

THE MYSTERY OF MARSH HOUSE

A play

by

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ACT I

LIGHTS UP ON A COUNTRY COTTAGE DRAWING ROOM.

THE ROOM LOOKS LIVED IN, BUT THE FURNISHINGS ARE FUNCTIONAL, RATHER THAN COSY, ALTHOUGH IT SHOULD NOT LOOK AUSTERE.

THERE IS ONE ENTRANCE TO THE ROOM, UPSTAGE, WHICH LEADS TO THE OUTSIDE, STAGE RIGHT, AND THE KITCHEN AND OTHER ROOMS, STAGE LEFT.

THERE IS A FIRE BURNING IN THE GRATE.

WE HEAR THE SOUND OF TWO CARS DRIVING SLOWLY ON GRAVEL AND STOPPING. WE HEAR PEOPLE GETTING OUT OF THE CARS AND DOORS SHUTTING.

JACK: (OFF. MUFFLED.) Come on. Quick as you can.

DENNIS: (OFF. MUFFLED.) Are you ok, Jude?

JACK: (OFF. MUFFLED.) Where's Connie?

CONNIE: (OFF. MUFFLED.) I'm right behind you.

WE HEAR A LOUD KNOCKING.

PAUSE.

MORE KNOCKING.

JACK: (OFF. MUFFLED.) Hello? Hello?

WE HEAR A DOOR OPENING.

JACK: (OFF.) Thank God for country people. Come on.

DENNIS: (OFF.) Do you think we should?

JACK: (OFF.) No. You're right. Let's stay in the cars and freeze to death.

ENTER JACK.

JACK: Nice. (LOOKS BACK INTO THE HALLWAY.) Well, come on then. We won't be able to see anything in here if you don't shut the door.

DENNIS: (OFF.) Hello? Anyone at home?

JACK: Let's have a shufti upstairs, Dennis.

DENNIS: OK. You girls have a nosy down here.

CONNIE: (OFF.) Righto.

WE HERE A FLURRY OF VOICES: HELLO! ANYONE
HERE? ETC.

JUDITH ENTERS SLOWLY. SHE LOOKS NERVOUS.

AFTER A BEAT, CONNIE ENTERS.

CONNIE: Not a soul. Like a ghost ship.

JUDITH: What do you mean by that?

CONNIE: Nothing. Sorry.

ENTER JACK.

JACK: We seem to have the run of the place. Might as well make ourselves at home.

HE THROWS HIMSELF ONTO A SOFA.

ENTER DENNIS.

DENNIS: Well, I must say it all looks very inviting up there. Beds made in all the rooms. You'd think they were expecting us. Interesting house, too. Seventeenth century, I shouldn't wonder.

JACK: Very nice. I could definitely get used to this. What do you say, Judith? Shall we come and live here?

JUDITH IS LOOKING OUT OF THE WINDOW, AND
DOESN'T RESPOND.

DENNIS: Anyway, what do you suppose we should do now?

JACK: Do? Nothing.

DENNIS: Well, shouldn't we try to contact someone?

JACK: Who?

DENNIS: I don't know. The owners. Let them know we're here.

CONNIE: I think they're out, Dennis.

JACK: Don't worry about it. We're here now. Might as well make the best of it.

DENNIS JOINS JUDITH AT THE WINDOW.

DENNIS: Golly. Can't even see the cars now. We're lucky you spotted this place, Jude. I know these sea mists can come in suddenly, but I've never known one to come rolling in as quickly as this. I think we might be here for a while.

CONNIE HAS BEEN LOOKING IN CUPBOARDS.
DENNIS SEES HER.

DENNIS: Connie. What are you doing?

CONNIE OPENS A DRINKS CABINET.

CONNIE: Looking for this.

DENNIS: Oh no, I really don't think that's on, love.

CONNIE: Listen, Dennis, 'love', we are supposed to be on our summer holidays and I, for one, am freezing. That fire doesn't seem to be giving off any heat at all. I need a little something.

DENNIS: But, Connie..

JACK: Dennis, old chap, I think you should listen to your wife for once. Scotch please, Connie. Nice big fat one.

DENNIS: But the people who live here might be back at any moment.

JACK: How? Visibility is down to about nil. Maybe less. How are they supposed to see to get back?

CONNIE: I wonder where they are?

JACK: Well, they've obviously got caught in it too. Maybe they're sheltering uninvited in somebody else's house. There are probably people all over the area keeping warm by the hearths of strangers. I expect that's how they go about meeting new people in these parts.

DENNIS: Funny thing to light a fire and then go out.

CONNIE: Not really. It's cold.

DENNIS: But it only got cold when the fog came down. How did they know?

JACK: I don't suppose they did.

DENNIS: There you are, then.

JACK: Perhaps they went to meet the guests who are going to be staying in those lovely bedrooms, and wanted the house to be warm and welcoming when they came back.

DENNIS: Meet them where?

JACK: Well, how the hell should I know? Station, presumably.

DENNIS: The nearest station's twenty miles from here.

JACK: Good. We've got plenty of time for a drink. Sit down and relax, for God's sake.

CONNIE: The usual?

DENNIS: Nothing for me, thank you. It's one thing to keep safe and warm in their house, but it's quite another to help yourself to the contents of their drinks cabinet.

JACK: If you're uneasy about it, we'll leave them some money. Or your address. They're not going to begrudge us one drink. You wouldn't if it was your house. Go on.

DENNIS: No thanks. I think one of us should keep their wits about them, don't you?

PAUSE. JACK AND CONNIE LOOK AT JUDITH, WHO IS STILL GAZING OUT OF THE WINDOW.

JACK: Judith? Everything ok?

NO RESPONSE.

JACK: Judith?

JUDITH: (TURNING TO HIM.) Sorry. What?

JACK: You alright?

JUDITH: (WITH FALSE JOLLITY.) Yes. Yes, never better.

CONNIE: Cockle-warmer?

JUDITH: Oh. Yes. Thank you. A little port, if there is any.

CONNIE: These bottles all look a bit ancient. I don't think our hosts are party animals. (SHE HANDS OUT DRINKS.) Can't guarantee that it'll be drinkable.

JACK: My scotch is lovely. Cheers.

JUDITH: Cheers. (SHE DRINKS AND WINCES.)

CONNIE GETS UP AND STARTS TO GO WITH HER DRINK.

DENNIS: Where are you going?

CONNIE: To look for ice.

DENNIS: I thought you were cold.

CONNIE: Don't be silly.

SHE GOES.

PAUSE.

DENNIS STUDIES THE PICTURES ON THE WALLS.
JACK DRINKS. JUDITH PUTS HER DOWN.

JACK: How's your port?

JUDITH: I think it's gone off.

JACK: Oh. Shame. Want to try something else?

JUDITH: I'd really like a cup of tea.

JACK: Splendid idea. I'm sure we can rustle you up a cup of tea. Dennis? Or does your vow of abstinence extend to tea as well?

DENNIS: No, thank you. I'm just not comfortable about taking advantage, that's all.

JACK: Better go and sit in the car then. If you can find it.

HE GOES.

DENNIS: I really don't know why your husband feels the need to talk to me like that.

JUDITH: It's not just you.

DENNIS: Well, it's making for a rather wearisome holiday.

JUDITH: It always takes him a while to relax. He's usually fine after a week or so.

DENNIS: We're only on holiday for a week.

JUDITH: I know.

PAUSE.

DENNIS: How are things?

JUDITH: Ok.

DENNIS: Really?

JUDITH: Yeah. We're muddling along. I see so little of him at the moment. He's so busy with work. Anyway, you've got enough on your plate, without worrying about me.

DENNIS: You're my little sister. Of course I worry about you.

JUDITH: How are you?

DENNIS: We're not talking about me.

JUDITH: Yes we are. How are you?

DENNIS: Very much the same, I'm sorry to say.

JUDITH: Oh dear. Poor you. Connie still..?

DENNIS: Like a fish.

JUDITH: Oh dear. I thought she'd started to get it under control.

DENNIS: So did I. I really did. I thought we'd turned the corner. She cut down, a lot. The odd glass of wine with a meal, a very occasional G and T. It was wonderful. I had the old Connie back.

JUDITH: What happened.

DENNIS: I don't know. She just..it was a gradual thing. The tell-tale signs started creeping back, and at first I ignored them. Told myself I was imagining it. Stupid. She hid it terribly well in the early stages. By the time it became too obvious to ignore there was no going back. (PAUSE.) I couldn't figure out where she was keeping it. I knew she must have a secret supply, but I couldn't find it. And then, one morning, I was looking for my nail clippers, and I thought she might have borrowed them, so I looked on her dressing table. And I noticed that there were several big perfume bottles. I mean, Connie almost never wears perfume. Right under my nose the whole time. God knows how many times a day I walk past that table. I rather admire her ingenuity, if I'm honest. Men never look at women's dressing tables.

JUDITH: Really?

DENNIS: Never. She could have kept a severed head on there and I wouldn't have noticed. And now she's not even bothering to pretend anymore. On the whole, I preferred it when she was lying to me. At least it gave her something to occupy her mind. But now we're back to square one, I'm afraid. I'm completely at a loss, Jude. I just don't know what to do.

JUDITH: Have you tried to talk to her?

DENNIS: She says it's none of my business and it's the only thing that gets her up in the morning. (PAUSE.) I don't think this holiday is going to help.

JUDITH: Maybe a week away from it all is just what she needs.

DENNIS: A week away from what? She doesn't do anything. Except have lunch. I wouldn't have thought it possible, but she regularly manages to have lunch from eleven in the morning until four in the afternoon. That's practically a full working day.

JUDITH: Better than sitting at home, drinking alone.

DENNIS: Yes. It is. But her dedication to her craft is costing me a small fortune. God knows. I don't begrudge it. I'm glad she's doing something. But there's one place, near us; she's invested so much of her time and my money in it that next year we're due for a carriage clock.

JUDITH: Sounds like it's you who needs the holiday.

DENNIS: Some holiday. Much more of Jack in his present frame of mind is going to drive me to drink. I'm worried there won't be enough to go around.

JUDITH: I think you need a hug.

DENNIS: There's nothing I'd like better.

THEY HUG.

JUDITH: At least you and I will get to spend some time together.

PAUSE. STILL IN EACH OTHER'S ARMS.

DENNIS: What do you suppose they're doing out there?

JUDITH: Oh, you know. Unfamiliar kitchen and all that. Just trying to put their hands on the makings, I expect.

DENNIS: I expect so.

THEY BREAK APART.

DENNIS: I must say, I do feel awkward about being here. I mean, I know we've no real choice. We couldn't have stayed in the cars, Jack was right about that. Even so, I don't think that gives us carte blanche to go around helping ourselves. Technically, we're trespassing.

JUDITH: I'm not so sure.

DENNIS: Pardon?

PAUSE.

JUDITH: Nothing.

DENNIS: Jude?

JUDITH: It's nothing. I promise.

DENNIS: It's me you're talking to. Not Jack.

JUDITH: I just..I don't know..I can't really explain it. I have this odd feeling that if the owners were alive, they wouldn't exactly be welcoming us with open arms.

DENNIS: If they were alive?

JUDITH: At home. If the owners were at home.

DENNIS: That's not what you said.

JUDITH: (SNAPPY.) It's what I meant.

DENNIS: Ok. I'm sorry.

JUDITH: Slip of the tongue.

DENNIS: Of course.

JUDITH: Anyone who chooses to live in such a bleak, out of the way spot, three miles, at least, from the nearest neighbours, is unlikely to welcome any sort of company, let alone a bunch of strangers appearing out of the fog.

DENNIS: I suppose not.

JUDITH: You're a people person. Would you want to live here?

DENNIS: Absolutely not.

JUDITH: There you are.

DENNIS: Yes.

JUDITH: That's all I meant. And like you, I feel a bit funny about being here.

DENNIS: Yes.

PAUSE.

JUDITH: I only hope the fog lifts before it's too late.

DENNIS: Too late?

JUDITH: Before Jack gets too drunk to drive our car.

DENNIS: I'm sure that won't happen. And I can always drive us all in ours. Come back tomorrow and pick yours up.

JUDITH: If you feel up to suggesting that to Jack, you're welcome to try.

DENNIS: Hopefully the fog will lift as quickly as it came down.

PAUSE.

JUDITH: Dennis.

DENNIS: Yes?

JUDITH: Just..be careful. While we're in this house.

DENNIS: What makes you say that?

JUDITH: I don't know. I can't explain it. You may be right, about us being trespassers. But we're here for a reason.

DENNIS: Jude, you mustn't let Jack hear you talking like that. You know how cross he gets.

JUDITH: To hell with Jack. He doesn't understand and he never will.

ENTER CONNIE, CLOSELY FOLLOWED BY JACK.
THERE IS THE MEREST HINT THAT THERE HAS
BEEN SOME DISARRANGEMENT OF THEIR
CLOTHING.

CONNIE: That kitchen is heavenly. Such rustic simplicity. I love it. Dennis, I want you to go in there and memorize every detail. I want a kitchen just like it at home.

DENNIS: Why? You so seldom venture into the one we have now.

CONNIE: Oh, what's that got to do with anything? Don't be obtuse.

DENNIS: I'm not going to spend money building a new kitchen that'll never be used.

CONNIE: We never use the bedroom, but we still had it decorated.

AWKWARD SILENCE.

JUDITH: Any luck with tea?

JACK: Ah. Tea. Yes. No.

JUDITH: Oh.

JACK: Can't be helped, I'm afraid.

JUDITH: Oh well.

CONNIE: There's a lovely ancient-looking range, which had been lit, so we started heating a pan of water and then discovered there's no tea.

JUDITH: It really doesn't matter.

CONNIE: Or milk or sugar.

JACK: While we were rootling around, we did come across an array of tins of indeterminate age or contents. Pretty antique, some of them. More your province than mine, Dennis, but I think they might be army issue.

DENNIS: Why is that my province?

JACK: Well, you know. With your little historical dabblings.

DENNIS: My studies are not dabblings.

CONNIE: More like all-consuming obsessions.

DENNIS: I think we all know that you don't share my enthusiasm for history, Connie.

CONNIE: You wouldn't believe the amount of time my husband has spent poring over family trees and local archives, only to find out that his ancestors were just as boring as him.

DENNIS: As we are going to be stuck here for the foreseeable future, shall we at least try to be civil to one another? We're not at home now.

CONNIE: It's your fault we're stuck here! If you hadn't dragged us all out here to see some bits of wood poking out of a mudflat, we could be stranded in a nice pub.

DENNIS: Those bits of wood, as you well know, are possibly the remains of a shipwreck of great historical importance.

CONNIE: And you're an amateur historian of absolutely no importance. Why the hell did you need to see it?

JACK: Connie..

CONNIE: What? You don't have to live with it. He's turned my entire life into a giant school trip. We can't even go to the supermarket without timetabling in a visit to the grave of some obscure poet or the site of a minor Civil War skirmish. It drives me nuts. Everything has to be planned to the nth degree. You should see the itinerary he's got for this week. I mean, after the shipwreck, if the fog hadn't come down, we were due to visit three churches, two Martello towers and a motte and bloody bailey castle before we were allowed to clock off. But don't worry. We won't miss 'em. When we get back to the hotel, he'll spend all evening re-doing tomorrow's schedule so we can fit in what we couldn't do today. It'll mean spending a little less time at the windmill and the corn dolly museum, but it can't be helped.

DENNIS: Have you finished?

CONNIE: Are you worried your head'll fall off if you do something spontaneous? I need a drink.

DENNIS: I really think you've had enough, don't you?

CONNIE: Will you for God's sake stop nursemaiding me? What do you think drove me to drink in the first place? Jack?

JACK: No, I think perhaps I'd better not.

CONNIE: Oh shut up. You're having one.

JACK: Well, just a very small one.

CONNIE: We're on holiday. Let's start having some fun.

THERE IS SILENCE AS SHE POURS DRINKS.

JUDITH: (LOOKING OUT OF THE WINDOW.) Thicker than ever now.

JACK: (JOINING HER.) Well, that settles it.

JUDITH: Settles what?

JACK: Connie and I were talking in the kitchen. We've no idea how long this is going to keep up, and we've still got a car full of bits and bobs from the picnic.

CONNIE: We've even got tea, Jude. I always bring my own because the stuff in hotels is usually so filthy.

JACK: So let's get the supplies in, and make ourselves comfortable. No point being hungry and thirsty on top of everything else.

JUDITH: No. We can't stay here.

JACK: Sweetheart, I don't want to be here any more than you, but we are here, and we might as well make the best of it.

JUDITH: I think we should try to leave.

JACK: We'll end up in the sea. I, for one, am not even going to attempt driving in this. It's ridiculous. Besides which, it's, what is it? Five-thirty. It's going to start getting dark soon.

JUDITH: Not for ages.

DENNIS: Sunset is at twenty-seven minutes past seven.

THEY ALL LOOK AT HIM.

DENNIS: Well, it is.

JUDITH: I don't want to stay here.

CONNIE: None of us wants to stay here, but there's no point moping about it.

DENNIS: It strikes me that there's a flaw in your plan.

JACK: And what is that, Professor?

DENNIS: How are we going to get to and from the cars? If we can't see them.

JACK: One thing we did lay our hands on in the kitchen is a large ball of twine. If we secure one end to the front door, and pay it out à la Theseus, we'll be fine. Can't guarantee that we'll actually find the cars, of course, but at least we'll stay in touch with the house.

DENNIS: Hmm. Maybe.

JACK: Perhaps, as an added safety precaution, the womenfolk can stand at the door and make noises.

CONNIE: What sort of noises?

JACK: I thought hymns might be fitting.

CONNIE: Hymns?

DENNIS: How about 'For Those in Peril on the Sea'?

JACK: Now you're getting into the spirit, Professor. Now, if you're agreeable, I'll go and get the twine.

DENNIS: When you say 'we'..

JACK: I'm not going out there on my own.

DENNIS: Right.

JACK: Even your help is preferable to none at all.

DENNIS: Thanks.

JACK: Good. That's settled, then.

HE GOES.

JUDITH: Dennis, we'll end up staying all night if he has his way.

DENNIS: He's right, Jude. We can't think of trying to get away.

JUDITH: We can't stay. You've got to make him see sense.

CONNIE: What are you talking about?

DENNIS: He'll say that the sensible thing is to stay here and not risk our necks on the road. And, I'm sorry, Jude, but I agree with him.

CONNIE: Is this only for brothers and sisters, or can anyone join in?

JUDITH: Connie, I..this is very hard. Please don't laugh at me. I sometimes, and I know this might sound a bit fantastical to you, but I have very strong feelings about places.

CONNIE: Right.

JUDITH: It's been happening to me since I was a little girl, Dennis will tell you. (PAUSE.) Today it's almost overwhelming, and, I can't tell you exactly why, but I can feel with absolute certainty that we are in grave danger if we stay here.

CONNIE: I didn't think my holiday spirits could be lowered any further.

JUDITH: I'm serious, Connie.

CONNIE: Yes. I know. May I ask a question?

JUDITH: Yes.

CONNIE: I just wondered. I don't suppose these paranormal gifts of yours extend as far as telling you the nature of the dangers facing us, do they? So we know what to look out for.

JUDITH: No.

CONNIE: Not much use then, are they?

DENNIS: Connie!

CONNIE: No, I'm sorry, Dennis. This situation is bad enough without your crazy sister cooking up doomy prognostications about unspecified lurking danger. I mean, in what way is that helpful?

JUDITH: I don't expect you to believe me. I can't prove it, but I am not crazy. How dare you?

ENTER JACK.

JACK: Twine! (PAUSE.) What?

CONNIE: Ask your wife.

JACK: Judith?

SHE LOOKS AWAY FROM HIM.

PAUSE.

JACK: Oh God. I was afraid of this. Are you having vibrations again, dear?

JUDITH: Don't make fun of me, Jack!

JACK: I was wondering when this would happen. It's getting so that we can't go into a building more than a year old without Judith vibrating all over the place. What is it this time?

CONNIE: Apparently we're all in mortal danger if we stay here.

JACK: You don't say? Funny that. Why are houses always hostile, Judith? Just once it would be nice if you said, 'Actually, this house quite likes us and would like to give us some chocolate'.

JUDITH: Do you think I enjoy this, Jack? I don't want to be burdened with these feelings, but I can't help it. Don't treat me like I'm a simpleton.

JACK: Look. Being trapped here is very far from making it onto my list of top ten holiday experiences. But, I, for one, am doing what little I can to make the best of it. So I suggest that we all try to relax, get some supplies from the cars and hope that the fog

lifts before we all become hysterical. Because I'll tell you this: whatever 'dangers' are lying in wait in this house, they are as nothing compared with what will happen if we try to leave in this weather. So, as far as I'm concerned, if a few headless Elizabethans want to rattle their chains at me, they can.

JUDITH: You're doing it again.

JACK: I'm sorry, but..Come here.(SHE DOESN'T MOVE.) Come here.

HE SHRUGS AND GOES TO HER, TAKES HER IN HIS ARMS AND KISSES HER. SHE DOESN'T REALLY JOIN IN.

JACK: It'll be fine. You'll see. The sea fogs never last for long. We'll be out of here in no time. Trust your old man.

JUDITH: Why should I? You don't believe me.

JACK: I believe that you believe it. Best I can do. Sorry.

SHE PULLS AWAY FROM HIM.

DENNIS: Come on, Jude. Jack's right. Deep down, you know he is. We'll be fine. We'll have a nice, cosy little picnic in here and then maybe it'll be clear enough for us to push off. None of us wants to be here any longer than necessary.

CONNIE: Hear, hear.

JUDITH SMILES WANLY.

JACK: Right. Well, this isn't getting the baby bathed. Dennis? Ready for an adventure?

DENNIS: I should say so.

JACK: Jolly good. Now, we need a good strong knot to fasten this to the front door. Don't want any mishaps.

CONNIE: I'll do it. I was a Girl Guide. I can do knots for all occasions.

JACK: You were a Girl Guide?

CONNIE: Yes.

JACK: Now, that I really don't believe.

CONNIE: One of the most valuable lessons Brown Owl taught me was how to break a man's arm. So that's enough of your lip.

SHE GRABS THE TWINE AND STARTS TO GO.

JACK: (GOING.) I don't know about you, Dennis, but I find today's female quite terrifying.

CONNIE: You don't know the half of it.

SHE FOLLOWS JACK OFF.

PAUSE.

DENNIS: You going to be alright, little one?

JUDITH: I expect so. Jack always has to be right about everything. I just hope to God he is, this time.

DENNIS: I'm sure he is.

JUDITH: This place. It's so full of noise and sadness. Something terrible happened in here, Dennis.

DENNIS: It's a very old house, Jude. I should think it's seen allsorts.

JUDITH: You know that's not what I mean.

DENNIS: I know.

ENTER JACK AND CONNIE.

JACK: She wasn't exaggerating. A real dab hand at tying things up. You're a lucky man.

DENNIS: I beg your pardon?

JACK: Nothing. Ready?

DENNIS: Yes. Any special requests while we're out there?

JUDITH: No.

CONNIE: I'd like my hot water bottle, please.

DENNIS: Good idea. Anything else?

THEY SHAKE THEIR HEADS.

DENNIS: Right. (HE GOES TO THE DOORWAY.) I'm just stepping out. I may be gone for some time.

JACK: Dennis! Not Captain Oates, for God's sake! Or are you intending not to come back?

DENNIS: Sorry.

JACK: Give me strength.

HE GOES. DENNIS FOLLOWS.

DENNIS: Wish us luck.

JUDITH AND CONNIE GO AND STAND IN THE DOORWAY, LOOKING INTO THE HALLWAY.

PAUSE.

CONNIE: Was Jack serious about us singing hymns, do you think?

JUDITH: I'm never quite sure whether he's being serious or not.

CONNIE: I expect that can get a bit irritating.

JUDITH: A bit. Keeps me on my toes.

CONNIE: There's never any doubt about when Dennis is being serious. Never any doubt about anything. Was he like that as a kid?

JUDITH: A bit. We were a very chaotic family. He didn't like that. When it all got too much he'd retreat into his room. It was so orderly in there. Nothing out of place. Bit weird for a small boy. Mum used to say, "Dennis, you go upstairs at once and untidy your bedroom".

CONNIE: Really?

JUDITH LOOKS AT HER AND SMILES.

CONNIE: Sorry. (PAUSE.) And I'm sorry about before.

JUDITH: It's alright.

CONNIE: I was very unkind.

JUDITH: Oh, I don't really blame you. People generally think I'm a crackpot. I shouldn't have said anything.

CONNIE: Yes, you should. If this place is freaking you out, you have every right to say so. It gives me the heebie-jeebies a bit, too. So. I'm sorry.

PAUSE.

JUDITH: Do you think they're alright?

LONG PAUSE. THEY LOOK ANXIOUSLY TOWARDS THE FRONT DOOR.

CONNIE: I don't care if he was serious or not.

SHE STARTS SHOUTING FOR JACK AND DENNIS. JUDITH JOINS IN. AFTER A WHILE THEY TAIL OFF AND GO QUIET. FOG BEGINS TO CREEP INTO THE HALLWAY.

JACK: (OFF.) Here's the first lot.

CONNIE: Where's Dennis?

DENNIS: (OFF.) Here I am.

THEY ALL ENTER. THE MEN HAVE VARIOUS BOXES AND BAGS.

DENNIS: Here's all the stuff we need from your car, I think. Very tricky out there, working out what was what. Couldn't see what was rubbish and what wasn't.

JACK: First thing tomorrow, I'm giving that car a proper going over.

JUDITH: Can I have that in writing?

JACK: You can have it in triplicate, my love.

CONNIE: Won't have that problem with our car. Everything stowed meticulously in order of likely necessity. And for once, Dennis, I applaud you.

GIVES HIM A KISS.

DENNIS: I'm glad to know I have my uses.

JACK HANDS JUDITH A SMALL BOTTLE OF PILLS.

JACK: Thought you might need these. Right. Ready for another go?

DENNIS: Roger that. I must say, your string thing works a treat.

JACK: Yes, well, we've reached the outer limits of my inventiveness. There's no more where that came from.

CONNIE: Come on, you two heroes, get on with it. Fog's coming in.

DENNIS: Oh crikey. Yes. Better push the door to behind us.

CONNIE: Be careful.

DENNIS: Oh, it's a doddle now we've got the hang of it. Back in no time.

THE MEN GO.

CONNIE: I'll do the door.

SHE FOLLOWS. JUDITH LOOKS ANXIOUSLY AROUND. CONNIE COMES BACK.

CONNIE: Come on, Jude. We girlies had better see what we can do with the spoils the big hunter-gatherers have brought.

JUDITH SMILES AND THEY START UNPACKING.

CONNIE: You must admit, this is quite fun, in an odd sort of way. There's something quite thrilling about being cut off from everything. It's as if it's just us in the world. Anything could be going on back at home and we wouldn't know a thing about it. I think the only danger we're in is of turning into characters from Enid Blyton.

CONNIE UNWRAPS A CAKE.

CONNIE: Yummy.

JUDITH: It's Victoria sponge. Hope that's ok.

CONNIE: Did you make this?

JUDITH: Yes. I thought we might need sustenance on some of Dennis's excursions.

CONNIE: Wow. Jack's so lucky to have you.

JUDITH: Well..

CONNIE: No, he is. I'm such a dead loss. I've even managed to cock-up those just-add-water cake-mixes in my time. Poor Dennis.

JUDITH: I'm sure you make up for it in other ways.

CONNIE: And what exactly do you mean by that?

JUDITH: Nothing.

CONNIE: Good.

SHE OPENS A TUPPERWARE BOX.

CONNIE: Oh, God, you've made biscuits, as well. That really isn't playing the game, Jude.

A LOUD THUD. JUDITH JUMPS.

CONNIE: (LAUGHING.) Relax, Jude. It's only them.

SHE GETS UP AND GOES OUT. JACK APPEARS IN THE DOORWAY WITH A CARDBOARD BOX, CONNIE BEHIND HIM.

JACK: This is brilliant, Judith. Three kinds of tea. Proper coffee. Cafetiere. Milk in its own little coolbag. Four mugs. Fantastic. You think of everything, Connie.

CONNIE: Dennis thinks of everything.

JACK: Yes, I know. Well, I'll just go and park this little lot in the kitchen.

JUDITH: Where is Dennis?

JACK: Well, he was right behind me.

CONNIE: You mean he's out there on his own?

JACK: Don't worry. He's perfectly capable of finding his own way back. I did.

CONNIE: That's not the point. You shouldn't have left him.

JACK: I honestly didn't think I had. Look, I'll dump this and I'll go out and find him.

EXIT JACK. CONNIE HOVERS IN THE DOORWAY.

JUDITH: Dennis is the last person on earth to do anything rash. You know that.

CONNIE: I know.

PAUSE.

CONNIE: I can't bear this.

SHE RUSHES OUT.

JUDITH: Connie..

JACK COMES BACK.

JACK: Right. Back in a mo. You ok?

JUDITH: Yeah. (SMILES.)

CONNIE COMES BACK WITH A FACE LIKE THUNDER.

CONNIE: String's gone.

JACK/JUDITH: What?

CONNIE: Must've come undone.

JACK: How?

CONNIE: I don't know.

JUDITH RUSHES OUT. WE HEAR HER CALLING FOR DENNIS UNDER THE FOLLOWING:

JACK: I thought you were a bloody Girl Guide.

CONNIE: I was thrown out.

JACK: What for?

CONNIE: What the hell does it matter what for? What are you going to do about it?

JACK: I don't know.

CONNIE: You'll have to go out and look for him.

JACK: I'm not going out there.

CONNIE: What?

JACK: He's got the string. There's no point in both of us blundering around like blind men.

CONNIE: You coward.

JACK: I am not a coward. He's your husband. If you're so worried about him, you go.

CONNIE: I'm not going out there.

JACK: I see. Not that worried, then. Wasn't you who undid the string was it?

CONNIE: What did you say?

JACK: Nothing.

SHE SLAPS HIM. PAUSE. THEY KISS. JUDITH COMES BACK IN. THEY BREAK APART GUILTILY.

JUDITH: Are you to going to come and help, or are you just going to stand around chatting?

JACK AND CONNIE SHAMEFACEDLY FOLLOW HER OUT AND START SHOUTING. NO ANSWER. THEY GO QUIET. FOG CREEPS IN AGAIN. THEY SHOUT SOME MORE, A LITTLE HALF-HEARTEDLY THIS TIME. THEY COME BACK IN.

JUDITH: Nothing.

CONNIE: (TO JUDITH.) What are we going to do?

JACK: I don't see that there's anything much we can do.

CONNIE: (STILL TO JUDITH.) Anything could happen to him out there.

JUDITH: I knew we shouldn't have stayed.

JACK: For God's sake, Judith.

JUDITH: Well, look what's happened.

JACK: We don't know that anything has happened.

JUDITH: How can you be so relaxed?

JACK: Because Dennis is a very intelligent man and quite capable of looking after himself. Why do you always assume the worst? For all we know, he was by the cars when the string came adrift. He's probably sitting in one of them now, perfectly safe.

PAUSE.

JUDITH: We can't just stand around doing nothing. Was there any more string in the kitchen?

JACK: No.

JUDITH: I'm going to look for some. Connie?

CONNIE: What?

JUDITH: I don't want to go on my own.

CONNIE ROLLS HER EYES. JUDITH GOES AND
CONNIE STARTS TO FOLLOW.

JACK: You may as well make tea while you're out there. I expect he'll want a cup when he comes in.

CONNIE COMES BACK.

CONNIE: Don't.

JACK: You've changed your tune.

CONNIE: How dare you?

JACK: I thought you couldn't stand the sight of him. Or have you been lying to me too?

CONNIE: Shut up, Jack. I mean it.

JACK: Trapped in a marriage to a man who bores you to tears, isn't that it? You can't leave him, of course, because he's rich..

CONNIE: I'm warning you.

JACK: ..and you're naturally afraid he'd leave you high and dry. Far better to be a widow than a divorcee, and you've got to take your chances when they come, I understand that. He might be face down in a mudflat, by now, and everyone would think it was an accident.

CONNIE: If you don't shut up, I swear..

JACK: What? You're surely not contemplating doing us both in, in one night?

CONNIE: Why are you doing this?

JACK: Why did you untie the string?

CONNIE: I hate you.

JACK: I think I'll get over it.

CONNIE: I must have been mad.

JACK: Do I take it you've changed your mind about leaving him?

CONNIE: Shut up.

JACK: Mind you, it looks as if you might not need to.

CONNIE LUNGES AT HIM. HE LAUGHS AND
PUSHES HER AWAY.

JACK: Better not leave Judith alone with her phantoms.

JUDITH SCREAMS OFFSTAGE.

CONNIE: Jude?

JACK: What the hell?

JUDITH RUNS ON.

CONNIE: What is it?

JUDITH: There was a hand. At the kitchen window.

JACK: Did it have a wedding ring on it by any chance?

CONNIE: Eh?

JACK: It'll be Dennis.

CONNIE: What? At the back of the house?

JACK RUNS OFF TO THE KITCHEN, AND STARTS
SHOUTING FOR DENNIS. JUDITH AND CONNIE
EXIT TO THE DOOR AND SHOUT. THEY COME BACK
AFTER A WHILE. DENNIS APPEARS SILENTLY
CARRYING A WOODEN BOX OF BOOKS AND A HOT
WATER BOTTLE.

DENNIS: Golly. That wasn't much fun. Hot water bottle.

CONNIE RUNS AND HUGS HIM. JACK ENTERS.

JACK: No sign of him, the silly arse. Oh, there you
are.

CONNIE: What happened?

DENNIS: I was on my way back and I tripped over
something. Pulled the string off the door. Been
staggering about out there trying to find my way
back.

CONNIE: Thank God you're safe.

DENNIS: You really can't see a dicky-bird out there. I knew if I kept gravel underfoot, I'd have a chance. Pure luck that I went in the right direction and bumped into a bit of the house. I must have gone all the way round it before I found the door.

JACK: I thought you were right behind me.

DENNIS: I was. Thought I'd better go back for these.

CONNIE: You put us all through that for a box of bloody books?

SHE ANGRILY PUSHES HIM AWAY.

CONNIE: Anything could have happened to you out there. You idiot.

DENNIS: But it didn't, did it?

JUDITH: Please don't do anything like that again.

DENNIS: I'm sorry.

JACK: You gave us all a fright.

DENNIS: It wasn't exactly a picnic for me.

JUDITH: What were you thinking?

DENNIS: Well, I've got this map, and one or two reference books about the area. I thought it might be useful to know where we are. For when the fog lifts.

JACK: We'll be able to see where we are when the fog lifts.

DENNIS: At any rate, it'll help pass the time until that happens.

CONNIE: How thrilling.

DENNIS: You never know. Old house like this might be mentioned.

CONNIE: It'll certainly be mentioned in books in the future. The house in which, one foggy night, three people died of boredom. I'm going to make tea.

CONNIE GRABS THE HOT WATER BOTTLE AND GOES.

PAUSE.

JACK: Married life still as blissful as ever, Dennis?

DENNIS: I have no complaints.

JACK: Really? How long's it been now? Three years, is it?

DENNIS: Four.

JACK: Four? Good God, is it really? Four years, Judith. That means we've been married five.

JUDITH: Yes, I know, dear.

DENNIS STARTS LOOKING AT HIS MAP.

JACK: Hardly seems possible, does it?

JUDITH: No.

DENNIS: Either of you notice the name of this place?

JUDITH: Marsh House. There was a sign over the door.

DENNIS: That's what I thought.

JACK: If you look for a house in a marsh, that'll be us.

DENNIS: That's just it. It isn't where it's supposed to be.

JACK: You're obviously looking in the wrong place.

DENNIS: No, I'm not. I've marked exactly where the wreck was, and according to this, there's nothing for miles around.

ENTER CONNIE WITH A TEA TRAY AND THE HOT WATER BOTTLE, WHICH SHE CHUCKS ONTO A CHAIR.

CONNIE: Tea.

JACK: Splendid.

CONNIE: What's going on?

JACK: Oh nothing. The Professor can't find us on the map.

CONNIE: (BLANKING HIM.) So you've bought a crap map.

DENNIS: On the contrary. These chaps are very accurate. Famous for it.

CONNIE: I suggest you write a stiff letter to someone. Is anyone going to have any tea?

JACK: I am.

JUDITH: Let me see, Dennis.

JACK: Judith?

JUDITH: Oh, yes please.

JACK STARTS TO POUR.

DENNIS: Here's where we should be. Just here.

JACK HANDS TEA TO JUDITH.

JUDITH: Thanks love.

JACK: Connie, my love?

CONNIE: Yes.

JACK POURS AND HANDS HER HER TEA. SHE TAKES IT AND SAYS NOTHING.

JACK: You're welcome.

JUDITH: What's that?

DENNIS: That's the odd thing. I think that's exactly where we are. But it's just marked down as a ruin.

JACK: It's not exactly Buckingham Palace, I grant you, but it's not that bad. Dennis.

HE HANDS DENNIS SOME TEA. DENNIS TAKES IT WITHOUT LOOKING UP.

DENNIS: Thank you.

JACK: Anyone care to join me in a slice of Judith's magnificent sponge cake?

DENNIS: Yes please.

JUDITH: Not for me, thanks. I couldn't eat a thing.

CONNIE: Connie?

SHE JUST LOOKS AT HIM, THEN GOES AND LOOKS OUT OF THE WINDOW.

JACK: Suit yourself.

JACK CUTS CAKE FOR HIMSELF AND DENNIS UNDER THE FOLLOWING. DENNIS TAKES HIS PIECE, BUT DOES NOT EAT IT.

DENNIS: It really is the damndest thing. I've never known them to make a mistake before.

CONNIE: So what? They probably came out here, took one look at it and couldn't be bothered to map it properly.

DENNIS: I don't think that's very likely.

CONNIE: It was a joke. For God's sake.

JUDITH: I expect it's just a misprint.

DENNIS: Hmm. I expect so. (SUDDENLY NOTICING CAKE IN HIS HAND.) Oh. Thanks Jack.

JACK: C'est mon plaisir.

HE TAKES A BOOK FROM THE BOX.

DENNIS: Let's see if there's anything in here.

CONNIE: Do let's.

JACK GOES AND SITS IN THE SEAT CONNIE'S HOT WATER BOTTLE IS ON.

DENNIS: There's a whole chapter.

CONNIE: Give me strength.

JACK: How's the fog, Connie, old love?

CONNIE: Dense and impenetrable. Just like you.

JACK: Do you know this hot water bottle of yours is stone cold? Shall I go and hot it up for you?

CONNIE RUSHES OVER AND TRIES TO GRAB IT.

CONNIE: Give it here.

JACK: It's no trouble. Anything for you, Connie. You know that.

CONNIE: Give it here. Now!

JACK: No need to get in a bate. It's only a hot water bottle.

CONNIE: No it isn't!

SHE KICKS HIM IN THE SHIN.

JACK: Ow!

HE LETS GO.

CONNIE: Thank you.

JACK: For crying out loud! Did you see that, Dennis?

DENNIS: (NOSE IN BOOK.) What's that?

JACK: Your wife just kicked me.

DENNIS: Did she? Good, good.

JUDITH: Please don't kick my husband, Connie. That's my prerogative.

JACK: Oh well. If you're all just going to gang up.

HE GETS UP AND WALKS TO THE WINDOW.

CONNIE: Sorry Jude. Would you like to kick Dennis?

JUDITH: Not especially.

CONNIE: Well I owe you one. Any time. No need to ask.

PAUSE. THEY DRINK TEA.

DENNIS: This is fascinating. Listen.

NO-ONE REALLY DOES. THEY'RE ALL IN THEIR OWN LITTLE WORLDS.

DENNIS: "Marsh House was built in the early part of the Eighteenth Century." There. What did I say? "There is no record extant of who built it, or why they chose such a lonely and desolate spot. Clinging to a bleak promontory half a mile from the coast road, the house was surrounded on three sides by rushing tides and constantly shifting sands. It was regularly engulfed by dense sea fogs which would frequently remain for days at a time."

CONNIE: Terrific. If only these people had a phone, we could call and cancel the hotel.

DENNIS: "The first mention of the house in local records dates from 1749 and it already had a baleful reputation. There were reports of diabolical screams and ghostly lights seen dancing in the dead of night. One rumour at the time was that the first Earl of Kesford had had the house built as a safe place to enforce his *droit de seigneur* with any unfortunate local maiden who happened to take his fancy.

"A more probable explanation was that it was a receiving house for gangs of smugglers who encouraged stories about the house to ensure that prying eyes kept away."

CONNIE: Do you see, Dennis? Even then people understood the pitfalls of prying eyes.

DENNIS: I don't think we're in any immediate danger from smugglers.

CONNIE: It would liven things up a bit.

DENNIS: (TO THE OTHERS.) Shall I carry on?

CONNIE: No.

DENNIS: "The house maintained its reputation well into the Nineteenth Century even though it appears to have fallen into disuse in around 1800."

CONNIE: I wish your mouth would fall into disuse.

DENNIS: Charming. Can you think of another way to pass the time?

CONNIE: Yes. I spy with my little eye, something beginning with..F.

JACK: Fog. Carry on, Dennis.

DENNIS: Thank you, Jack.

CONNIE: It isn't fog!

DENNIS: "A pall of fear once more descended.."

CONNIE: It isn't fog! We haven't finished the game.

JACK: We haven't started the game. Dennis.

CONNIE: Jude. You want him to stop, surely.

JUDITH: I wasn't really listening.

CONNIE: There. She's not listening. No point in carrying on.

JACK: If she's not listening her vote doesn't count. You're outnumbered. Dennis.

CONNIE STOMPS AWAY AND SITS WITH HER BACK TO THEM.

DENNIS: "A pall of fear once more descended on that section of the coast with the arrival in 1840 of a prison ship moored half a mile from the shore. It was a leaky vessel in every sense and the local settlements became all too familiar with the melancholy sound of the prison ship's barrage being fired off to warn of another escape.

"In 1841, Marsh House was refurbished to accommodate one Captain Glover, governor of the prison ship, and his young wife Alice. Fortunately for the historian, Alice was an assiduous correspondent, filling the empty, desolate hours with letter writing. Much of

her correspondence has survived, no doubt as a direct consequence of the notorious and macabre events which were to overwhelm her."

HE STOPS AND READS SILENTLY FOR A BIT.

CONNIE: Well?

DENNIS: What?

CONNIE: You can't just stop there.

DENNIS: I thought you wanted me to stop.

CONNIE: Don't be obtuse. Come on. Macabre events.

DENNIS: (LOOKING AT JUDITH.) The rest isn't very interesting.

CONNIE: You are a useless liar. Give it here.

DENNIS: No.

SHE TRIES TO GRAB THE BOOK. THEY STRUGGLE WITH IT.

DENNIS: Just leave it.

CONNIE: Give me the book, Dennis.

DENNIS: Was it furniture?

CONNIE: Was what furniture?

DENNIS: Something beginning with F.

CONNIE: We're not playing I spy. How old are you?

SHE SLAPS HIS HAND. HE LETS GO.

CONNIE: Thank you. "A year after the Glovers moved into Marsh House, Alice gave birth to a baby son, who tragically was only the first of three to be carried off in early infancy by consumption brought by the damp. As joy gave way to despair he marriage became increasingly rancorous. Captain Glover was utterly grief-stricken by the loss of his sons and sought solace in the bottle. It can be readily inferred from several of Alice's letters that he blamed her lack of skill as a mother for the deaths of his children and

that he struck her on a number of occasions when he was in his cups.

"In the winter months of 1845, Alice's writings became more rambling and desperate as her husband became drunker and more violent. On the 26th of October, the powder keg finally exploded." I'm not surprised. That poor woman. If any man tried that with me..

JACK: No man would dare.

CONNIE: Good. "On that night, as Captain Glover lay in a drunken stupor in the parlour of Marsh House, one Jacob Jones, an inmate of the prison awaiting transportation for stealing a man's coat, escaped. By the time his absence was noted, and the barrage fired off, a thick fog had descended."

WHILE SHE READS THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPH,
SHE PICKS UP THE CAKE KNIFE AND CUTS
HERSELF A SLICE.

"As soon as it lifted the next morning, two warders rowed ashore to alert the Captain. Outside the house, they were greeted by the hysterical Alice and on entering they found the blood-boltered corpse of Captain Glover, whose chest had been repeatedly cut open."

JUDITH HAS STARTED TO WEEP SILENTLY. ONLY
DENNIS NOTICES.

DENNIS: I think that'll do now, Connie.

CONNIE: You must be joking. "Alice told the men that the escaped convict, Jones, had forced his way into the house and brutally murdered her husband as he slept. She had narrowly escaped death herself, she said, by running out into the fog where she had stayed for the remainder of that freezing night.

"Jones was swiftly apprehended, and naturally denied ever having set foot in Marsh House, claiming instead, that he had passed the night in a barn further up the coast. One anomalous aspect of the case was that while Jones' prison fatigues were clean of even the least speck of blood, Alice's dress was

caked in it. She explained this in Court by stating that when she re-entered the house after seeing Jones leave, she had unthinkingly embraced her husband's body.

"Jones vehemently protested his innocence, but as far as the jury was concerned it was an open and shut case. He was hanged a fortnight later, claiming even as the noose tightened around his neck, that he had been wronged.

"Two days after the execution, Alice Glover was found staggering down the coast road in a state of mental derangement. Her dress and hands had been repeatedly cut with a knife and she cried out that it was she who had slaughtered her husband and wildly beseeched forgiveness from Jacob Jones.

"Shortly thereafter she was committed to an insane asylum, where she died the following year. Some people believed that she had run mad after the shock of her witnessing the attack on her husband, but many more believed that she had killed him and that it was no more than he had deserved."

I couldn't agree more. Horrible man. And it all happened in this room. (SHE SHIVERS.) Makes you think.

JACK: I'm so glad you shared all that with us, Connie. It's going to make our time here so much more relaxing. (TO DENNIS.) And well done you for bringing the book in in the first place.

DENNIS: Sorry. Didn't know it would be anything like that.

JACK: Well it wasn't likely to say that Marsh House brought joy and fulfilment to everyone who crossed its threshold, was it?

DENNIS: Suppose not.

JUDITH: What else does it say?

CONNIE: Let's see. Nothing much. Just some stuff about it being empty for a bit and then..oh, about a year later it was taken over as a lookout post by the Army. Bit dull, the rest of it looks.

JUDITH: May I see?

CONNIE: Here.

DENNIS: Best not, eh, Jude? Put it to bed now. Do something else.

JUDITH: I'd like to read the rest of the chapter. Right. "Soldiers, however, are superstitious folk, and stories quickly began to circulate. It is certainly true that a disproportionate number of accidental deaths occurred there, and it was robustly maintained by many otherwise rational men, that each death was foreshadowed by the descent of a thick fog and the ghostly sound of a barrage being fired off.

"The last such story was reported as late as 1917. Marsh House had been taken over by the Army at the turn of the century and became a busy and important outpost for the duration of the Great War. On June 10th of that year, one Sergeant Walters wrote in his diary: 'I've had about enough of this bloody place. I'd sooner be back in Wipers. Two nights ago, we had a real pea-souper and we were all stuck indoors playing cards. Then we heard it, all of us, clear as you like. I said it must have been a bittern booming or something, but we all knew what it was. Private Coombs got in a right how d'you do about it. He'd heard it once before, he said, and the very next day one of his oppos was out mapping the sandbanks, when he fell overboard and was swept away by a fierce current. Well, yesterday, Private Coombs bought it, poor devil. Lost his footing in a rainstorm and drowned in quicksand. We tried to save him, but there was nothing we could do. I shall be hearing his screams in my sleep till the day I die. Someone should burn this bloody house.'

"Coincidentally, two days after Sergeant Walters wrote the entry, the house was destroyed by fire, and given its reputation the decision was made not to rebuild it.

"Here ends the grim narrative of Marsh House.."

JACK: Eh? Don't be daft. (HE PEERS OVER JUDITH'S SHOULDER.) There's another half page. Give it here. "Here ends the grim narrative of Marsh House, but for a curious

coda in the form of the following notice from the Kesford Parish Pump dated September 1959 and entitled, 'Marsh House Revisited: 'A sad and peculiar story reaches us of Signor Gianni Gioberti. Many of you will have fond memories of the eminent Italian maritime historian who visited us for a week recently to research reports of one of his country's vessels wrecked off our shores. Whilst pursuing his detective work, he reported being caught in a sudden thick sea fret, from which he insisted he had sheltered in a house called Marsh House'"...there you go.. "'and that furthermore, while alone in the house, he had heard distant gunfire. He was greatly amused to hear the folklore surrounding the house, and not a little surprised to hear that it had burned down forty years ago.

"We are therefore terribly upset to learn that Signor Gioberti, continuing his researches further up the coast, had chartered a small fishing boat, from which, while taking soundings in an otherwise calm sea, he was washed overboard by a freak wave. At the time of going to press, his body was yet to be recovered. While we are reluctant to give any credence whatever to the lurid history of Marsh House, we shall certainly think twice about venturing down to its ruins, particularly if fog is forecast.'"

LONG SILENCE.

JUDITH: Now shall we take our chances out there?

JACK: Wait, wait, wait. Just hang on. There's got to be some rational explanation.

JUDITH: Why?

JACK: Because I am not standing in a house which burned down before my parents were born. How can I be?

JUDITH: I don't know.

JACK: Hold on. (HE TURNS TO THE FRONT OF THE BOOK.) Ha! (HE SHOWS THE PAGE TO JUDITH.) This book was published twenty years ago. Somebody's obviously rebuilt it since then.

DENNIS: I don't know about that. The fabric of this house is old. Definitely.

JACK: Well..I expect it was one of those heritage projects. Rebuild with authentic materials.

JUDITH: But why rebuild a house with such a reputation?

JACK: I don't know, do I? But somebody manifestly has. Now, can we please move on? Fireplace.

THEY ALL GIVE HIM BLANK LOOKS.

JACK: Fireplace. Connie?

CONNIE: What? No.

JACK: Finial? Frame? (GOES TO HALLWAY.) Front door?

CONNIE: Flowers. On the wallpaper. And I'm not in the mood anymore.

JACK: Come on. I'll have a go.

AS HE SPEAKS WE HEAR A BARRAGE FIRING IN THE DISTANCE.

JACK: I spy with my little eye..

JUDITH: Listen.

JACK: ..something beginning with..T.

JUDITH: Shut up, Jack.

IT FIRES AGAIN, AS SHE SPEAKS.

JACK: Well, that's lovely, I must say.

AND AGAIN, A BIT LOUDER.

JACK: Come on. Something beginning with T.

JUDITH: Shut up!

HE DOES, AND THEY ALL HEAR IT PROPERLY. IT GETS LOUDER AND LOUDER AND THEY ALL LOOK TERRIFIED AS THE LIGHTS FADE.