

*FX MUSIC UP AND FADE. SUBURBAN LIVING ROOM ACOUSTIC. NORMAN IS ONSTAGE ASLEEP.*

JOY (FROM OFFSTAGE) Norman! Norman!

NORMAN (WAKES UP) What? What?

JOY (FROM OFFSTAGE) Norman. You're very quiet in there. What are you up to?

NORMAN How does she know? How does she know?

JOY (ENTERING) Honestly. I've been working my fingers to the bone all morning and all you can do is doze on the sofa.

NORMAN I was reading the paper.

JOY You were asleep. You're always asleep. You're only sixty. You're not senile, you know. (PAUSE)

*(PULLS CUSHIONS FROM BEHIND NORMAN)*

JOY Look you've made these cushions all flat.

NORMAN Yes that often happens when you sit on them. Terrible isn't it.

JOY You leave a trail of destruction where ever you go. You're like Gozdilla

NORMAN Godzilla.

JOY I don't know what she's going to think.

NORMAN Godzilla?

JOY I don't know why I bother.

NORMAN According to the Mail, cushions are not what they used to be. Not like cushions in the fifties

JOY What is he on about now?

*(JOY GOES TO THE WINDOW AND LOOKS OUT)*

JOY He's out there again.

NORMAN Who?

JOY Him! Next door. Look at him. Black as the ace of spades. How does he afford a place like that?

NORMAN He's a doctor.

JOY He is not a doctor.

NORMAN He's a doctor. He's with MacKenzie.

JOY I don't believe it. Well I'll not be seeing him and that for certain. Doctor! One 'O' level in biology and a few chicken bones. That's all they need over there you know...

NORMAN He trained at Oxford apparently.

JOY Oxford. (*HALF TO HERSELF*) Oxford, Mbutuland. Qualify over there then, quick as a flash, they're over here, taking over the National Health Service. I didn't see one white face from one day to the next when I was in that hospital. (*TO NORMAN*) No. I'll be sticking with Mackenzie thank you very much.

NORMAN He's Korean.

JOY Who is?

NORMAN Mackenzie.

JOY Don't be ridiculous.

NORMAN He's Korean. Scottish father. Korean mother. (*HALF TO HIMSELF*) Born in Pusan apparently.

JOY You're making this up. (*HALF TO HERSELF*) He's always making things up. He just does it to be annoying.

NORMAN Yes. Yes. (*HALF TO HIMSELF*) They're called 'facts' dear. Always getting in the way of a good argument, the facts.

JOY I shan't speak to him.

NORMAN Mackenzie?

JOY No. Him. Him out there.

NORMAN You must to speak to him.

JOY I'll do no such thing.

NORMAN You must speak to him.

JOY Why must I?

NORMAN He's our immediate neighbour.

JOY           What does that have to do with anything?

NORMAN     You have to say hello. (*HALF TO HIMSELF*) Say hello to your immediate neighbour, nod to the one beyond that and anyone else ignore completely. It's in the rules.

JOY           What does he mean - what rules?

NORMAN     The British Suburban Rules 2005. (*HALF TO HIMSELF*) The Rules Britannia.

JOY           Sometimes, I'm quite convinced he's (*MEANING NORMAN*) got some sort of mental illness - the rubbish he comes out with.

NORMAN     (*HALF TO HIMSELF*) It's the only thing that keeps me sane - the rubbish I talk. The rubbish I read...

JOY           Look at him. Just look at him. Standing there. Bold as brass. As if he owns the place.

NORMAN     He does own the place.

JOY           He most certainly does not.

NORMAN     He does.

JOY           How can a person like him own a house like that? It doesn't make sense. Probably sells drugs, you know. Imagine it - a doctor giving drugs to all and sundry.

NORMAN     The mind boggles.

JOY           Your mind certainly does. (*PAUSE*) I expect he's just renting it till the Parkinsons sell it.

NORMAN     They have sold it. To him.

JOY           Six bedrooms. I'd've loved that place. We should have bought it. Biggest on the plot. Best position. 3 en-suite.

NORMAN     We don't need six bedrooms.

JOY           That's not the point.

NORMAN     What would we do with six bedrooms? (*HALF TO HIMSELF*) I suppose we could sleep in a different bedroom every night of the week. Oh no that's no good. We'd need seven for that. (*TO JOY*) Doesn't look as if it's nearly big enough dear.

JOY I do wish he'd stop chuntering. He's always chuntering. (*HALF TO HERSELF*) Sometimes I think he's got Alzheimer's. I don't know what she's going to make of all this.

NORMAN Who?

JOY Her! (*AS IF THIS WERE EXPLANATION ENOUGH*) You never should have taken early retirement

NORMAN Oh I wondered when we'd get back to that. (*HALF TO HIMSELF*) Ought to be grateful. It's been a hour at least. Just time to re-load both barrels.

JOY You could have stayed. You didn't have to leave.

NORMAN I've spent forty years staring at the soles of people's feet. It's long enough, isn't it. You only get 20 years for armed robbery.

JOY Podiatry. What sort of job was that? He should have been a surgeon. We'd have had that house years ago. It's name your salary in the private sector

NORMAN I've done the job long enough. I needed to stop to preserve some vestige of dignity. Dignity. (*PATTING HIS POCKETS*) Now where on Earth did I leave my dignity.

JOY I'd have stayed on. I wouldn't have let them push me out.

NORMAN Yes, Yes. I'm sure you would dear. (*HALF TO HIMSELF*) No doubt, with her vast knowledge of the working world, she'd have handled the whole thing far better than I ever could.

(*THE DOORBELL RINGS*)

JOY What was that?

NORMAN I think you'll find it was the doorbell dear. It often makes that noise.

JOY (*IGNORING HIM*) It can't be them. I haven't even tidied up yet. Look at the state of this place. And look at you.

NORMAN Me?

JOY Look at you. Those trousers. You're not wearing those trousers.

NORMAN I like these trousers.

JOY You look like Worzel Gummidge. Go and change. I'll let them in

(*THE DOORBELL RINGS AGAIN*)

NORMAN But they're comfortable.

JOY (*ANGRILY*) Go and change!

NORMAN (*EXITS MUMBLING*) It's only the boy. He's seen these trousers hundreds of times. Probably bounced him on my knee wearing them.

JOY (*FOLLOWING HIM OUT*) Hurry up. Hurry up (*SOUND OF OUTSIDE DOOR OPENING, COMPLETE CHANGE OF TONE*) Oh hello, hello, how are you. Do come through to the sitting room (*AS THEY ENTER*) It's a bit of a mess but you did catch us on the hop. You must be..

MITCH Mitch.

JOY Mitch, that's right. Sit yourselves down. Now I'm just going to finish the dinner..

SIMON Is dad in the garden?

JOY He's just getting changed. He won't be a minute. (*TO MITCH*) Now do you like coffee?

MITCH Yes thanks.

JOY Good. That'll be four coffees..

SIMON I don't drink coffee.

JOY No of course, he doesn't drink coffee these days. So hard to keep up with all these fads.

SIMON I haven't drunk coffee for fourteen years.

JOY These men: always chopping and changing. Now Simon will look after you, won't you Simon. (*EXITING*) I'll just be in the kitchen. Shout if you need anything.

MITCH Do you think she'll roll me a joint if I asked?

SIMON Dad'll be upstairs changing his trousers. (*IMITATING HIS MOTHER*) 'You're not wearing those trousers, Norman. You look like Worzel Gummidge'. He's always having to pull them out of the dustbin.

MITCH This is going to be worse than I thought.

SIMON It'll be alright.

MITCH No it won't. It'll be awful. It's already awful. Why did you bring me here?

SIMON We had to do it sometime.

MITCH It's just what I want to do on a Sunday - sit round the carcass of some dead animal. (PAUSE) I bet it spent its whole life in a box. (PAUSE) Never seen a chink of daylight. She just better not start that's all. It's bad enough talking to her on the phone - 'Oh we're dying to meet you'.

SIMON Don't you think you're prejudging her a bit?

MITCH Why not? Saves time. (PAUSE) This is what you're like really isn't it. All this.

SIMON I've never pretended to be anything else

MITCH I could really go off you in a big way.

SIMON You won't though.

MITCH Why not?

SIMON You won't.

MITCH Why not?

SIMON You need me.

MITCH I need your money.

SIMON And you love me.

MITCH I do not love you.

SIMON You do.

MITCH I do not

SIMON Say it.

MITCH I am not going to say it.

SIMON Say it.

MITCH I am not going to say it. Not here.

SIMON Say it.

MITCH Alright. Alright. I'll say it. I love you. Now piss off.

SIMON My God - she won't be very pleased about that.

MITCH About what?

SIMON Come and have a look?

MITCH I can't see anything.

SIMON Him. Next door. He's black.

MITCH Oh yes (*WAVING*) Hello! He's not very friendly.

SIMON He can't see you.

MITCH Why not?

SIMON You don't look in people's windows. Not out here. It's not done.

(*PAUSE*)

MITCH Do you think I should have worn a dress.

SIMON It's just lunch.

MITCH Yes but jeans. Do you think jeans are alright?

SIMON Those jeans are spectacular. We'll take 'em off later.

MITCH Get off for God's sake. She'll think I'm a right tart.

SIMON You told me you didn't care what she thought.

MITCH I don't.

SIMON You're not here to impress my mother?

MITCH What am I here for then?

SIMON To meet her.

MITCH Not your dad?

SIMON Dad as well.

MITCH But he doesn't matter. It's what she thinks that matters isn't it?

SIMON I don't care what she thinks.

MITCH Since when?

SIMON Since forever.

MITCH            Rubbish. Anyway, mother's are not normal, Simon. They're deeply dangerous and psychotic people.

SIMON            You should know.

MITCH            Yeah. I should know, shouldn't I?

NORMAN        (*ENTERING*) Hello. Here I am at last. You must be Mitch. How are we?

MITCH            I'm fine thanks.

SIMON            The trousers was it?

NORMAN        I'm afraid so. Still, I'm lucky to still have them. She nearly did it this time - sneaked them off to the WI jumble sale when I wasn't looking. I actually had to pay to get them back. 10p. I even had to haggle.

MITCH            Why does she keep throwing them away?

NORMAN        Principle.

MITCH            And that's why you keep getting them back?

NORMAN        Absolutely.

MITCH            Seems a bit - weird.

NORMAN        You'll understand, dear, when you get older - it's not a battle for the trousers, it's a battle for the soul.

MITCH            (*TO SIMON*) You haven't got any old trousers have you.

SIMON            Me? No.

MITCH            You've got that stupid hat though..

JOY              (*ENTERING*) Here we are. So. How are we all getting on?

NORMAN        Splendidly. Aren't we, Mitch? She's very interested in my trousers, aren't you.

MITCH            Yeah.

JOY              What is he talking about?. Now. I'll put the tray here so you can all help yourself - this one's the tea. This one's for Norman. He doesn't like it too strong you see. My men, can't drink a cup of coffee between the pair of them.

MITCH            I like it strong.

JOY            So do I, my dear, so do I.

MITCH        (*TO SIMON*) Is that you in the photo?

JOY            When he was a school. In fact, I think that was the actual day we took him off to school for the first time. You never forget days like that.

MITCH        Did he stay at that school?

JOY            'Stay'? Oh you mean board. Yes he did. From when he was eight.

MITCH        Eight. You sent him away when he was eight!

JOY            We didn't send him away, dear. We sent him to school.

MITCH        Why?

JOY            To get an education, to get a good education.

MITCH        Didn't you miss him?

JOY            Of course. I missed him terribly.

MITCH        (*TO SIMON*) What about you? What did you think about it?

SIMON        It was alright.

MITCH        You said you hated it.

SIMON        I did. At first.

NORMAN     You get used to it, I expect.

MITCH        You can get used to prison if you're there long enough.

JOY            It's not quite the same thing, is it?

MITCH        I would never send a child of mine away from home.

JOY            If you want to get on - you have to make sacrifices

MITCH        Couldn't you have killed a goat?

JOY            I beg your pardon.

MITCH        Sacrificed a goat. Sorry. It was a joke.

SIMON        Life is miserable. That's what public schools teach you. Life is going to be miserable so you might as well start getting used to it now.

JOY Don't be silly Simon. These men, they say the silliest things, don't they? I sometimes wonder if they live in another world. Now dear, tell us about yourself. We're dying to know all about you.

MITCH Not much to tell.

JOY Somebody's got to tell us. Simon hasn't told us a thing.

MITCH *(TO SIMON)* Yeah, thanks, Simon.

JOY Simon said you met at the office. Are you in accounting too?

MITCH No.

JOY Some sort of secretarial...

MITCH I'm a cleaner.

JOY Oh I see. A cleaner

MITCH I work five till eight. That's how we met. Simon tends to work late.

NORMAN Well I suppose somebody has to clean these places clean don't they.

JOY Simon didn't mention...

MITCH No. I don't suppose he would. I just need the money. And the hours fitted in.

NORMAN It's a job though.

*(THE SOUND OF ROARING MOTORBIKES OUTSIDE. NORMAN AND SIMON GO TO LOOK OUTSIDE)*

JOY It's those kids again. Norman go and speak to them.

NORMAN What good does it do?

JOY It makes them go away.

NORMAN They'll just come back.

JOY Do you want me to go?

NORMAN *(WEARILY, EXITING)* No. No. I'll go.*(HALF TO HIMSELF)* Get knifed to death by some teenage hoodlum. No point in lingering about is there?

SIMON *(AT THE WINDOW)* What are they doing?

JOY            They just go round and round on their motorbikes. Sometimes they've even got a car. Stolen no doubt. They went right across the lawn last week. And that was after Norman spoke to them. We've tried calling the police. They're not in the least bit interested. Too busy chasing racialists no doubt.

SIMON        They've gone.

JOY            They're off that council estate you know. I don't know why they have to come round here. I mean, they've got those perfectly good walkways to ride along at home. Honestly, my dear, you should see the state of the place. There's burned out cars everywhere. It's like Bosnia.