

PRELUDE TO MURDER

A NEW PLAY BY
STAN THOMPSON

WHOM CAN YOU TRUST OR BELIEVE?

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PRELUDE TO MURDER

A new play in two acts, by Stan Thompson

Cast

James Downing	Mid-twenties - second violinist in a UK symphony orchestra - university-educated - well-spoken
Oliver (Ollie) Brooks	Mid-twenties - owner of an art gallery in Brighton - slightly camp disposition
Rupert (Rupe) Spencer	Late twenties - works in financial management in the city - met James at university
Emma (Emm) Spencer*	Early thirties - criminal defence barrister - highly self-opinionated – Rupert's wife
Charlene Hendry	Early twenties - works in the catering department of a UK barracks - decent, caring person
Kyle Jacobs	Mid-twenties - a soldier and Charlene Hendry's partner
Comisario Rafael Fernandez	Mid-fifties – Spanish, seasoned police inspector - attended boarding school and university in the UK - sardonic sense of humour - can be quite pedantic
Officer Eduardo Herrera	Late twenties – Spanish police officer - (no dialogue)
Valerie Stockton*	Late 50s/early 60s - mild theatrical deportment - imagine a Meryl Streep look-alike - speaks in an affected manner.
Elderly Woman	Early 60s – respectable-looking (no dialogue)

**Both characters are to be played by the same actress*

The characters and companies depicted in this play are fictitious.

Any similarity to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual companies is purely coincidental

Revised version, May 2018

BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Welcome to my play!

I hope you will enjoy reading it; it is essentially a light-hearted, old-fashioned murder mystery updated to a modern setting, with just a passing nod to Coward and Christie. It shouldn't be taken too seriously!

The action takes place on the wide terrace of a holiday apartment on the Canary Islands, over two days in mid-September, present day.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

The holiday apartment terrace, early afternoon, day one

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

The same holiday apartment terrace, two hours later, day one

ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

The same holiday apartment terrace, a little later, day one

ACT ONE, SCENE FOUR

The same holiday apartment terrace, early evening, day one

ACT ONE, SCENE FIVE

The same holiday apartment terrace, shortly before midnight, day one

ACT ONE, SCENE SIX

The same holiday apartment terrace, late morning, day two

INTERVAL

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

The same holiday apartment terrace, fifteen minutes later, day two

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

The same holiday apartment terrace, early afternoon, day two

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

The same holiday apartment terrace, twenty minutes later, day two

ACT TWO, SCENE FOUR

The same holiday apartment terrace, twilight, day two

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

At curtain rise, we are on the wide terrace of an apartment in a holiday complex adjacent to a swimming pool, with a view of the sea in the distance, on one of the Canary Islands. It is early afternoon in mid-September, present day. It is still very hot and the sunlight is harsh. There are background sounds of laughter, voices, seagulls and splashing from the nearby communal swimming pool.

The apartment terrace is furnished with two sun loungers, a large table with a parasol, four high-back chairs with cushions, and a small plastic side table. Two large cactus plants, in tubs, stand either side of the patio doors leading into the apartment.

The exterior walls of the apartment are painted brilliant white. The terrace tiles are cream terracotta. There are four exterior wall lights – two each side of the double patio doors, which are shaded by an internal vertical blind.

[THE SET, AS DESCRIBED ABOVE, REMAINS CONSTANT THROUGHOUT.]

James Downing is relaxing on one of the sun loungers. James is reading a trashy, crime thriller paperback. He is wearing a pair of khaki swim shorts, a white tee shirt and black Ray-Ban sunglasses. He is alone. A glass and a jug of Pimms sit atop the adjacent plastic side table. An expensive Armani sports bag rests on the tiles by James's side.

His gay best friend, Oliver (Ollie) Brooks is resting inside the apartment. The throb of club disco music, from within the apartment, leaks out onto the terrace.

WAIT 10 SECONDS AFTER CURTAIN UP BEFORE STARTING SPEECHES

OLLIE *(from within the apartment)* Where are you, James?

JAMES *(nonchalantly)* Out here, Ollie. Where else would I be?

OLLIE *(from within)* What are you doing?

JAMES *(exasperated)* Trying to read. *(He puts down his book and takes a long swig of Pimms)*

Enter OLLIE through the patio doors; he is wearing a pair of skimpy revealing underpants.

OLLIE *(standing by the patio doors)* God it's bloody hot.

JAMES *(spluttering his Pimms)* Put your shorts on, for God's sake! You'll frighten the children!

OLLIE *(surveying the area, stage right)* I can't see any children.

JAMES *continues reading his paperback.* OLLIE *exits in a huff back into the apartment.*

A moment.

Enter OLLIE, wearing a ghastly pair of Hawaiian shorts.

OLLIE *(annoyed)* Must you read? I am so bored. Let's go to that bar with the parrot outside. The barman's a real hunk. All hairy and muscles. Or let's rent a car and take a trip round the island. Do you think they have Ferraris for hire here?

JAMES *(not looking up from his book and raising his sunglasses)* I very much doubt it and you're forgetting that Rupe and Emm are dropping by later for drinks. *(a brief moment)* And I've booked a table for dinner afterwards.

OLLIE *(he sits on the adjacent sun lounger and pouts)* Oh hell, I didn't realise it was tonight we're meeting up. *(he sighs)* That's just what I need – a round of verbal fisticuffs with the 'Wicked Witch of the West'.

JAMES You know, Emm's not as bad as you seem to make out.....

OLLIE You only say that because she turns up at your concerts, like some 'classical groupie'. *(petulantly)* Well, I hate the bitch.

JAMES *(irritated and snapping shut his book)* The truth is, Ollie, you hate all women. There's a word for your kind.

OLLIE I don't hate **all** women. I loved my Aunt Daphne to bits and I got on fairly well with my mother, I think.

JAMES Really? But you haven't seen nor heard from her in years?

OLLIE I still get the occasional postcard. Last I heard, she was in Santorini. Or was it San Francisco? Anyway, Emma's such a nasty cow. I don't know how Rupe puts up with her.

JAMES So, nothing to do with the fact that you're still in love with Rupe, by any chance?

OLLIE *(standing up and looking away)* I'm still very fond of him. But I'm not sure if I'm in love with him. *(contemplative)* Maybe I never was.....

JAMES *(looking directly at Ollie)* Well, your time with Rupe was hardly a bed of roses - it was shaky from the outset – you had no job – no money – and you were struggling to make ends meet in a pokey rented room on the wrong side of Brighton. It was only down to Rupe's generosity and mine, come to that, that you managed to stay afloat.

- OLLIE** Yes, and I will never forget all the support you and Rupe gave me. My life has changed so much now. If only I could have a second chance with him.
- JAMES** But he did marry Emm. He **chose** to marry her. And it always puzzles me why you detest her so much. I think she's a lovely caring person.
- OLLIE** Their marriage is a travesty. And I know for a fact that he's still in love with me. He may pretend otherwise, but he can't hide his feelings. I know he still wants me. I just know it.
- JAMES** *(riled)* For God's sake, Ollie! Just listen to yourself! Must you always be so melodramatic and self-centred? Give it a rest.
- OLLIE** *(quietly)* Everyone loves Ollie.
- JAMES** *(returning to his book)* You wish.....
- OLLIE** *(a moment)* What are you reading?
- JAMES** A crime thriller I found under the bed.
- OLLIE** Is it any good?
- JAMES** It's absolutely brilliant. It's all about this devilishly, handsome young musician called James, who murders his irritating, shallow best mate, Oliver, by whacking him over the head with a priceless Stradivarius, in a holiday apartment on the Canary Islands.
- OLLIE** That's not very funny.
- JAMES** I thought it was hilarious.
- OLLIE** *(something catches his attention stage left)* God it's that hideous Essex couple, Kyle and Charlene, we bumped into at the airport, down by the pool. I don't know why you kept talking to them. I just wanted a quiet drink. Don't look over as they might come and bore us again.
- JAMES** I thought they were a decent, down to earth couple. And, by the way, I had a lovely chat with Charlene in the bar last night, while you were out clubbing. She told me she was worried about her Kyle. He keeps going off and doing his own thing.
- OLLIE** *(intrigued)* Really? Well I'm not surprised – he probably needs to get away from her incessant whingeing.
- [cue sound effect]*
- (A baby screams and cries off set)*

(irritated) That wretched brat again. Kept me awake most of the night with its whimpering.

JAMES Well It didn't bother me and it didn't seem to interfere at all with your snoring...

OLLIE It's alright for you – nothing keeps you awake. I reckon you'd sleep through a live performance of the 1812 Overture out here in the middle of the night!

JAMES *(laughing)* Well I almost dozed off once during a rehearsal of Beethoven's fifth. I was so hungover. You'd dragged me along to a club in Brighton the night before. Remember? I kept getting black looks from the maestro. (a moment) Or was it Brahms?

OLLIE Brahms was there watching?

JAMES Don't be an idiot! I'm talking about the conductor!

Exit OLLIE in another huff.

The lights slowly fade to a black-out.

END OF SCENE ONE

ACT ONE

SCENE TWO

Two hours later.

When the lights come up, the scene and situation are exactly as they were at the end of Scene One. The light is still bright, but slightly less harsh.

James remains on the sun lounger reading. He is alone. He wears his Ray-Bans.

The soft thud of disco music still escapes from within the apartment.

OLLIE *(from within the apartment)* Where are you, James?

JAMES *(nonchalantly)* About half-way up the Matterhorn by now, I would imagine.

OLLIE *(from within)* What are you doing?

JAMES *(exasperated)* Performing a lobotomy on a passing albatross! *(He puts down his book and takes a long swig of Pimms)*

Enter OLLIE through the patio doors; once again he is wearing his skimpy revealing underpants.

OLLIE *(standing by the patio doors)* God it's still bloody hot.

JAMES *(spluttering his Pimms once more)* Go and put your shorts on, for God's sake! You'll frighten the horses!

OLLIE *(surveying the area, stage left)* I can't see any horses.

OLLIE exits back into the apartment in another huff.

JAMES continues reading his paperback.

A moment.

Enter OLLIE, wearing a pair of union jack swim shorts.

Why do you never answer me properly when I call you?

JAMES Because you always ask such fatuous questions. *(a moment)* Have you phoned the gallery today? You need to keep them on their toes while you're away.

OLLIE Yes, and we've sold another Mancini landscape. That's three, so far. And Alex told me it's hotter in Brighton today, according to the newspapers, than it is over here. *(looking at James, who doesn't seem to be that interested)* I am so bored. Can we please pop into the parrot bar and see hairy Pedro, or whatever his name is, before the 'Spanish Inquisition' with Rupe and Emma? I could do with some Dutch courage. Pretty please?

JAMES *(not looking up from his book)* Dutch courage? Sounds to me like you've been on the vodka all afternoon...

[cue sound effects]

(Loud male Geordie voices reverberate off set)

OLLIE *(irritated and looking stage left)* God, it's that common, Geordie couple we met on the plane - Brian and Duncan. I think I saw that soldier guy, Kyle, hanging around with them yesterday.

JAMES *He takes off his Ray-Bans and drops them into his sports bag.*

[cue mobile phone beep]

The sound of a mobile phone alert beeps from within the apartment.

Sounds like your mobile....

OLLIE *(excited)* It might be my new dating app.

OLLIE darts into the apartment to check his mobile phone.

A moment.

OLLIE returns clutching his mobile phone.

(more excited) I've got my first message on 'CRUISER'. I didn't think it would work over here, and it says this guy's only 20 metres away!

(looking stage left towards the pool) Which means he could be staying here, too!

JAMES Well, I wouldn't put too much trust in those GPS tracking things. They're notoriously inaccurate. He's probably back home on Brighton beach!

OLLIE *(reading aloud the texter's profile)* "Discreet and masculine sporty guy, 27, looking for a soulmate. Enjoys football, gym, cinema and cuddling up with a bottle of wine on the sofa watching a DVD. Not into one night stands." He says: "Hi buddy, fancy meeting up for a beer later?"

JAMES *(with sarcasm)* "Sporty, gym and likes beer." He sounds just your type.....

OLLIE *(showing JAMES the screen of his mobile phone)* But his profile photo's all fuzzy and blurred.

JAMES *(barely containing himself)* Haha, he looks like 'Norman Bates' to me!

JAMES pretends to hold a knife in his clenched hand and mimics stabbing thrusts and screeches the 'Psycho' shower scene music.

OLLIE That's not very funny. *(a short moment)* I think I'm gonna give it a go. It could be the only fun I get to have in this god-forsaken place.

(he composes a reply text and reads aloud as he does it) "Hello, Ollie here. Meeting up sounds great. Where are you and what time?"

JAMES *(getting up and heading into the apartment with his sports bag)* I need the bathroom. *(talking aloud from within the apartment)* I wonder if he'll turn up wearing his dead mother's clothes?

A moment.

[cue mobile phone beep]

Another text alert beeps on OLLIE'S mobile phone.

OLLIE I bet it's him. *(he reads aloud the message)* "Hi Ollie, it's Gavin. Meet me at the harbour wall at 10pm tonight?" *(calling through the apartment doors for JAMES to hear)* I'm gonna meet him tonight!

A moment.

JAMES *(exasperated, as he returns onto the terrace from within the apartment)* You're forgetting again about Rupe and Emm, you idiot!

OLLIE *(confident)* They'll be long gone by then, if I have anything to do with it.

JAMES *(piqued)* Well, don't let us interfere with **your** plans. It's all about **you**, as usual.....

Exit OLLIE in another huff and composing a reply text on his mobile phone.

JAMES shakes his head as he watches OLLIE return to the apartment.

The lights slowly fade to a black-out.

END OF SCENE TWO

ACT ONE

SCENE THREE

A little later.

When the lights come up, the scene is almost the same as it was at the end of Scene Two. The light is still bright.

OLLIE is alone on the terrace. [cue muted headphone club dance music] He is still wearing his union jack swim shorts. He is standing near the large table, wearing headphones, listening to a club dance track on his iPhone and bopping gently to the music. He holds a glass of vodka and Coke. KYLE JACOBS, wearing blue knee-length shorts and white tee shirt, wanders quietly onto the terrace from stage left. He has short-cropped hair and his build is firm and defined.

KYLE sneaks up behind Ollie, puts his arms around his waist and kisses him on the back of the neck.

OLLIE *(shocked, turning round and almost spilling his drink)*
Kyle! What the f....!

KYLE *(very cheerful)* I thought I'd surprise you.

OLLIE rips off his headphones, puts down his drink on the table and pushes KYLE stage left, away from the apartment doors. He turns to see if James is at the doorway.

OLLIE *(offhand)* Well you can't stay. James is around.

KYLE *(despondent)* That's a great welcome. I thought you'd be pleased to see me? *(a brief moment)* You ashamed of me, or something? Cos I'm just a common squaddie? Not posh like you and your mate? You weren't so fussy last night with your bit of rough, were you?

Unbeknown to both OLLIE and KYLE, JAMES is watching them from inside the apartment's patio doors.

OLLIE *(hugging KYLE)* Hey, no, it's not that. I'm sorry. Of course I want to see you again. I really like you. It's just that we're expecting friends for drinks soon. And I need to get changed.

KYLE *(unconvinced and pushing OLLIE away)* Whatever. If you say so.

OLLIE And another thing - your girlfriend, Charlene, was bending James's ear about you in the bar last night.

KYLE About me?!

OLLIE Yeah, about you. Keep your voice down.

KYLE What was she saying about me, then?

OLLIE She's worried about you going off and doing your own thing. Does she know you like to 'bat for the other team'?

KYLE *(casually)* I'll sort it with her, don't worry. *(a brief moment)* So, are you and me gonna have some more fun tonight, then?

OLLIE Look, like I said, we're busy tonight with these friends coming over. But I might be around a bit later on. I'm not sure. Maybe meet you at the Millennium Bar again? I'll text you.

JAMES retreats into the apartment unseen.

KYLE *(irritated)* Well, the ball's in your court. You've got my number. I won't hold my breath. I did meet other blokes last night, you know... *(he exits stage left, somewhat dejected)*

OLLIE *(calling towards KYLE, as he leaves, stage left)* Kyle. Kyle, come back!

KYLE ignores OLLIE'S request. OLLIE picks up his glass and finishes his drink.

JAMES appears onto the terrace from within the apartment.

JAMES Who was that? I thought I heard you talking to someone?

OLLIE *(surprised to see JAMES)* Er....No.....It was just me singing along to the music....

JAMES *(unconvinced)* Singing? If you say so. *(a brief moment)* Look, we should think about getting ready for Rupe and Emm's visit. I need to pop out for a bottle of fizz.

OLLIE OK. I'll come with you. We're low on vodka. Hang on while I go grab a tee shirt.

OLLIE hurries into the apartment. JAMES remains on the terrace. He looks puzzled.

The lights slowly fade to a black-out.

END OF SCENE THREE

ACT ONE

SCENE FOUR

A few hours later.

When the lights come up, the scene is almost the same as it was at the end of Scene Three. The light is beginning to fade (and will continue to fade throughout this scene). There is an orange glow as sunset approaches. The exterior wall lights have come on.

JAMES is alone on the terrace. He wears sensible blue shorts and a white cotton shirt with short sleeves. He is making vodka martini cocktails from a drinks trolley, containing an assortment of bottled spirits and glasses. An ice bucket, containing a bottle of Dom Perignon Champagne, rests on the large table.

Enter RUPERT and EMMA, stage left.

RUPERT wears blue chino shorts and a white Ralph Lauren polo shirt.

EMMA is wearing a cream cotton dress from Zara. She has shoulder-length dark brown hair.

JAMES is shaking a cocktail mixer when his guests arrive.

- JAMES** *(warmly)* Hey strangers, welcome. So you found us then? Nice one.
- RUPERT** James, good to see you *(the two men hug each other)* - yeah, we came along the beach road. *(looking around)* Great apartment...
- JAMES** Thanks. We got it on the cheap - a trombonist in my orchestra was meant to come instead, but he fell off the stage at the Wigmore Hall and broke his leg, poor sod. So he offered me the holiday. And here we are.
- RUPERT** Hope he didn't damage his instrument!
- They all laugh*
- JAMES** Anyway, how are you both? It's great to see you. It's been a while.
- RUPERT** Yeah, we're both good thanks, except Emm's got a rotten migraine.
- EMMA** *(returning a kiss on the cheek from JAMES)* Hello James. I think it's the heat. It will soon pass.
- JAMES** Well come and sit down both of you. Cocktails?
- RUPERT and EMMA take seats at the large table.*
- EMMA** No, just a mineral water for me, please.
- RUPERT** And a beer for me, thanks.
- JAMES hands out drinks to RUPERT and EMMA.*
- JAMES** Well I'm having one – vodka martini – the James Bond way.
- RUPERT** *(looking around):* So where's Ollie?
- EMMA** *(sarcastically)* Is he hiding from me?
- JAMES** He'll be out in a minute. He dozed off in the bath!
- RUPERT** *(with genuine interest)* So, how's life with the symphony orchestra, James? When are you going to make first violin?
- JAMES** Me make first violin? I wish. Well, it's all been rather hectic lately – the Proms and a couple of UK tours planned, and then we're off to Brazil at the end of the year performing Elgar.
- EMMA** Well, I reckon they should make you leader!
- JAMES** Leader of the orchestra! Hey, you're too kind! So what about you, Rupe? Still wheeling and dealing in the city? Audi or Beamer in the garage?

- RUPERT** *(smugly)* Lexus, actually. The firm's made me an associate. Hopefully I should make partner before too long.
- JAMES** *(sincerely)* That's brilliant. And you, Emm? Still raking-in Legal Aid fees from the public purse?
- RUPERT** *(mocking)* Well somebody has to look out for the battered wives and under-age, single mothers.
- EMMA** *(irritated)* Jesus, Rupe, do you always have to be so fucking odious! There **is** life outside fucking Weybridge, you know! You should try it!
- RUPERT** Oops, put my foot in it, again! Only joking, Emm....
He tries to cuddle her, but she pulls away from him.
OLLIE appears from inside the apartment.
- OLLIE** *(feigning cheerfulness)* Hi everybody. Sorry to keep you all waiting.
- EMMA** *(sarcastically)* Why? Are we expecting something to happen?
- OLLIE** *(nonchalantly)* Hello, Emma. Good to see you, too.
- RUPERT** *(trying hard to lighten the mood)* Ollie! There you are. *(standing up to hug him)* How have you been? How's the young entrepreneur doing?
- EMMA** *(surprised)* Entrepreneur?
- JAMES** Yes, didn't I tell you? Ollie's the proud owner of an art gallery under the arches on Brighton's seafront.
- EMMA** *(miffed)* You're joking?
- OLLIE** *(relishing the moment)* No. Sorry to disappoint you, Emma but it's true – good old aunt Daphne popped her clogs and left me the business and her house in Hove.
- EMMA** But what on earth do you know about the art world?
- RUPERT** *(embarrassed)* Emm, that's uncalled-for.....
- OLLIE** It's OK, Rupe. I expect that's what everybody thinks. But I'm very lucky to have a good loyal team who do know the ropes. And we've just signed-up a brilliant local artist who's selling well already.
- RUPERT** So what are you driving now, Ollie – a Porsche, I reckon? Or, maybe a Merc?
- JAMES** No, he's got a Ferrari, actually...

An awkward moment

OLLIE *(to EMMA)* So, are you still finding time for the local amateur dramatic society, Emma? Have you auditioned yet for Lady Macbeth?

EMMA No, but we're considering Oscar Wilde for next season, maybe 'Dorian Gray', which should be right up your street...

RUPERT *(softly to himself)* Touché.

Another awkward moment

JAMES I take it you're both staying at your aunt's villa, Emm?

EMMA Er, yes. We've just popped over for a few days. It's good to get away. But Rupe can't seem to leave the office behind – he's always logging onto his laptop, or texting on his mobile phone. *(looking at RUPERT)* I often wonder whether it's all work-related?

RUPERT *(sheepishly as he scans text messages on his mobile)* Well, you know how it is – you have to keep in touch – especially when you've got some big deals going down.

Another awkward moment

OLLIE *(mischievously)* I'd love to see your aunt's villa, Emma. I bet it's got a private pool? I hate sharing the pool here with all the chavs.

RUPERT No pool, I'm afraid, Ollie. And I would hardly call it a 'villa' – a grandiose, concrete box, more like it..

EMMA gives RUPERT an angry look.

Yet another awkward moment

JAMES *(trying to lighten the mood)* More drinks, anybody?

JAMES is about to refresh his guests' drinks, when OLLIE grabs the bottle of Dom Perignon Champagne that's been chilling in the ice bucket.

OLLIE *(holding up the bottle)* We thought we might have some fizz to celebrate us all meeting up again?

RUPERT *(standing up)* Hell yeah, I'd love a glass of the old Dom.

OLLIE cracks open the Champagne and starts to pour out four glasses.

EMMA *(grabbing OLLIE'S arm)* No, none for me, thank you.

The boys hold up their glasses and chink them together.

OLLIE Cheers!

RUPERT AND JAMES *(together)* Cheers!

A moment.

EMMA *(awkwardly)* Rupe, we should think about going.

JAMES *(puzzled)* Going so soon? Really? But you've only just got here and I thought we were all going out for dinner? I've booked a table at Navarro's, on the marina.

RUPERT *(disappointed)* And I was expecting virtuoso James to give us a tune on the old fiddle.

JAMES Yeah, of course, no problem. I'll go fetch it.

JAMES exits the terrace to collect his violin from the apartment.

OLLIE *(with a touch of insincerity)* Yeah, such a shame that you have to leave so early. Are you sure you can't stay a bit longer?

EMMA *(reluctantly)* Well, just a little while longer, then. Rupe should have made it clear that we've got an early flight back to Gatwick in the morning. I have to be in court tomorrow.

JAMES *(returning with his violin and bow)* OK, then, how about something from Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons'.

[For this segment, the actor will need to use a violin with fake strings, so that he can simulate playing, in sync with a recording of the piece.]

JAMES takes up his violin and gives an exemplary recital of the 'Largo' from the 'Winter' concerto. RUPERT watches JAMES in proud admiration, while OLLIE focuses his attention on RUPERT, which does not go un-noticed by EMMA. JAMES concludes his brief performance to rapturous applause from RUPERT and OLLIE. EMMA is less impressed and just about manages a brief and feeble hand-clap.

RUPERT *(clapping enthusiastically)* Bravo, James! Bravo!

RUPERT gives JAMES a hug. EMMA looks away.

OLLIE *(proudly)* Yeah, well done, mate. That was awesome! *(he pats him on the back)*

EMMA *(impatient and getting up)* Rupe, we really should be going now.
(turning to face JAMES and OLLIE) It's been lovely meeting up again.
I'm sorry it was such a brief visit. Maybe next time

RUPERT Yes, sorry guys. We really have to split. Maybe we can all get together in Brighton before too long. Check out Ollie's pad and that Ferrari.

OLLIE Yeah, anytime. That would be great. You can all stay at mine. I've got six bedrooms. Just round the corner from the seafront.

RUPERT Well good luck with the Brazilian tour, James. Hope all goes well for you, Ollie, with the gallery business.

RUPERT hugs JAMES and OLLIE briefly. OLLIE wishes it would last longer. EMMA pulls RUPERT away. She leaves without saying anything further.

JAMES Bye then. Great seeing you both. Take care.

OLLIE Safe journey back. Keep in touch. And good luck with the play, Emma. We're so looking forward to it. Don't forget to send us some front row tickets.

JAMES and OLLIE watch as their guests leave the terrace, stage left.

(gloating) Well that worked out well – a nice short and sweet visit.

JAMES *(annoyed)* Was that your plan, then? To deliberately taunt Emm and bang on about your inheritance?

OLLIE Well you mentioned my Ferrari....

JAMES And you couldn't keep your eyes off Rupe. Emm noticed only too well. No wonder she wanted to piss off so soon.

OLLIE I told she was a bitch. *(looking at his watch)* And now I need to tart myself up for my gay blind date. I can't wait. I hope he's a gorgeous hunk.

JAMES *(noticing RUPERT'S mobile phone on the table)* Rupe's left his mobile behind....

OLLIE *(grabbing the phone from the table)* I'll go catch them up. They can't have gone far. *(OLLIE leaves the terrace in a hurry, stage left)*

The lights slowly fade to a black-out.

END OF SCENE FOUR

ACT ONE

SCENE FIVE

The same day, just before midnight.

When the lights come up, JAMES is sitting alone at the terrace table; he is familiarising himself with a music score. He has a bottle of beer on the go.

It is a lot cooler. The terrace is bathed in blue light to suggest the late hour. Reflections of the nearby apartment blocks' outside lights, shimmering on the surface of the swimming pool, dance across the exterior walls .

Music and laughter waft across in waves from a nearby bar.

CHARLENE HENDRY turns up unexpectedly stage left.

She arrives wearing denim shorts and a Next tee shirt. Her dark black/brown hair is tied in a ponytail.

CHARLENE *(sheepishly approaching JAMES)* Hello, James. I hope I'm not disturbing you?

JAMES *(slightly surprised)* Oh hi, Charlene. No, not at all. I'm just going over my music.

CHARLENE Sorry to barge in so late. I noticed you sitting out here. Are you alone?

JAMES Yes. Ollie has gone out. Come and sit down. Can I get you something to drink?

CHARLENE *(she sits at the table)* Just some water, please. *(she notices the music manuscript and points at the score)* All them notes look scary to me.

JAMES *(handing CHARLENE a mineral water)* Here you go. Yeah, I suppose they do look a bit intimidating. But I've been studying music since I was a kid. *(laughing)* So I've just about got the hang of it. I'm preparing for an Elgar tour next month.

CHARLENE Elgar?

JAMES Sir Edward Elgar – England's greatest composer – 'Land of Hope and Glory' and all that?

- CHARLENE** Oh yes, the Proms....
- JAMES** So where's your boyfriend, Kyle, tonight?
- CHARLENE** He's gone out again, by himself. He didn't say where.
- JAMES** Oh right. You were telling me last night that he's been acting strangely lately. But you didn't say a lot. And I didn't like to ask.
- CHARLENE** (*anxious*) No. I didn't want to bother you, but I don't know what to do. I'm at my wits' end. I need somebody to talk to, and you seemed so friendly last night. I thought straight away that I could talk to you. You seemed so kind. (*a moment*) I hope you don't mind me just turning up like this? I don't know where to turn. They say it's always easier to talk to strangers.
- JAMES** (*comforting her*) No, it's no bother. I'm happy to help, if I can. I'm touched that you feel you can talk to me. I reckon I'm a good listener. So, I'm all ears.
- CHARLENE** (*slowly with difficulty*) It's Kyle, of course. He's being so secretive. Acts like he doesn't want to be with me. Happy to spend most of his time with his mates. They all go clubbing back home. But he never takes me. I suggested this holiday, hoping we could get some romance back into our relationship. But he prefers playing cards with the Geordie lads – messing about in the pool with them – playing football on the beach with them, while I get ignored. (*a brief moment*) And he hasn't touched me in ages. In bed. You know?
- JAMES** (*slightly embarrassed*) Have you ever tried talking to him about it?
- CHARLENE** Oh yes, but he always says I'm being stupid and over-reacting. And then he gets snappy with me.
- JAMES** (*a brief moment*) So how long have you been together?
- CHARLENE** Almost three years. We're both in the Army. I've always wanted to be a soldier's wife. (*a brief moment*) It was fine when we first got together. But he's never been what you might call romantic or passionate. Sex has never been great – always over too quickly. But lately he seems to have gone off sex altogether.
- They are both silent for an awkward moment while CHARLENE plucks up the courage to continue.*

I've got a strong feeling my Kyle's gay. I do know that one of them clubs he goes to is for gays – I found a free drinks voucher for a gay bar in his jeans pocket, when I was doing his washing.

JAMES Well, going to a gay bar doesn't necessarily mean you're gay – I often go to gay bars with Ollie. The atmosphere in those places can be really buzzing. That's probably why your Kyle likes going. I think you might be worrying unnecessarily.

CHARLENE *(getting up and looking away)* It's not just that – he's started spending a lot of time at the gym lately. Working-out with another squaddie, Joe. I've seen the way they act together – the way *(turning to face James)* Kyle looks at him – their body language. He's become so secretive – he's always texting on his mobile phone. And he rushes out the room to read a text if I'm around. I've tried looking at his text messages, cos I'm so worried, but he's now put a password lock on his mobile. I think he's got himself one of them gay dating apps. *(a moment)* And I'm sure he's gone out tonight to meet up with someone.

JAMES looks pensive.

I don't know what I'd do if I saw him in the arms of another man.

JAMES *(standing up to give her a comforting hug)* I still think you're worrying unnecessarily – he's probably met up with the Geordie lads for a beer and a game of pool. He'll be back before you know it.

CHARLENE I'm not so sure – I followed Kyle, you see. Followed him to the harbour. And at the top of the steps there was this guy waiting by himself and texting on a mobile phone. I'm convinced Kyle went there to be with him.

The lights slowly fade to a black-out.

END OF SCENE FIVE

ACT ONE

SCENE SIX

It is late morning of the following day.

When the lights come up, JAMES is sitting alone at the terrace table studying his music once more. He has a cup of coffee on the go. He is wearing red swim shorts and a white tee shirt bearing a motif of Beethoven. It is a very bright morning with harsh sunlight.

JAMES *(picking up his mobile phone, making a call to OLLIE, and leaving a voice message)* Hi Ollie.....Where are you?.....Are you OK?.....I'm getting worried....Give us a call when you get this message. Cheers.

A moment.

Policemen, COMISARIO RAFAEL FERNANDEZ and OFFICER EDUARDO HERRERA arrive on the terrace from stage left.

FERNANDEZ is wearing a blue, two-piece suit with a white open-neck shirt.

HERRERA is in police uniform.

JAMES stands up in surprise, when he realises who they are.

FERNANDEZ Good morning. Senor James Downing?

JAMES *(surprised)* Yes, that's me. How can I help you?

FERNANDEZ Please forgive our intrusion. The apartment manager said we might find you out here. *(displaying credentials)* I am Comisario Rafael Fernandez and this is Officer Eduardo Herrera. We are from the Policia Canaria.

JAMES *(worried)* I'm sorry, but I don't understand. Why are you here?

FERNANDEZ May we ask you a few questions?

JAMES *(confused)* Questions? What kind of questions?

FERNANDEZ Just some routine questions to help us with our enquiries.

JAMES Enquiries? What's this all about?

FERNANDEZ Please sit down, Senor Downing. *(a moment)* We have established from passenger arrival records at the airport, that you and a Senor Oliver Brooks arrived on the island on September 17th, and checked into this apartment complex.

JAMES *(agitated and sitting back down)* Is it about Ollie? You've come here about Ollie?

FERNANDEZ Why do you ask about him?

JAMES *(puzzled)* It's just that he hasn't come back yet – he went out last night to meet someone. I thought he would be back by now. I've just tried calling him.

A moment.

FERNANDEZ *(calmly)* I have to tell you, Senor Downing, that the body of a young man was recovered from the harbour early this morning. His face, head and torso having been badly mutilated from contact, we think, with the propellers of a cruise ship that had its mooring nearby. But there was no formal identification on the body – no wallet or mobile phone, but we did find this business card in the pocket of the young man's shorts.

He passes JAMES a small polythene evidence bag containing a water-stained business card.

JAMES *(slowly reading out aloud the details on the business card)*

“Oliver Brooks, Proprietor, De Vere Art Gallery, Brighton....”

(stunned) Ollie's dead? He can't be dead....

FERNANDEZ *(with dignity)* I'm afraid it's a possibility, and it looks like he was murdered...

JAMES *(dazed)* Murdered!! Ollie, murdered!!

The lights slowly fade to a black-out.

The curtain falls.

END OF ACT ONE

INTERVAL – 20 MINUTES

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

A few moments later.

When the curtain rises, the scene and situation are exactly as they were at the end of Act One. A devastated JAMES is trying to come to terms with OLLIE's murder.

JAMES *(standing up, pacing the terrace and demanding answers)* What do you mean he was murdered, Comisario? I don't understand!

FERNANDEZ *(patiently)* Our preliminary examination has revealed that the victim was shot, Senor Downing. Shot through the heart.

JAMES But you don't know for definite that it was Ollie's body you pulled from the harbour – *(pointing at the evidence bag)* all you have to go on is that business card you found on him?

FERNANDEZ That is quite true and we must keep all options open, and I am very sorry that this terrible news has distressed you. *(a brief moment)* But perhaps you could help us with the formal identification?

JAMES *(confused)* But I thought you said that the body had been badly mutilated? How could I possibly identify him?

FERNANDEZ Yes, a facial identification is out of the question. So we must rely on a DNA match, or corroboration from dental records, if this is at all feasible in the circumstances. Would you happen to know of his next of kin? They could assist with a DNA sample.

JAMES Ollie has a mother, but I don't know where she's living – somewhere abroad, I think. But he hasn't seen nor heard from her in years. And he's an only child. But I do know that he has a dentist in Brighton. *(pointing at the evidence bag again)* His people at the art gallery might have details.

FERNANDEZ Then we shall make contact with the art gallery later. *(a brief moment)* You said that Senor Brooks, Ollie, left here last night to meet somebody? Do you know the name of this person?

JAMES Only that his name is 'Gavin'. He met him online – a gay dating website. He has the app on his mobile phone.

FERNANDEZ As I said earlier, we have been unable to locate any mobile phone, but we have divers continuing to search the harbour.

So, last night when Ollie left to meet this 'Gavin' person, was that the last time you saw your friend?