A Voyage Round My Father

By John Mortimer
FATHER:
in grief I'm arrayed
For keeping on the company
of a young servant maid
- [ Bee buzzing]
- Bring that saw, will you, boy?
Out of the barrow.
Who lived on board wages
and a house to keep clean
In a gentleman's family
in Paddington Green
Here, boy.

SON:
My father wasn't always blind.
[ Gasps 1
He hi! His head
on the branch of a tree,
and the retinas lei! The balls
of his eyes.
That's how I looked to my
father from childhood onwards.
That's how my wife
and his grandchildren looked.
Acorn Media

BOY:
Where are we going to sleep?

BOY 2:
in Granddad's bedroom.

SON:
sleep in the middle bedroom.

BOY 1:
in the middle bedroom.

ELIZABETH:
I want to change her.
Oh. Uh...
Here.
[Door closes]
FATHER:
Trapped a few, boy?

SON:
Just a few.

FATHER:
to feast on our dahlias.
Put them to the slaughter.
Sow;
All right.
Dahlias are all right, are they?
Yes.
Will you describe them for me?
Well, they're red... yellow.
Blousy.
Go on, tell me frankly.
Middle-aged, are they?
Past it, eh?
Well...
Oh, go on.
You paint me the picture.
[ Chuckles ]
You be my eyes, huh?
[ Chuckles ]
My father was blind,
but we never mentioned it.
He had a great disinclination
to mention anything unpleasant.
What was that?
Courage?
Cowardice?
Indifference?
Or caring too completely?
Made it?
Have we?
Good?
OK8'!-
Why didn't he blaspheme?
Beat his head against the
pitch-black walls around him?
Why didn't he curse God?
He had a great capacity
for rage,
but! Never a! The universe.
This egg is bloody runny!
It's in the most revolting
condition.
[ Coughs 1
What are you trying to do,
choke me to death?!
Have you all gone mad?!
Am I totally surrounded
by cretins?!
[ Breathing heavily]
In this six months, he married
this hardhearted girl
But he was not a Viscount,
and he was not an earl
He was not a baronet,
but a shade or two worse
'Twas the bowlegged conductor
of a tuppenny bus
The boy here?
- Yes, dear. He's here.
- Mm.
Don't let anyone ever
deceive you into believing
that the world was created
in six days.
Would you like your coffee now,
dear?
The evolution of the horse
was the most torturous process.
Mm.
This coffee's frozen.
Like a sort of Arctic mud.
Shall I make you some fresh,
dear?
Um... rather like it.
Six days' labor wouldn't even
evolve one primitive earthworm.
Have you got some more of that?
So none of this
six-days nonsense, hmm?
What are you trying to do now...
scald me to death?!
The three of us lived
in a small house surrounded,
as if for protection,
by an enormous garden.
My father was driven
to the station,
where he caught a train
to London
and his work as a barrister,
in a great hearse-like car,
which he would no more have
thought of replacing each year
than he would have accepted
a different kind of suit
or a new gardening hat.
Mr. Ringer Lean, who drove it,
treated the car as though
it were a nervous stallion.
Come on, me old beauty.
A bit frisky this morning.
Do you want a quick rubdown
with the Sporting Life?
There we are.
- Morning, ma'am.
- Good morning.
- Morning, gov.
- Ah. Lean.
The old Austin's gone
a bit lame today.
The going doesn't suit her.
It's a bit heavy.
Come on, me old beauty.
[Cane tapping]

MOTHER:
Just here.
Right.

FATHER:
[Whistle blows]

MOTHER:
"Report of Mr. Thong."
Bah!
Private detective.
All right. Go on.
Read it.
"Observation was commenced

at 9:

At 11:
to enter the house
in the company
of a gentleman with a mustache
who was identified
as the corespondent Dacres.
The bedroom light came on

at 11:
and was extinguished
five minutes later.
"The next day, inspection
of the bedroom revealed..."
Go on.
What did it reveal?
"Male and female clothing.
[ Whispers ]
Scattered."
What was that?
Do speak up, dear.
"Male and female clothing."
Scattered!
All right. Go on.
"We were able to inspect
the sheets and observed..."
Oh, do go on, dear.
"Stains."
What was that?
Stains!
He never used a white stick,
but his clouded malacca
was heard daily,
tapping the corridors
of the raw courts.
He had no use for therapy,
dogs, or training,
nor did he adapt himself
to his condition.
He simply pretended
that nothing had happened.

**MOTHER:**
He's for the husband.
Ah.
[Chuckles]
Agin me, are you, Bulstrode?
Agin me?
Boustead.
Oh. Boustead.
Of course.
Excuse me, please.
Uh...
- Where are you? [Chuckles]
- Here! I'm here.
Oh.
I, uh...
I've been studying your case
pretty closely,
and I have a suggestion to make
which might be useful to you.
- Really?
- Yes.
What I have to suggest,
dear boy,
is that you might like,
my dear boy,
to, uh, throw in your hand,
surrender.
Now, wouldn't that make life
more comfortable?
Certainly not.
I'd say we had
some pretty valuable evidence.
You terrify me, sir.

**JUDGE:**
Thank you, Mr. Thong.
Mr. Thong...
what price did you put
on your valuable evidence?
I'm a private inquiry agent.
A professional witness?
Charging the usual fee.
Ah.
30 pieces of silver?
I object.
This is outrageous.
Perhaps that was
not entirely relevant.
Then let me ask you something
which is very relevant,
which goes straight
to the secret heart
of this wretched
little conspiracy.
Where was my client's husband
during these observations?
Captain Waring had accompanied
me as we kept watch.
And did he not storm the house?
Did he not beat upon the door?
Did he not seize his wife's
paramour by the throat
and hurl him into the gutter?
According to my notebook, no.
What does the fellow say?
Not according to his notebook,
dear.
Ah.
Then, according to
your notebook...
was he enjoying himself?
- Really.
- Please, Mr. Bulstrode!
I have sat here for three days
like patience on a monument
while a series of spiteful,
mean, petty,
sickening,
and small-minded charges
are tediously paraded
against the unfortunate woman
I represent.
And now,
when I rise to cross-question,
I will not be interrupted!
Gentlemen.
Gentlemen, please.
[Clears throat]
What was your question?
I have forgotten it.
My learned friend's interruption has had the effect he no doubt intended, and I have forgotten my question. But this is intolerable.
Ah!
Now I've remembered it again. Uh, did he enjoy the night he spent in the field from which he was miraculously able to overlook his own kitchen?
SON'.
He sent words into the darkness like soldiers to battle and was never short of reinforcements.
In the law courts, he gave his public performance.
You must understand that Captain Waring has already given evidence to this court.
On the subject of racing glasses? No, Mr. Bulstrode. On the subject of love. He has told us that he was deeply and sincerely in love with his wife. I don't know anything about that. Exactly, Mr. Thong. You are hardly an expert witness on the subject of love, are you?
Members of the jury, love has driven men and women in
times past to curious extremes.
It led Juliet to feign death
and Ophelia to madness.
No doubt it disturbed the
serenity of the Garden of Eden,
and we are told
it started the Trojan War.
But surely there is
no more curious example
of the mysterious effects of
the passion than the spectacle
of Captain Waring
of the Royal Engineers
roosting in a tree,
complacently viewing
the seduction of his beloved
through a pair
of strong racing binoculars.
Is not the whole story,
members of the jury,
an improbable and impertinent
tissue of falsehoods?
Bu! As soon as possible,
he returned to the safety
of the dahlias,
the ritual
of the evening earwig hunt.
Visitors were rare,
and h' spotted,
my father would move further
into the foliage
- until the danger was passed.
- Oh, my God.
Oh, really.
Well, I'm going to ground.
Oh. Oh.
Oh.
- Coast clear?
- I'm sure she saw us.
Well, I hope she did!
Make the wretched woman
understand
we... we dread visitors.
Where's the boy?
I was to be prepared for Hie.
Complete with house shoes,
gym shoes, football boots,
shirts gray, shirts white,
Bulldog Drummond,
min! Humbugs, boxing gloves,
sponge bags,
and my seating plans
for all the London theaters.

MOTHER:
Mr. Lean's going to drive him.
A trois heures e! Demi.

Half past 3:
Yes, dear.
Mr. Lean's going to drive him.

FATHER:
is totally useless,
but it does pass the time.
The boy can't mope around here
all day long
doing the crossword
till it's time he gets married.
Married?
[ Chuckles ]
There's plenty of time
to think about that
when he's learned to keep
his bedroom tidy.
The headmaster seemed
rather charming.

FATHER:
[ Chuckles ]
No one ever got a word of sense
out of any schoolmaster.
You may at a pinch
take their word
about, uh, equilateral hexagons,
but life...
Life's a closed book to them.
I've packed you
some mint humbugs.
They're allowed humbugs.
Don't expect any advice from me,
Ihope?
All advice is useless.

MOTHER:
your hockey stick.
You're alone in this world,
and there's nothing anyone
can tell you about it.
[ Sobs 1
Oh, what's the matter
with the boy?
You're never crying?
- Oh.
- Ah.
Uh, say the word "rats."
Nobody can cry
if they say "rats."
It's something to do
with the muscles of the face.
Rats. Rats.
Rats.
[ Sniffs ]
R-Rats.
[Door closes,
engine turns over]

HEADMASTER:
Stand up now.
Let me have a look at you.
Someday, some far distant day,
you will be one-yearers.
Then you'll be two-yearers,
then three-yearers.
You will go away,
and you will write letters,
and I shall try hard
to remember you.
Then you'll be old boys.
Old Cliffhangers
you shall become,
and the fruit of your loins shall return to the school by the water...
Leave the room, the boy who laughed.
The fruit of your loins shall return and stand here, even as you are standing here. And we shall teach them. We shall give them sound advice so that hungry generations of boys shall learn not to eat peas with their knives or butter their hair or clean their fingernails with bus tickets. You shall be taught to wash, to bowl straight, and to wipe your dirty noses. In the sixth form, you shall see something of golf. You will look upon the staff as your friends. At all times, you will call us by nicknames. I am Noah. My wife is Mrs. Noah. You are the animals. My son Lance is Shem. Mr. Pearce and Mr. Box... Ham and Japhet. Matron is Matey. And Mr. Bingo Ollard is... Mr. Bingo Ollard is Mr. Bingo Ollard. These mysteries have I explained to you, oh, litter of runts. [Piano plays] Cliffhanger School Cliffhanger School F Home oi our happy Gays F F Wherer we serve F Where'er we rule
You are the school we praise
A Hanger
A Hanger
A Hanger
Strafe you, boy!
Bomb and howitzer and strafe
the living daylights out of you!
God bomb you to hell!
Get your tin hats on.
It's coming over now.
It's equaled on a square.
What square,
you unfortunate cretin?
On the other two sides,
a right-angled bloody triangle!
Strafe you, boy!
Bomb and strafe,
bomb you to hell!
All right.
All right.
War's over.
Armistice Day.
Demob.
I suppose you want compensation.
If you like, sir.
How many books did I throw?
Six, sir.
That's not counting the duster.
Threepence a book and, uh,
penny the duster.
Is that fair?
I'd say so, sir.
From Ham, I learn!
The heahng power of money.
I am writing to you from outside
the President's Court
at the start of a divorce case.
Like all divorce cases,
this one is concerned with sex.
The subject you will find
to be filled with comic relief.
Like you,
I shall today be rubbing up
against second-rate minds.
Hallelujah! Give us a handout to revive us again
Hallelujah! I'm a bum
Hallelu...
Do you know what a bum is?
Yes, sir.
In the American colonies, dear boy,
a bum is not your posterior.
"Bum" is a penniless person.
Seriously, sir?
Hallelujah! Bum again
Hallelujah!
Give us a handout...
[Bell ringing]
Now, look,
nobody's going to laugh at you if you use two simple chords.
You see?
- This.
- [Chord plays]
- And this.
- [Chord plays]
That's all.
Just two simple chords.
Always.
For every tune.
When springtime does come
- Oh
- Take my tip.
Sing in the back of your nose so that it sounds as if you've crossed the States by rail road.
[Nasal voice]
When springtime does come
Oh, won't we have fun
We'll throw up our jobs and we'll go on the bum
[Normal voice] Look as if you know what you're doing, and nobody's going to laugh.
By the way, you don't tie that tie of yours properly.
What's properly, sir?
With the big knot.
The way he wears it.
He?
The king, of course.
Oh, yes, sir.
Of course.
That's Lydia, isn't it, sir?
Oh. I-IS it?
She makes our beds.
The king and I,
we've got a lot in common.
Yes, sir.
Same tie... same trouble.
What trouble is that, sir?
Woman trouble.
Just like the jolly old king.
The king and Japhet were both
russling with the problems
from which my father
made his living.
Ah, get on with it, shall we?

**MOTHER:**
Yes, dear.

**FATHER:**
You will be pleased to hear
I won Jimpson v. Jimpson,
and the wife was convicted
of adultery
in the front seat of a motorcar
parked in
Hampstead Garden Suburb.
One vital bit of evidence
consisted of footmarks
on the dashboard.
- Is that really suitable, dear?
- Oh, just put that down, dear,
and get on with it.
My own final speech
lasted four hours,
and I made several jokes.
At home, we are, uh, cutting
our Korean chrysanthemums
and making marmalade.
An unusually large plague
of earwigs this summer.
Ever your loving father.
[ Indistinct conversations]
[Water running]
Keep the envelopes.
For the stamps?
To put the fish in
on Sunday nights.
The fish is disgusting.
Put in envelopes
and post it down the bogs.
Why in envelopes?
Well, you just can't put bits
of fish.
Not straight in your pocket.
Is your mother slim?
Fairly slim.
Is your father good at golf?
Pretty good.
My mother's slim as a bluebell.
Well, mine's quite slim, too,
really.
She goes to cocktail parties.
Slim as a bluebell.
With yellow eyes.
- Yellow?
- Like a panther.
Oh. I see.
Very small feet.
High heels, of course.
Does your mother wear
high heels?
Whenever she goes
to cocktail parties.
She wears them then.
My mother wears high heels
even at breakfast.
Of course,
she's slim as a bluebell.
But November the 11th brought
embarrassing revelations.
[Bell ringing]
HEADMASTER:
inasmuch as we are now paraded
on Lower School field
on this Armistice Day,
help us, Lord of hosts, to
remember those old Cliffhangers
who fell upon alien soil
in the late great match.
Grant us their spirit,
we beseech thee...

[Thunder crashes]
O Lord,
that we may go over the top to
our Common Entrance examination
and our football fixtures
armed with the cold steel
of thy holy word.
Give us, if thy will be done,
give us the great opportunity
to shed our blood for our
country and our beloved school
and fill us with that feeling
of sportsmanship
which led our fathers
to fix bayonets
and fight
until the last whistle blew.
We shall now sing the concluding
song on our hymn sheet,
"God of Our Fathers,
Known of Old."

[Organ plays]
God of our fathers,
known of old
Lord of our far-flung
battle line
Beneath whose awful hands
we hold
Dominion over palm and pine
Lord God of hosts,
be with us yet
FATHER:

as beautiful as a butterfly
F And as proud as a queen F
Was pretty little
Polly Perkins
Of Paddington Green
...the shouting dies
The captains
and the kings...
'Twas the bow-legged conductor
of a tuppenny bus
F Oh... F
[ indistinct conversations]
Your mother doesn't look
much like a panther.
That isn't my mother.
She's not much
of a bluebell either.
Who is she, then?
Just the dear, good old soul
who promised to look after me.
When?
When they smuggled me out
of Russia after the revolution.
They smuggled me out
in a wickerwork trunk.
I was 10 days and nights
on the rack in the carriage
of the Siberian Railway.
When I was a boy,
I never minded the lessons.
I just resented having to work
so terribly hard at games.
He'!-
My parents are getting
a divorce.
Why?
Are they unfaithful?
Oh, always.
I told you... My mother
goes to cocktail parties.
Mind, here they come.
The boys are going to put on
an entertainment.
Oh, I like an entertainment.
[ Laughs ]
What is it, then?
Something out of Boy's Own?
- I wrote it.
- You what?
I'm sure Reigate helped.
Didn't you, Reigate?
He didn't help.
We hope it will keep you
from thinking
of your great unhappiness.

MOTHER:
Reigate's got your greatcoat,
and the boy's wearing
your old Sam Browne.
[Screeching]
You can see Reigate's artistic.
He's making
a very lively performance.
- Bill?
- Who is it?
It's me, Bill.
It's Harry.
Harry.
I-l can't see you, old fellow.
It's this damn gas everywhere.
Take my hand.
Where are you?
Out here by the wire.
Listen.
What?
They've stopped strafing.
I say, if we ever get back
to the old country...
What?
I want you to marry Helen.
You said you'd never let Helen
marry a chap
who'd flunked the top
diving board at Roehampton.
Never mind what I said, Harry.
I saw you today
on the north redoubt.
You were in there
batting for England.
You shall have my little sister,
boy.
My hand on it.
I can't feel your hand, Bill.
I can't see you, Harry.
I'm cold.
I'm afraid
we'll never see England again.
What's the matter with us?
We're dead, old fellow.
Can't you understand?
We're both of us dead.
[ Laughs ]
Dead.
That's what we are, Bill.
[ Both laugh ]
[ Laughs ] How very killing.
Dead!
[ Laughs ]
Come and have your tea now,
boys.
Clifford.
[ Laughing ]
Quite right, boys.
If they ever give us
another war,
avoid the temptation
to do anything heroic.
That's my advice to you.
Sorry you're leaving?
Not altogether.
Chass, boy!
Chass!
- [ Music ends]
- I'm leaving, too.
Perhaps you heard.
Yes, I know, sir.
Lydia left yesterday.
We had to make our own beds.
Yes, Lydia has left.
I've abdicated.
So has the poor old king.
Him as well?
He broadcast this afternoon.
We all heard him
on Noah's radiogram.
The king has given up everything
for love.
I told you
we had a lot in common.
- [ Music resumes]
- Take my advice.
Don't give up everything
for love.
No, I won't, sir.
It's just not on, that's all.
Just simply not on.
Are you going to Noah's talk?
It's for all of us leavers.
The one where he tells you
the facts of life?
I've heard quite enough
about them to be going on with.

HEADMASTER:
what was I going to tell you?
Ah, yes.
I feel I ought to warn you
about dreams.
You'll have them.
Oh, certainly
you will have them.
And in the morning
you may say to yourself,
"You rotter to have had
a dream like that."
Well, you can't help it.
That's all.
You simply can't help them.
Not dreams.
Of course, if you're awake,
you can do something about it.
You can change into a pair
of shorts
and go for a run across country
or get into a bath
and turn on the cold tap.
You can always do that.
Your housemaster
will understand.
He'll understand if you should
have been up to a French lesson
or Matins or some such thing.
Just say,
"Sir, I had to have a bath,"
or go for a run
or whatever it is.
You just say to Mr. Raffles
or Humphrey Stiggler
or Percy Parr,
just say, "Mr. Raffles,"
or, "Mr. Parr,"
dependent on what school
you're at, of course,
"that, sir, is what I felt
the need to do."
He'll understand perfectly.
Now, another thing.
When sleeping,
always lie on the right side.
Not on the face,
for obvious reasons.
Not on the left side.
Stops the heart.
Not on the back.
It encourages dreams.
Just the right side
all the time.
Now to the most serious problem
you're likely to run up against.
Friends.
You may find that a boy from
another class or house, even,
comes up to you and says,
"Let's be friends,"
or even offers you
a slice of cake.
Now, that's a simple one,
a perfectly simple one
to deal with.
Just say very loudly,
"I'm going straight to tell
the housemaster!"
Straightaway.
No hesitation about it.
Remember, the only real drawback
to our great public school
system is unsolicited cake.
Is that very clear?
Go straight and tell
the housemaster.
- Do you have dreams?
- Not very much.
- I once dreamt about the fish.
- What?
All that fish they gave us
on Sunday nights
that we put down the loo.
I dreamt that it came swimming
back up again
and invaded the school.
Do you feel bad?
About dreaming that, I mean.
I suppose so.
That must have been
what he meant.
L! Wasn't until later
that I realized the headmaster
had been trying to advise us
on a subject my father
often brought up unexpectedly
in the middle of tea.
Sex.
Sex has been greatly overrated
by the poets.
I don't remember having
many mistresses
with thighs like white marble.
Would you like your biscuit now, dear?
"Could you hurt me, sweet lips,
as I hurt you?"
Men touched them,
and change in a trice
The lilies and languors
of virtue
"To the roses and raptures
of vice."
Where's my bloody biscuit?
I put your biscuit
in your saucer, dear.
"From their lips
have thy lips taken fever?
Is the breath of them hot
in thy hair?"
What did he know of the sharp
uncertainties of love?
Have you ever heard of anything
so revolting...
"Is the breath of them hot
in thy hair?"
[ Chuckles ]
Sex is pretty uphill work
if you ask me.
I don't agree.
Uh, sex has been greatly
overrated by the poets.
I don't happen to agree.
Who's that?
It's the boy.
[ Laughing ]
What ever have you got on?
The boy's been
very quiet lately.
He's wearing my old Liberty
scarf tied as a cravat.
A cravat?
[ Laughs ]
How killing!
I don't think sex has been
overrated exactly.
Like some tea?
Do you take sugar?
I always forget.
No sugar. We've...
We've got new neighbors.
It's the ridiculous
inconvenience of sex.
They never write about that.
New neighbors?
Perhaps we'd better plant
some more poplars.
- Miss Baker and Miss Cox.
- Who?
Two ladies who run
the new bookshop by the station.
Apparently the boy went in
to buy a book,
and they found him simpatico.
He hasn't invited them here,
I hope.
Hasn't encouraged them to
drop in for a glass of sherry.
[ Bell rings 1
Oh, my God.
That's not them, is it?
Well, it might be.
Oh, well, I-1 shall...
I shall go to work.
I shall disappear without trace.
Oh.
Oh, my poor boy, you'll miss
the evening foray after earwigs.
Mm?
Oh, dear.
What a pity.
I could have kissed you when
you first came into our shop.
Could you really?
- And actually bought a book!
- [ Laughs ]
Most people come in
for pamphlets...
"A Hundred Things To Do
With Dried Eggs,"
published by the Ministry
of Food.
Is your family out?
Cocktail parties.
[ Chuckles ]
- Would you like a drink?
- Oh, rather.
I'd adore a Pernod.
Bill and I got used to Pernod in Cassie.
Oh. Who's Bill?
I'm Bill.
She's Daphne.

SON: 
I'm afraid we're out of Pernod.
Sherry would be lovely.
We've never actually met your father.
No. We looked over the gate one evening and shouted.
He was busy doing something with a bucket.
Probably the earwigs.
What?
He... He drowns earwigs every night.
[Clears throat]
Well...
Um, cheerio.
[Chuckles]
[Exhales deeply]
Forgot the bucket, have you?
[Clears throat]
It's, um, quite a small house, isn't it, really?
I mean, you know, when you consider the size of the garden.
Haven't those visitors left yet?!
[Chuckles]
Bloody war.
I've been called up.
The Women's Land Army.
They're putting Bill on the land.
I'll probably ruin the crops.
It's the war, Bill.
We all have to make sacrifices.
Most of our friends
go into the fire service.
They get more time for writing,
between fires.
Your garden might give me
a few ideas...
on, uh, digging for victory.
Oh! Uh...
I mean, you'll probably end up
as a writer, won't you?
[ Chuckles ] For the drowning.
Have you abandoned me totally?!
Coming, darling.
Isn't there an easier way
of getting rid of the earwigs?
Easier way?
Sometimes I think
women don't understand anything.
Did he get rid of his visitors?
- Hmm?
- They went.
Oh, is that you?
[ Chuckles ]
Yes, it's me.
- What are you doing here?
- Helping you.
Consider the persistence
of the earwig.
Each afternoon it feasts itself
upon our dahlia blooms.
Each evening it crawls up
into our flowerpots
and goes to sleep.
We empty the pots
and drown the earwigs,
and the cry is, still they come.
Yes.
Nature is remorseless.
Hm.
I may be a writer.
If we did this for a million
years all over the world,
do you think we'd make
one small dent
in the pattern of evolution?
That we'd produce an earwig that could swim?
[Chuckles]
Do a little law, won't you?
Just to please me.
I've had a lot of fun out of the law.

SON:
to the South of France?
Once or twice.
It's all right, except for the dreadful greasy food they can't stop boasting about. Bill and Daphne say the worst of the war is they can't get to the South of France.
Who are they?
The ladies from the bookshop.
Daphne is Miss Cox.
And Bill?
Bill is Miss Baker.
Damned rum!
They practically lived in Cannes before the war.
They met Cocteau.
Who?
He smoked opium.
[Sniffs]

SON:
Have you ever smoked opium?
Certainly not.
Gives you constipation.
Dreadful binding effect.
Ever see any pictures of that wretched poet Coleridge?
[Laughs]
Green about the gills and a stranger to the lavatory.
Avoid opium.
They may find me a war job.
Why? Is old Bill
on the General Staff?
No, they have a friend
who makes propaganda films
for the government.
He needs an assistant.
At least there's nothing heroic
about it.
Uh, we...
Are we at the bottom
of Windmill Hill?
- Yeah.
- Uh-huh.
Are we going to the top?
Ah.
Yes, certainly.
I mean, you want to see
three counties, don't you?
All right.
See everything.
Everything in nature.
That's the instinct
of the mayfly.
24 hours to live.
Then spend it looking around.
We've got more time.
[ Laughs ]
Don't you believe it.
If they ever say to you,
"Your old father can't have had
much of a life..."
overdrawn at the bank,
bad-tempered,
"and nobody much ever went
to see him,"
"Nonsense!" you say.
"He enjoyed every minute of it."
Did you want to go on now?
Yes.
[ Panting ]
If you consider the embryo
of the liver fluke,
born in sheep's droppings,
searching for a shell
to bore into
so it can live in a snail
until it becomes tadpole-like,
then leaves its host, uh...
only to be eaten up again
by another sheep.
If you consider such
complicated persistence, hmm.
Well, of course,
I've clung on for 65 years.
It's the instinct.
That's all.
The irrepressible instinct.
Well, we're at the top now.
Ah. Ha.
Ah.
There.
You see the three counties?
[ Chuckles ]
Well, uh, be my eyes.
Paint me the picture.
L-I can just see
three counties...
Yeah.
- ...stretched out.
- Mm.
That's all I can see.
A fine prospect, though?
- A fine prospect.
- Yes.
Shall we go home now?
Yeah. Well, uh...
12335?
Um, I-1 think it's more.
Oh.
[ Chuckles ]
Ah.
You've painted me the picture.
We've seen a lot today.
We've seen a great deal of the
monstrous persistence of nature.

A.T.S. GIRL:
naughty tonight, then, Hilda?
A.T.S. GIRL 2:
Yeah.
Tea, love?
Ta, love.
Sugars, do you?
Ta.
You know, I've been thinking.
Have you, Hilda?
Oh, yeah, Sandra.
I've been thinking.
What about, then, Hilda?
You know what I reckon
this war is all about?
No.
It's just our freedom.
Our freedom to talk
to each other.
Cut!
That was magnificent!
Totally real!
- Thank you.
- Couldn't do that with actors.
Don't you think
that was magnificent?
Totally magnificent.
Listen, lad.
You interested in
the creative side of filmmaking?
Oh, yes.
Yes, of course.
Then go and buy me 20 Player's.
All right.
Now we move in really tight
on Hilda.
[ Typewriter slacking ]
20 Player's, please.
How's the writer's department?
They say I'm not cut out to be
an assistant director.
When I yelled for quiet, all
the electricians went on strike.
[ Laughs 1
They say with me
as an assistant director,
the war would be over
before the film's finished.

DIRECTOR:
Cut! All right, then!
Smoke?
Thanks.
What's the script?
Oh, it's something
Humphrey wants to do.
There's a character in it
called the...
There's a character in it
called the Common Man.
He keeps on saying,
"Look, here, matey,
what is the World Health
Organization?"
Oh, sounds ghastly.
It is, rather.
Why do you bother to write it,
then?
Oh, I suppose...
the school fees.
Oh.
You're studying something?
No, you fool.
It's my kids.
Peter's only got
his captain's pay,
- and I can't possibly afford...
- Peter?
My husband.
He's overseas?
Uxbridge.
In Army Education.
My father always says
that in time of war,
one should avoid the temptation
to do anything heroic.
I think after today,
I'll give up the film business,
take up the law.
My father's a lawyer.
Do you always copy your father?
Good God, no.
Really?
You look the sort
to agree with Dad.
Well, there's one thing he says
I don't agree with.
Oh?
What's that?
He says that sex has been
greatly overrated by the poets.
[Sighs]
They're going to hate me.
Oh, of course they're not.
I must try and do something
about this face.
Oh, yes.
You must.
A bit of war paint
to impress your father.

SON:
It won't impress him.

ELIZABETH:
Thank you very much.
He won't be able to see
what you look like.
My father's blind.
You all right?
Oh, darling.
- Hi.
- Hello.
  [Chuckles]
All right.
Good. Um...
She's just...
- You must be Elizabeth.
- How do you do?
- We've heard so much about you.
- How's Father?
Come and have a glass of sherry,
Elizabeth.
We usually walk 'round
the garden before dinner.
Straight through.
[ Grunts ]
My tie!
Oh, God, where's my tie?!
Oh! Can't anybody even get me
a waistcoat?
If you only knew the loneliness
of getting dressed!
I'll... I'll go.
Here. Here.
Oh. Thank you.
- Have you...
- Yes, it's me.
I suppose you expect me
to talk about it?
Well, I know it came
as a bit of a shock to you
when Peter divorced Elizabeth.
It must have come a bit of
a shock to you, too, didn't it?
When you found when she was
of marriageable state.
I mean, you're hardly in a state
to get married, are you?
Uh, how long have you been
at the bar now?
Nine months.
Nine months.
I'd been in practice
for 10 years
before I felt the slightest need
to marry your mother.
Well, perhaps needs
weren't so urgent then.
[ Chuckles ] Perhaps.
Uh, see the waistcoat anywhere?
- Yes. Here you are.
- Ah.
Have you got any...
got any work to do?
A little.
A little work.
Unsuccessful defense in serious
case of nonrenewed dog license. That won't keep you in... in cleaning powder. I don't want to be kept in soap powder. But you'll have no alternative once you're married. Your no-income will be frittered away on Vim, saucepan scourers, Mansion polish and children's vests and suchlike luxuries. I'm quite prepared to take on her children. You sound like a railway train. Short stop to take on children. And I... yeah, I think so... I understand your poor girl's coming for the weekend. Uh, we seem to be nowadays almost submerged in visitors. I hope you're not going to be rude to her. Oh, your poor girl and I will soon come to a certain understanding. Oh, for God's sake. Why do you keep calling her my "poor girl"? That's something I'll have to explain to her. [Chuckles] Rhododendrons out? - Yes, dear. - Huh? A fine show of rhododendrons. And the, uh, philadelphus? Just out. Mm? Just out. [inhales deeply] And smelling sweetly. And, uh, is our guest with us? Yes, dear. Elizabeth is here. I've often wondered
about my son...
Does he treat girls well?
Now, why have you wondered that?
Well, I once knew a fellow
called, uh, Arthur Pennyquick.
He was like you in many ways.
- He didn't treat girls well.
- Please, dear.
I don't think Arthur Pennyquick
is quite suitable.
Oh, do tell us.
What did he do to girls?
Well, I was out with him
one evening,
and he... he picked up a girl
in the promenade
of the Alhambra Music Hall,
and, uh,
before he took her away,
he took out his gold cuff links
and gave them to me
for safekeeping...
in front of the girl.
I was so sick and angry.
Disgusting.
[ Sniffs ]
You think
if you sleep with someone,
you should trust them
with your cuff links?
[ Laughs ] Well...
not... not remove them
in front of the girl.
Well, we've seen a fine show
of rhododendrons.

MOTHER:
And I showed you the polyanthus.
Yes, yes.
[ Laughs ]
The result
of much laborsome potting up.
Why do you bother?
What?
I said, "Why do you bother to do all this gardening?"
I mean, when you can't see it.
Elizabeth...
Well, he can't, can he?
Why do you all walk about pretending he's not blind?
This you?
Yes.
Would you take me down to the west copse?
I'd like a report on the magnolia.
Would you do that?
Be my eyes?
Come, then.

MOTHER:
She does have nice eyes.
Yes.
Not at all the eyes of a divorced person.
If only he could see her, he'd understand why I want to marry her.
Oh, he understands that.
I think his main difficulty is understanding why she should want to marry you.
When I was a child, the woods were dark and full of flies, and we picked bracken leaves to swat them, and he told me we carried cuasses to hack our way through the jungle.
I used to shut my eyes at dead rats or magpies gibbeted on the trees... sights his blindness spared him.
He walked with his hand
on my arm...

a small hand

with loose brown skin.

From time to time, I had
an urge to pull away from him,
to run into the trees and hide,
to leave him alone,
lost in perpetual darkness.
But then his hand would tighten
on my sleeve.

He was very persistent.

Come over, did you,
in your own little car?

You've been trying to
put him off.

Oh, not at all.

I told him you'd put him off.

He asked for my advice.

And I suppose
you gave it to him.

I never give advice.

Must be quite an asset, having
your own personal transport.

We've made up our minds.

And, uh, your children,

I believe,

are really quite attractive,

for children.

He gets on marvelously

with them.

And then you will have, uh,
your own bits and pieces

of furniture.

A fine bedroom suite,

they tell me,
in a good state of preservation.

You know, you're quite a catch,

if you want my honest opinion.

Well, then,
you ought to be glad for him.

For him? Oh, no, no.

Look here.

I say seriously, joking apart,
you're not gonna marry him,
are you?
I mean, he's got no assets of any kind.
Not even a kitchen cupboard.
And there's something else.
He won't like it, you know, if you catch the flu.
- Really?
- Oh, yes.
Most people are sympathetic towards illness.
They're kind if people develop high temperatures.
They even cosset them.
But not him.
Oh, no.
One sneeze and he'll be off in the opposite direction.
I thought it was me you might disapprove of.
Oh, why ever?
Well, think he's marrying someone unsuitable.
Oh, no.
I mean, you have particularly nice eyes, they tell me.
Thank you.
Couldn't you do better than someone who bolts when you get 2 degrees above normal?
I hadn't thought about it.
Oh, well, do.
Do think about it.
Think about it seriously.
You could do better than that.
I'm prepared to take a bet on it.
It's getting cold.
I'll take you in.
In that case, my father's advocacy failed.
In time, he became reconciled to me
as a husband
for his daughter-in-law.
- Good evening.
- Oh, uh, hello, there.
Well?
10 guineas for that divorce.
Oh, darling, that's marvelous.
Thank God for adultery.
I had to get them new vests.
What do they do
with their vests?
Here's my opinion...
They eat their vests.
- Oh, and, uh, knicker linings.
- Oh, God.
- They need new knicker linings.
- Don't go mad.
I don't get paid for years
in the law.
Can't you ask for it?
Well, of course not.
George collects the fees.
- Who's George?
- Our clerk.
- It's his department.
- I thought his name was Henry.
Well, it is,
but Father calls him George.
Why on earth does he do that?
Because Father had a clerk
called George
who got killed on the Somme.
So when Henry took over, Father
went on calling him George.
Well, Henry doesn't much
like that, if you ask me.
George doesn't mind.
You always think no one minds
about your Father.
Shall we go to the pub?
What on?
Family allowance.
All right.
I'll get Susan down.
Shall we play bar billiards?
Oh, like the night
when Peter walked in.
Do you remember?
And said, "This is the end
of our marriage."
I see you've become
entirely trivial."
Do you miss Peter?
No.
Do you?
No.
Of course not.
- I'm sorry.
- What about?
The knicker linings.
Oh, that's marriage.
Hm.
What's marriage?
"An unexpectedly large
expenditure on soap powder,
children's vests,
and other suchlike luxuries."
And who's that a quotation from?
[ Chuckles ]
In his chambers, my father,
smelling of eau de cologne
and occasional cigars,
sat among his relics...
the blown duck egg
on which a client's will
had once been written,
the caricatures of himself
infamous cases.

FATHER:
Timing is of great importance
in the art of cross-examination.
Now...
[inhales deeply]
I often start by counting...
in silence, of course...
up to 43
before starting
a cross-examination.
What ever for?
The witness imagines
that you're thinking up
some deadly dangerous question.
- Are you?
- No, of course not.
I'm just counting up to 43.
But it unnerves
the customer in the box.
I see.
What is... What's the point
of all this, actually?
Oh.
The point, my dear boy, the
point is to down your opponent,
to obliterate
whoever's agin you.
That's what the point of it is.
And, of course,
to, uh, have a bit of fun
while you're about it.
[Whispering] 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.
15,16,17,18,19.
[ Inhales, exhales deeply]
Are you intending to ask
any questions?
I'm sorry, my lord.
Well, if you have a question
to ask, ask it.
We can't all wait
while you stand
in silent prayer, you know.
Will you read that letter out
to us, please, madam?
Read it out aloud.
I can't.
Madam... the court is waiting.
I really can't.
Is there something
in that letter
which you would rather not
remember?
No.
Not exactly.
Then read it to us, madam.
Then could I borrow
your glasses?
[I Laughter]
30...
40...
Whoo!
[Laughing ] Oh.
My father retired on nothing
but credit, optimism,
and the determination not to
think of anything unpleasant.
OK8'!
His money had gone on cigars
and barrels of oysters
and eau de cologne
for his handkerchief
and always first class
on the railway
and great, rare Japanese cherry
trees that rustled in the wind
and flowered for two weeks
a year
in a green-while shower
he never saw.
I'll get in it with you
this time.
Wait for me!
- [ Cork POPS 1
- Om

SON:
What's this?
It sounds like a celebration.
I won!
Clarkson v. Clarkson.
- Oh?
- After five days.
Aha!
That means five refreshers!
They insisted on fighting the
divorce every inch of the way.
- Terribly litigious.
- FATHER: What?

- MOTHER: Yes, yes.
Just like a wedding.

FATHER: What was that?
Uh, what did you say?

MOTHER: a glass of champagne.
Oh.
Uh, thank you.

SON: I'm glad you can afford this sort of thing, dear boy, now you've pinched all my business. [Both laugh]
Cheers.

- SON:

- MOTHER: You know what would go down very well with this champagne? What, dear? A dry biscuit? No. [Chuckles] The crossword. [Laughs 1 I'll get n. - Yes. I thought... I mean, in that Clarkson v. Clarkson, I thought you were for the husband. Well, of course I was for the husband. Wasn't he the man who insisted on his wife tickling the soles of his feet
for hours at a stretch?
Only while they watched television.
With a contraption.
A foot tickler.
Ingenious.
The whole thing was worked out by a system of weights and pulleys.
But the actual act was performed by an old pipe cleaner.
Ought he to have won?
I won.
Yes, but ought you?
The judge said that it was part of the wear and tear of married life.
I mean,
how did they feel about it?
Well, they did look a little confused.
Perhaps they didn't appreciate the rules of the game.
I enjoyed it.
[Sighs]
You get more like him every day.
In his old age, my father's chief sport was starting arguments.
Music.
I can't imagine anybody actually liking music.
The immortality of the soul.
What a boring conception.
Can't imagine anything worse than living for infinity in some great transcendental hotel
with nothing to do in the evening.
- What's the time?
- Half past 8:
Hm!
Time's nipping along nicely.
You know, nothing narrows
the mind like foreign travel.
Stay at home.
That's the best way
to see the world.
I don't know that's true.
[ Chuckles ] Oh, yes.
Of course it's true.
I'll tell you something else,
Elizabeth.
There's a lot of sorry stuff
in D.H. Lawrence.
- I don't know about that either.
- Oh, yes, there is.
And I'll tell you
something else.
There's a lot of damned
dull stuff in old Proust.
[ Laughs ]
Do you hear that, Elizabeth?!
A lot of damned dull stuff
in old Proust!
Yes, I heard.
[ Chuckles ]
Well, I'll say one thing
for you.
You're an improvement on
the ones he used to bring home.
Gals who closeted themselves in
the bathroom for hours on end.
Nothing to show for it.
And then none of them lasted
very long.
I wonder why.
Yes. I wonder.
After all,
my son is someone to talk to.
Most parents have
damned dull children.
That you?
Yes. It's me.
Yeah.
They tell me that play of yours
came across pretty well.
- Yes.
- Yes.

That other fellow's play
was very well reviewed.
You'd better watch out or he'll
put your nose out of joint.
I've not been sleeping well
lately.
When I can't sleep, you know,
I-I make a list
of all the things I really hate.
"Vegetarian banquet."
Two words.
Is it a long list?
Bean feast.
What?
No. Not very long.
Runny eggs, of course.
Uh, cold plates.
Uh, waiting for things.
- Parsons.
- Parsons?
Yes. Parsons.
On the wireless.
Oh, if they bore God as much as
they bore me, I'm sorry for him.
My father's a parson.
Oh, yes, I know.
Oh. "Nymph, in thy orisons
be all my sins remember'd."
- [ Buzzing ]
- What... What... What is that?
- Is that a wasp?!

- MOTHER:
W-Well, what's it doing?!
Going away.
[ Breathing heavily]
When you've been troubled
by a wasp, don't you love a fly?
[ Chuckles ]
Do you find the evenings
very long now you're married?
Don't you find it tremendously tedious?
What do you do...
have the wireless?
No, we don't get bored exactly.
We can always fight.
You know, I was surprised about that play of yours.
− Were you?
− Yes.
When you told us the story, I said,
"Well, this is a bit thin."
But you seemed to... seemed to have come across quite well.
Didn't that surprise you, Elizabeth?
− Well, I...
− She doesn't like it.

**FATHER:**
Uh, what?
Elizabeth doesn't like it very much.
Really?
How interesting.
Tell me, why not?
Not serious.
You think not.
You think he's not serious?
He plays games and makes jokes.
When the time comes
to say anything serious,
− it's as if he's...
− Oh, for heaven's sake.
No, no.
Go on, go on.
Well, it's as if there's something stopping him
− all the time.
− Really?
Ah.
I wonder what that could be.
Hm.
Well, I should think you'd know.
Why?
Because you've never really said
anything serious to him,
have you?
Nobody here ever says anything.
They tell stories
and make jokes.
And somethings happening.
Elizabeth, it doesn't always
have to be said.
Sometimes.
Sometimes it has to.

FATHER:
Well...[ Sighs 1
What do you want to hear
from me, huh?
[ Laughs 1
What words of wisdom, hmm?
Beautiful as a butterfly
And as proud as a queen F
Was pretty little
Polly Perkins
He had no message.
I think he had no belief.
He was the advocate
who can take the side
that comes to him first
and always find words
to anger his opponent.

FATHER:
And one...
And when the children came
to see him,
he told them no more
and no less than he'd told me.
Our little Anne's getting
so pretty.

FATHER:
Your little Anne's lovely.
So are our Daniel and Jennifer.
I'd like to have done a drawing of Anne.
Perhaps a pastel.
Well, why don't you?
Oh, I gave up drawing when I got married.
I mean, you have to, don't you?
Give up things when you get married.
Do you?
Now, of course, there isn't time.
Doesn't he ever leave you half an hour to yourself?
He doesn't like to be left.
I suppose I often think one day I'll be alone.
You can't help thinking.
What will you do?
Travel?
Go to France?
Well, for one thing, I shan't dig the garden.
The enormous garden became dark and overgrown in spreading patches.

GIRL:
Oh, Daddy, it hurts!
Willow herb and thistles and bright poppies grew up.
A nettle?
The fruit cage collapsed like a shaken temple, and weeds supported the tangled netting.
The rhododendrons and yew hedges grew high as a jungle, tall and dark and uncontrolled, hot with unexpected owers.

FATHER:
[ Chuckles ]
Women can be useful
occasionally. [Laughs]

- ELIZABETH:
- Yes, yes.
I've often said to George,
"Let's have a woman in chambers."
Women work so much harder
than men.
Look how seriously
girls' schools take lacrosse.
They treat the law like that.
"I could get a ridiculous amount
of work from a woman pupil."
And what does George say?
Oh, he says there's not
the toilet facilities.
But, you know,
old Carter Davidson had
a woman pupil.
He occupied the basement
of our chambers,
rooms that could easily be seen
from the garden,
where the masters of the King's
Bench strolled after dinner.
Well, they were strolling there,
history relates,
after some grand night with,
uh, some royal personage...
king, queen, princess,
something of the kind.
And they glanced down,
and what did they see?

ELIZABETH:
Well, what?
Carter Davidson and
his woman pupil naked as puppies
stretched out
on the Persian rug.
[Laughing]
And noth... noth... noth-
Nothing was said.
- But do you know what?
A very few days later, Sir Carter Davidson was appointed chief justice of the Seaward Isles. They shipped him 10,000 miles from the Inns of Court, and he... he... he never understood why.

[Both laugh]
Well, that's one way to get a bloomin' knighthood!

[Laughing]
[Gasping]

ELIZABETH:
Are you all right?
[Wheezing]
Carter Davidson and... nearly did for me.

ELIZABETH:
[Sighs]
My father began to chronicle the garden's progress in his diary. Put sodium chlorate on the front path. Had raspberry tart with our own raspberries. The dahlias are coming into bloom. The jays are eating all the peas.
[Thunder crashes]
Today a dragonfly flew into the sitting room. Am laid up. Unhappily, I had to miss the destruction of the wasps' nests.
[Tapping]
It looks very comfortable, dear.
[Grunts]
It's impossible.
A...bath chair!
You'll be very glad of it,
− if I know anything about it.
− What did he say?
Doctor says you'll be very glad of it,
− if he knows anything about it.
− Ah, but does he?
Isn't that the point?
Does he know anything about it?!
I am qualified.
Well, the world is filled with qualified lawyers who don't know the difference between rape and indecent assault and qualified architects whose roofs blow off in a high wind and qualified gardeners who can't tell bindweed from polygonum!
Are you an exception to the laws of nature?

**DOCTOR:**
Are you?
I should think you're tired of standing up.
Hm.
Well, how am I gonna get this thing into the rose bed?!
[ Grunting ]
[ Panting ]
Oh. Oh.
Oh. Oh.
What a business.
In the summer, with the garden at its most turbulent... he became suddenly very old and ill.

**ELIZABETH:**
going to take for breakfast, Mr. Phelps?' said Holmes.
'Curried fowl, eggs,
or will you help yourself?
Try the dish before you.'
Phelps raised the cover, and
as he did so, uttered a scream
and sat there staring
with his face as white
as the plate
upon which he looked.
Across the center of it
"was lying a little cylinder
of blue-gray paper."
- The naval treaty?
- [ Chuckles ] Yes.

FATHER:
[ Exhales deeply]
I'm afraid you find that story
a great bore.
Of course not.
Very exciting.
Dear Elizabeth.
I'm so relieved to find you can
lie as mercifully as anyone.
It was a hot, endless night
in a small house
surrounded by a great garden
in which all the plants
were on the point of mutiny.
Darling?
Do you want to come
and say good night to them?
[ D09 barks ]
I want a bath!
Take me to the bathroom!
Cretins!

SON:
Don't be angry.
I'm always angry...
when I'm dying.
Look, Doctor...
We've got a territorial dinner
in High Wycombe.
Don't let him sleep.
That's the main thing.
Come on.
Wakey, wakey!
That's better.
Look, look...
The only thing is to keep
his eyes open.
There's really nothing else.
I've spoken to your mother.
I'll come back in the morning.
[ Breathing heavily]
[ Breathing stops]
Wake up.
Wake up.
Please.
Please.
Wake up.
I'd been told of all the things
you're meant to feel.
Sudden freedom.
Growing up.
The end of dependence.
You step into the sunlight
where no one is taller than you,
and you're in no one else's
shadow.
And I know what I felt.
Lonely.
Acorn Media

ELIZABETH:
Danny, come and have some tea.
Jenny.
Jenny, go and have a drink.

SON:
Wheel [Laughs]
[ Laughs ] Whoa!
Ooh!
[ Indistinct talking, laughter]
Oh.
- [ Crying ]
- There you are.
Come on, darling.