE:** (*smiles, looks away, then back*) What would you prefer, hysterics?

**DAVID smiles and goes to ROSE, takes her around the waist, kisses her lightly.**

**ROSE:** (*as she holds DAVID away slightly so as to look at him*) I don't want to have to face this mess in the morning, David. We have to deal with it now

**DAVID does not reply**

**ROSE:** (*disengages and starts her tidying efforts again*) Martin found his appetite, didn't he?

**DAVID:** (*watches ROSE work*) I'm not surprised.

**ROSE:** Come on, lets get in to this!

**DAVID:** (*DAVID again takes ROSE around the waist*)) How did I ever find someone like you?

**ROSE:** The rubbish dump of life?

**DAVID:** Not where. *How?*

**ROSE:** Pure chance, David. The lottery of life.

**DAVID:** That's not very romantic.

**ROSE:** (*disengages, but holds DAVID'S hands*) I'm not feeling terribly romantic right this minute.

**DAVID:** Hence the sudden desire for tidiness.

**ROSE:** The whole day's been untidy. (*ROSE lets go of DAVID'S hands and turns away*) I suddenly have a strong need for order.

**DAVID:** (*watches ROSE as she goes back to tidying*) I didn't know what to do when I saw Martin walking towards that car. It was as if time had stopped. Along with my heart. He didn't hesitate, Rose. Walked straight across to her the moment he realised what she was up to. (*Pauses*) You know, I don't remember seeing Vitali during the whole mad exercise. Did you?

**ROSE shakes her head, continues.**

**DAVID:** But he knew exactly where we were. All of us! (*laughs to himself*) Probably his old KGB training kicking in.

**ROSE glances at DAVID but does not reply.**

**DAVID:** Okay. So what do we know about him? Nothing. He's never talked about his life in Russia. His childhood. His parents? You didn't even know he'd been married.

**ROSE:** Caught you out nicely with that one.

**DAVID:** Oh, there's no doubting he's sharp. I'll give you that. But he's hiding *something*. I can smell it.

**ROSE:** (*without looking at DAVID*) You obviously find him threatening.

**DAVID:** Not threatening. Irritating.

**ROSE:** (ROSE stops) What irritates you is that you can't pigeon hole him, David. He comes out of left field and takes you by surprise. Constantly. You find that difficult to handle.

**DAVID:** (*elongates word*) T-r-u-e.

**ROSE:** You'd much rather argue the toss over some obscure point.

**DAVID:** (*smiles*) Head to head is *much* more fun. It's the Western way. Too much meaning clogs the intellectual arteries. Vitali's language brims with half-articulated meanings, disguised meanings. He's continually teetering on the edge of . . . incomprehension?

**ROSE:** He's a literate Russian, David. And an accomplished poet.

**DAVID:** What he says sounds vaguely sensible until you examine it. Example. Growing a soul. Which means what exactly? Being astute in what you do in life? Hardly a revelation.

**ROSE:** You've missed the point of that.

**DAVID:** Which is?

**ROSE:** (*stops what she's doing*) That there's more to a life than choosing which breakfast cereal we'll eat in the morning.

**DAVID:** Surely that goes without saying?

**ROSE:** Does it? I don't think so. I think it has to be spelled out for most people.

**DAVID:** (*blinks uncertainty*) I'm well aware of the need to take life seriously, Rose. Julia drove that point home day in and day out. (*Pauses*) I spent a lot of time staring out of windows when I was with Julia. She would rail at me and I'd fight back, then quite suddenly all the life would go out of me. I'd sort of crumple inside and go numb. No feeling at all. Nothing. That's when I'd find myself at the window. Eyes wide open and blind. Mind frozen. Breathing shallow. And behind me, Julia, her breathing even and deep.

**ROSE:** Then you know what it feels like to have the life dragged out of you by someone.

**DAVID:** Do I ever.

**ROSE and DAVID are now standing quite far apart looking at one another.**

- ROSE:** I'd trust Vitali with my life.
- DAVID:** (*exasperated*) It's not *what* he says, Rose, it's *how* he says it. Everything's so bloody portentous!
- ROSE:** I find his approach to things . . . refreshing.
- DAVID:** (*quickly*) All that guff about Martin coming out of hiding? Come on!
- ROSE:** We've been through that.
- DAVID:** So why can't you see my side of things for once? Why is it always me that's in the wrong?
- ROSE:** Why is it always you who has to be right?
- DAVID:** (*huffs a laugh and looks away, then back*) Do you know what? I can't remember the last time I won an argument with a woman!
- ROSE:** Your habit of jumping rails doesn't help, David.
- DAVID:** Jumping rails? You mean I go to the heart of an issue by a straight route.
- ROSE:** There's not much subtlety in *straight*, David.
- DAVID:** Ah, you prefer the European meander.
- ROSE:** If you like.
- DAVID:** (*laughs and raises his hands as if in self defence*) Okay, okay. Have it your own way. I give in!
- ROSE:** That's *not* what I was asking of you.
- DAVID:** Giving in isn't enough?
- ROSE:** Vitali sees what most people miss, David. Do you know why? Because he's actually interested in what's being said to him, in what other people think, in what they've experienced. You're a bit too busy slicing what they think and feel into little manageable bits for your own amusement.
- DAVID:** Might just be that what he sees isn't actually there most of the time.
- ROSE:** You really believe that?
- DAVID:** I've just said so.
- ROSE:** Yes, but do you believe it?

**DAVID:** Why else would I say it?

**ROSE:** Why else indeed, David?

**DAVID:** (*perplexed*) For Christ's sake, Rose! Why are you so enamoured with that Guy?

**ROSE:** Because he isn't afraid. Not of you, not of any of us. Particularly when we come out with some half-backed bit of nonsense.

**DAVID:** You mean when I come out with some half-baked bit of nonsense.

**ROSE:** Not particularly, But yes, you too.

**DAVID:** (*pauses*) You've had it in for me since I arrived yesterday morning. Why?

**ROSE:** (*chews at the inside of her cheek before replying*) Your catch phrase when talking about someone you like and admire is that they have a *good mind*. You talk about 'well-stocked heads' as if they're supermarket shelves.

**DAVID:** Information load is important. How one uses it even more important.

**ROSE:** And if you misuse it?

**DAVID frowns, waits for Rose to continue**

**ROSE:** If you keep on reducing life to a meaningless blob with your *good mind*. What then?

**DAVID:** (*defensively*) Dressing reality up in fancy words doesn't change its nature, Rose. If you jump off a building thinking you can fly you quickly realise how wrong you are.

**ROSE:** Neither Vitali or Lawrence suggest otherwise.

**DAVID:** (*haughtily*) I'm sorry, I eschew mystification in any form.

**ROSE:** No, you eschew the possibility of there being more to life than you can analytically dream up or accept.

**DAVID:** (*exasperated*) That's my *job*, Rose. I'm paid to analyse reality's constituent parts, not fantasise about them!

**ROSE:** There you go again, accusing Vitali of fantasising when he's done nothing of the kind!

**DAVID:** I'm sorry, Vitali's kind of thinking does not put people on the moon.

**ROSE:** What? The moon that's 93 *something* million miles from Earth?

**DAVID** *smiles obliquely and acknowledges ROSE'S little dig.*

**ROSE:** Utilitarian thinking does not inspire. It informs, but it does *not* inspire. There's more to living a life than mouthing grocery lists of facts!

**DAVID:** (*pauses*) I never ever found Lawrence inspirational, Rose. Do you know why? Because he was heavy-handed in everything he said? And did. And you *know* that that's the truth

**ROSE:** (*shakes her head*) He searched for words that would help bring things back to life. For himself. For us. He wouldn't allow himself to be dragged down into being no more than a conglomerate of systems. Breathing. Circulation. Cognition. He knew he was alive, and he wanted to go on sensing his own aliveness every day of his life.

**DAVID:** That's what you think Vitali's up to? Oh, really, Rose!

**ROSE:** (*pauses*) You really are a difficult man to talk to at times.

**DAVID:** *I'm* difficult?

**ROSE:** Monochrome.

**DAVID:** (*sighs*) And back into the dog house I go. Eh?

**ROSE:** Don't be silly.

**DAVID:** (*raises his right arm in a kind of solute*) Vitali reigns! Long live Vitali!

**ROSE:** You're blowing the Vitali thing out of all proportion, David.

**DAVID:** His proportions belong to you, not to me, Rose. You're asking me to turn into a gangling adolescent and hang on his every word. I can't and won't do that!

**ROSE:** (*quietly*) I'm asking you to do nothing of the kind.

**DAVID:** That's how it seems to me.

**ROSE:** (*groans audibly*) You're wearing me out with the rational bit, David. You *really* are.

**DAVID:** You'd prefer I were irrational? Is that what you want?

**ROSE:** *(fast and angrily)* That is exactly the kind of response I was getting at a moment ago. I say I dislike everything being dumbed down to the rational and you assume I want you to be irrational. That isn't rationality at work, David, that's logicity run amuck! Logicity is an *ingredient* of rationality. You've allowed it to usurp the whole *bloody* landscape of your thinking!

**DAVID:** *(pauses)* That is unfair.

**ROSE:** There's nothing unfair about it! Your every breath is dedicated to reducing things to their lowest common denominator. Everything turns to ice at your touch!

**DAVID:** *(trying to control himself)* You mean I avoid obscurantism.

**ROSE:** Is that what you think you're doing?

**DAVID:** Its what rational people do, Rose.

**ROSE:** *(low tone)* Then may God preserve us from rational people!

**DAVID:** *(looks around distractedly)* I don't know where I am in this conversation. I think you're in the process of reinventing what it means to be a thinking human being.

**ROSE:** *(quickly)* No need. I suspect you did that a long time ago.

**DAVID straightens, his expression is that of someone grossly misunderstood**

**ROSE:** You just don't get it, do you?

**DAVID:** Get *what*?

**ROSE:** What you're up to in that head of yours.

**DAVID:** *(coldly)* Do tell, Rose.

**ROSE:** You only see what you want to see.

**DAVID:** In the context of this conversation what I see is Vitali's obscurantism. That's what this comes down to - obscurantism masquerading as serious thought.

**ROSE:** Leave Vitali out of this for a moment. What I'm referring to is the



ordinary, everyday things of life. The little things that make us feel glad to be alive.

**DAVID:** I'm not oblivious to such things, Rose. I can enjoy a sunset like anyone else.

**ROSE:** (*pauses*) You said something earlier about staring out of windows and going numb.

**DAVID waits for ROSE to continue.**

**ROSE:** You were talking about how you *felt* under Julia's withering gaze. You called it her 'deadly gift'. Well, I'm sorry, but you exercise the same gift on occasions.

**DAVID is recognisably upset; he's finding it very difficult to look at ROSE.**

**ROSE:** I've tried to ignore the way you handle things, the way you dismiss what I consider to be important with a flick of your tongue. If you don't agree with something then that's the end of it. It's all over in an instant.

**DAVID:** There's no point in going round in verbal circles, Rose.

**ROSE:** (*tilts her head questioningly*) You've got lost, somehow. I don't know who you are any longer.

**DAVID:** (*puzzled*) I'm right here in front of you, Rose.

**ROSE:** Not 'where', 'who'.

**DAVID does not reply; he just stares at ROSE.**

**ROSE:** Constant negativity drains the colour out of existence David.

**DAVID:** Constant?

**ROSE:** Every other sentence.

**DAVID:** (*raises hands in act of submission*) Okay, okay. I admit to being a negative force, Rose. But that's just how I am, how I've come together. I wasn't born an optimist like you.

**ROSE:** Born?

**DAVID:** You always see the best in people, in situations.

**ROSE and DAVID are now standing very straight.**

**ROSE:** That's not optimism. That's giving people and situations the benefit of the doubt. You prefer snap judgements.

**DAVID:** It's pretty clear what's going on in most situations.

**ROSE:** Vitali isn't a 'situation', David, he's a human being..

**DAVID:** Ah, we're back to Vitali.

**ROSE:** I haven't make Vitali an issue, David, you have.

**DAVID:** Fanciful ideas aren't difficult to spot.

**ROSE:** So if I happen to agree with Vitali about something I'm open to being classed as someone with fanciful ideas and written off?

**DAVID:** I didn't say that.

**ROSE:** No, but it's where you end up with that kind of thinking.

**DAVID:** (*pauses*) Fanciful ideas should not be allowed to rule the roost.

**ROSE:** (*narrows her eyes*) You're contempt for Vitali is not attractive, David.

**DAVID:** (*looks away*) Charlatans I can do without.

**ROSE:** *That* is unfair.

**DAVID:** (*looks back at ROSE*) I can't be expected to automatically like everyone you like!

**ROSE:** You're deliberately provocative when it comes to Vitali.

**DAVID:** As I said, he *irritates* me.

**ROSE:** (*pauses*) So where do we go from here?

**DAVID:** (*frowns*) Go? What do you mean?

**ROSE:** Us. You and me.

**DAVID:** (*alarmed*) What are you saying Rose?

**ROSE:** I'm saying we have a problem that has to get sorted out.

**DAVID:** Suddenly we have a problem?

**ROSE:** Everything's fine in your reckoning?

**DAVID:** (*hesitates*) We have our differences of opinion , but . . .

**ROSE:** It goes a damned sight deeper than that and you know it.

**DAVID:** Look, I know I can be a silly bugger at times . . . (Smiles lamely) I'll try my damndest to be less negative. I'll even cut back on the booze if that's what you want.

**ROSE:** (*with sudden anguish*) I want to grow a *soul*, David! With you, if you're willing! Is that possible? Do you think that's possible?

**DAVID is at a complete loss as to how he should respond.**

**ROSE:** A *real* life, David. That's *all* I mean by that.

**DAVID:** Aren't relationships supposed to be about the balancing of differences, Rose?

**ROSE:** This isn't about whether I like eggs and you don't, David.

**DAVID:** (*groans*) Oh, spare me the *eggs* bit, Rose!

**ROSE:** David, we're in trouble. Hasn't that dawned on you yet?

**DAVID:** (*factiously*) Do you know, I'd rather guessed that was the case. I'm so quick. (*Pauses*) You've already made up your mind, haven't you?

**ROSE does not reply**

**DAVID:** Julia told me once that I'd had done her a mischief. (*Smiles brokenly*) She didn't spell out what she meant by that. Not that I'm letting the bitch off the hook. I'm not. I suspect it had something to do with my tendency to divide overblown things by two.

**ROSE:** Too optimistic? Fanciful? Overblown? Going round and round in circles?

**DAVID:** (*frowns*) Your needs are obviously *very* different from mine, Rose.

**ROSE:** It isn't a matter of what I *need*, David, it's a matter of what I *don't* need. And I *don't* need this kind of argument over the next twenty or so years.

**DAVID:** (*quickly*) If Julia hadn't turned up we'd be man wife right now. Have you considered that?

**ROSE:** Yes.

**DAVID:** And?

**ROSE:** I need a different route, David.

**DAVID:** (*laughs*) That *has* to be a Freudian slip, Rose!

**ROSE:** (*ignores remark*) I'm the wrong woman for you and you damned well know it! Its taken this . . . debacle to drive that home for me.

**DAVID:** (*consults watch*) Now suddenly you're the wrong woman?

**ROSE does not reply.**

**DAVID:** I've never seen this side of you.

**ROSE:** Its not going to work, David. Even you must be able to see that by now.

**DAVID:** (*stoically*) I love you, Rose.

**ROSE:** (*emptily*) It would be a disaster.

**DAVID:** (*frowns*) How can you be so certain?

**ROSE:** I caught sight of what we were up to.

**DAVID:** When? This morning? This afternoon? What about all the mornings and afternoons we've spent together? Haven't they meant anything?

**ROSE:** (*looks away, and back*) Of course they did.

**DAVID:** Well, then?

**ROSE:** We're fundamentally at odds with one another.

**DAVID:** We're nothing of the kind.

**ROSE:** A year from now we'll have nothing to say to one another.

**DAVID:** Everyone runs out of things to say.

**ROSE:** Not if they share an appreciation of the other, if they hold the same basic values.

**DAVID:** I thought we did.

**ROSE:** What I think and hold dear is almost anathema to you.

**DAVID:** We perceive the world differently, that's all.

**ROSE:** (*longish pause*) In your definition of reality, David, having a good life, a full life, a meaningful life, means no more than having a few dollars in the bank

and a nice comfortable holiday abroad once a year. I think there's a damned sight more to living a life than that.

**DAVID:** Example?

**ROSE:** (*takes a deep breath*) Waking up in the morning with a sense of delight in being alive. When's the last time you felt like that?

**DAVID:** When I'm with you.

**ROSE:** (*quickly*) Leave me out of the equation.

**DAVID:** (*perplexed*) Why should I have to?

**ROSE:** Because I don't want to be the focus of your life in that way! Not *that* way!

**DAVID:** Which way would that be?

**ROSE:** The *needy* way.

**DAVID:** We all *need* each other.

**ROSE:** Not to the extent you need me, David.

**DAVID:** (*quickly*) Me thinks you may be a little too sure of your own importance, Rose.

**ROSE:** Some men have to be literally rescued from themselves.

**DAVID:** *That* is romantic twaddle, Rose.

**ROSE:** Romantic?

**DAVID:** Overblown?

**ROSE:** Ah! (*puts an index finger to her chin*) You mean like the things you had to divide by two for Julia's sake?

**DAVID:** (*alarmed*) I'm not equating you with Julia. Please don't think that!

**ROSE:** You just did.

**DAVID:** Inadvertently.

**ROSE:** (*shrugs*) Ah, it's all right then.

**DAVID:** (*pauses*) I'm finding this conversation *very* trying, Rose. You seem intent on destroying everything we've had together.

**ROSE:** Thought we had.

**DAVID:** (*annoyed*) Oh, come on! We've had some great times together.

**ROSE:** (*Rose is now tearful*) We wouldn't make it on those moments alone, David. They're not enough. We'd spend the

rest of the time arguing the toss over next to nothing and that would drive both of us nuts.

**DAVID:** I'm willing to try, Rose.

**ROSE:** I can't let you do that. I can't afford to let you be *that* selfish!

**DAVID:** (*shocked*) What an extraordinary thing to say!

**ROSE:** Not so. You don't give a damn about me *or* yourself. Its all about your needs and bugger mine!

**DAVID:** (*frowning*) What you've just said is a contradiction in terms, Rose.

**ROSE:** No it isn't! You're not conscious of your own needs, David. That's the heart of the problem we're dealing with here. You knew instinctively that I was the perfect foil for that negative nature of yours, that I would keep on coming back at you until the penny dropped. You could in other words rest easy knowing that I'd couldn't rest easy. And it didn't matter to you that you might have to use up the whole of my fucking life to that end

**DAVID:** What absolute nonsense!

**ROSE:** You think so?

**DAVID does not reply.**

**ROSE:** Little boy lost.

**DAVID:** Hardly.

**ROSE:** We're each driven by a deep-seated instinct for survival. I'm now exercising mine. At last.

**DAVID:** (*pounces*) At my expense!

**ROSE:** You've got the wrong woman, David.

**DAVID:** (*huffs a laugh*) I'm beginning to believe you!

**ROSE:** (*pained expression and tone*) And it's my fault. All of this is *my* fault.

**DAVID:** Well that's something.

**ROSE:** I've led you on, and I shouldn't have.

**DAVID:** I'm supposed to be grateful for that trumped-up *mea culpa*?

**ROSE:** My needs got in the way.

**DAVID:** *That* is esoteric hogwash, Rose!

**ROSE:** To you it is. Not to me.

**DAVID:** It's pure Vitali.

**ROSE:** And you dislike Vitali.  
**DAVID:** He is not my favourite person .  
**ROSE:** Yet I am?  
**DAVID *hesitates.***

**ROSE:** You see what I'm getting at?  
**DAVID:** You're not in the least like Vitali.  
**ROSE:** I'm not in the least like you.  
**DAVID:** We're intelligent human beings,  
Rose, that should be enough.  
**ROSE:** (*pauses*) I can't live in a  
monochrome universe, David.  
**DAVID:** You think that's what I'm  
offering?  
**ROSE:** It's what you *are*, David. Black  
and white all the way down.  
**DAVID:** Isn't that supposed to be turtles  
all the way down?  
**ROSE:** Oh, give me a break!  
**DAVID:** Jokes aren't monochrome.  
**ROSE:** They are when they come out of  
nothing more than an association of sounds.  
**DAVID:** (*huffs a laugh*) How very  
analytical of you.  
**ROSE:** (*with emphasis*) I do not eschew  
analysis, David. I told you that earlier but  
you *weren't* listening.  
***There is a pause in the  
conversation; both parties are extremely  
ill at ease.***

**DAVID:** So where do we go from here?  
**ROSE *remains silent.***

**DAVID:** (*half turns away, turns back*) I  
have to admit to not quite understanding  
what's going on here Rose. Everything  
seemed okay earlier.  
**ROSE:** It's been building up to this for  
months, David.  
**DAVID:** We've had our differences . . .  
**ROSE:** Intrinsic differences.  
**DAVID:** That's not how they struck me.  
**ROSE:** You didn't sense what was  
happening?  
**DAVID:** I didn't think it was serious. *This*  
serious. You've sprung this one on me, Rose.  
**ROSE *again remains silent.***

**DAVID:**           *(makes a move towards ROSE, but her reaction makes him stop)* Suddenly everything is in jeopardy?

**ROSE:**           Not *suddenly*, David.

**DAVID:**           Well, I'm sorry, Rose, but that's how it seems. *(Changes tack)* Look, I know today's been difficult for you, but it's been no less difficult for me.

**ROSE:**           *(pauses)* What I'm on about has got nothing to do with what happened today, David. *(Smiles)* Didn't help, I'll give you that, but not the reason for what I'm struggling to say right this minute. I've only just admitted to myself that I've known for months that we were in trouble but couldn't, wouldn't let it properly register. Not even as we walked out of that door to get married. And you were no different. You knew fine well things weren't right between us but you kept right on going pretending that everything was fine and dandy. Well, it isn't, and you damn well know it isn't.

***It is DAVID'S turn to remain silent.***

**ROSE:**           I fell in love with you because you're good looking and funny and very, very intelligent. What I didn't realise was that you are also, by mind set, black and white and negative to a degree that is for me utterly maddening. There's no philosophy in you, David. You don't discuss things, you *pronounce* on things. If something doesn't fit into one of your little pigeon holes then you either discard it, instantly, or disparage it. You never hesitate. It's either "don't be silly, Rose," or a look that makes the floor open up under me. *That* is not how one relates to another human being, David!

**DAVID:**           You should have said something.

**ROSE:**           *(shouts)* Damn it, David, I did! Again and again! But you don't listen. You look away with that little fucking smile on your face and as far as you're concerned that's the end of the matter.

**DAVID:**           That's not how I perceive myself, Rose.



**ROSE:** I'm sure it isn't, but it's how you come across. Even Mary has pulled you up on it.

**DAVID:** Keep Mary out of this.

**ROSE:** Why?

**DAVID:** Because she is not relevant.

**ROSE:** She's in love with you for God's sake! *That* isn't relevant?

**DAVID:** Not to me.

**ROSE:** (*pauses*) You've hurt her deeply.

**DAVID:** Her feelings are her own affair, Rose. I promised her nothing.

**ROSE:** I think you're avoiding the obvious.

**DAVID:** And that is?

**ROSE:** Oh, come on, David?

**DAVID:** Oh, *very* clever, Rose! You've been limbering up to that little bit of home-spun wisdom from the beginning of this argument, haven't you?

**ROSE:** Not true.

**DAVID:** (*quotes ROSE back to herself*) "You've got the wrong woman, David?"

**ROSE:** I'm not that Machiavellian.

**DAVID:** Women are unconsciously Machiavellian. The lot of you can't help it.

**ROSE:** That was Lawrence's gift, David - he knew what that meant, and respected it.

**DAVID** *sighs, shakes his head, pushes his hands deep into his pockets and looks away.*

**ROSE:** She'd still have you.

**DAVID:** (*astonished*) You're pushing me into the arms of another woman!

**ROSE:** You've already been on those arms.

**DAVID:** I prefer your arms, Rose.

**ROSE:** I was looking for something. I thought I saw that something in you. I got it wrong. I'm sorry.

**DAVID:** That's it? (*Shakes his head as if to dislodge something*) I can't get my head around that. So much has passed between us in the last eighteen months.

**ROSE:** It would be the same with anyone, David. Any one human being can relate reasonably well with any other if they

have to. But that isn't the point. It isn't a matter of feeling relatively comfortable with someone, it goes a damned site deeper than that.

**DAVID:** You prefer the Vitali's of this world?

**ROSE:** Vitali? Vitali would drive me nuts! He's a lovely man, a sensitive man, but I could never live with him.

**DAVID:** You agreed to marry me.

**ROSE:** I thought we'd explore stuff together. Share stuff. Savour the same things. But we haven't, have we. We've spent eighteen months hunting for a basic commonality and we've failed to find it. It simply isn't there, David. We were kidding ourselves.

**DAVID:** (*grimaces*) I am capable of change, Rose.

**ROSE:** No you aren't. None of us are capable of change on the basis of wanting to, or even of needing to. We are what we are. It takes total upheaval for any of us to change direction by as much as a centimetre, and a centimetre isn't generally enough.

**DAVID:** That's a depressing thought.

**ROSE:** With which I'm sure you are in full agreement.

**DAVID looks down, then up.**

**ROSE:** And it applies to me as much as it does to you.

**DAVID:** (*draws in breath and lets it out again*) This is the most hurtful thing that's ever happened to me, Rose.

**ROSE:** Then you know how Mary feels.

**DAVID:** (*quickly*) So she *did* say something!

**ROSE:** (*shakes her head*) No, Martin told me. He overheard your exchange with Mary when Vitali and I were out walking.

**DAVID:** (*shocked*) Little bastard!

**ROSE:** He was mad at you..

**DAVID:** For what?

**ROSE:** *For-not-listening-properly.*

**DAVID falls silent.**

**ROSE:** And for not caring that you had hurt someone for whom he has a high regard.

**DAVID:** I apologised to her for that.

**ROSE:** Sometimes apologies aren't enough.

**DAVID:** Sometimes life gets too difficult, Rose. (*Changes tack*) I still blame Vitali for this mess. Everything was fine between us until he turned up.

**ROSE:** It was nothing of the kind *fine*, David. That's what I've been trying to make you aware of for the last twenty minutes!

**DAVID:** You're denying he was a catalyst?

**ROSE:** No, I'm not denying that. The way you reacted to what he had to say was a real eye-opener.

**DAVID:** He's filled your head with a lot of nonsense.

**ROSE:** Really? A lot of nonsense? I find that insulting.

**DAVID:** I didn't mean it like that.

**ROSE:** Inadvertently like that?

**DAVID does not know how to reply.**

**ROSE:** You do not respect my mind. We'd end up with not a single thing to say to one another. I'd be too afraid to utter a word and you would be too bored to listen. Or we would just run out of stuff to say, like you see between couples in restaurants. The vacant stare. The occasional smile. The pretence that something is interesting. The menu. The mark on a spoon.

**DAVID:** We talk constantly.

**ROSE:** Yes, we do, but about nothing in particular. Inconsequential mostly. Nothing you could really call *substantial*. Nothing *telling*. I've not once fallen asleep beside you thinking that a day had ended on a really satisfactory note.

**DAVID:** That's not always the case. We've had some pretty good discussions.

**ROSE:** Yes, but only on your terms. You're the one who decides whether a conversation is sensible or not. A conversation with you is immediately thrust

into an intellectual straitjacket. You immediately limit how far it will go by abruptly dismissing anything that moves beyond your ultra strict definition of what constitutes a sensible response to reality.

**DAVID:** As I said; I'm a rationalist.

**ROSE:** And as I said, you're nothing of the kind. You're just incorrigibly rationalistic.

**DAVID:** I can't win which ever way I turn.

**ROSE:** And that's the problem in a nut shell! It isn't about winning, or being 'right' all of the time. It's about *communicating* you silly bastard!

**DAVID:** (*deeply agitated*) That is grossly unfair, Rose.

**ROSE:** Yes, it is. And I can't take any more of it.

**DAVID:** (*physically and mentally disjointed in tone*) I feel . . . as if I've dropped a very precious thing . . . and its smashed beyond repair! Is that what I've done, Rose? (*In tears*) Is that what I've done?

**ROSE does not reply.**

**DAVID:** (*brokenly*) Rose?

**ROSE and DAVID stand staring at one another as lights dim and music comes up.**

**ends**