

DEAD ON TIME

FINAL
VERSION

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

by

MICHAEL J. BIRD

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Agents: Peters, Fraser & Dunlop,
503/4 The Chambers,
Chelsea Harbour,
Lots Road,
London SW10 0XF

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

DAVID RYDER

ANNE RYDER

ALFRED DUNSTAN

JESSICA INNES

DETECTIVE INSPECTOR MURRAY

WOMAN POLICE SERGEANT

POLICE CONSTABLE

The action of the play takes place in the sitting room of the Ryder's house, a converted water-mill, on the Essex/Suffolk boirder.

Time. The present.

Act 1, Scene 1. An evening in November.
Scene 2. Two hours later.
Scene 3. The following morning.

Act 2, Scene 1. The following day.
Scene 2. A week later.
Scene 3. Some days later.
Scene 4. That night.

ACT ONEScene 1

Time: the present. An evening in November. The sitting room of the RYDER'S house on the Essex/Suffolk border. The house was once a water-mill and has been tastefully and expertly converted in keeping with its original design and purpose and in addition to the modern central heating there is a wood burning stove. The front door opens directly into the room and a door on the right leads into the kitchen. Wooden open tread stairs climb to a railed gallery off which are the doors to two bedrooms and the bathroom.

There is the sound of a car stopping outside the house and shortly afterwards the front door is unlocked and DAVID RYDER enters.

DAVID is 33. He is a slenderly built but wiry man of slightly less than medium height. He is wearing a business suit and a distinctive pair of executive style spectacles.

He is carrying a briefcase and a portable telephone and looking very pleased with himself. He closes the door.

DAVID: (calling) Anne? Anne!

He goes to the foot of the stairs.

DAVID: (contd) Anne!

Getting no response, he crosses to the table, puts the briefcase and the telephone down on it, opens the case and takes from it four or five slim, sealed packets. Going to one of the pictures in the room he hinges it back to reveal a wall safe. He works the combination, opens the safe, puts the packets in it, shuts the door and swings the picture back into place.

Moving to the hi-fi unit in a corner beneath the gallery, he switches it on, lifts the lid of the record player, checks the LP on the turntable, closes the lid and presses the 'play' button.

The first track on the record is Elisabeth Schwarzkopf singing 'Villia' from The Merry Widow.

Taking off his jacket, DAVID hangs it over the back of a chair and then goes into the kitchen from where there is the sound of the refrigerator door opening and shutting and the rattle of plates.

Some way into the music the front door opens and ANNE RYDER enters. She is 26 and very attractive but she is clearly on edge and extremely tense. She is wearing a light raincoat.

She closes the door, glances anxiously at her watch and moves to the foot of the stairs.

DAVID appears in the doorway of the kitchen.

DAVID: Hi!

ANNE: You're late getting back. You're usually

home around four the days you're going away.

DAVID: Meyer asked me to stay on for a bit.

ANNE: Oh.

She takes off her raincoat, drapes it over the bannister and glances irritably at the hi-fi unit.

ANNE: Must we?

DAVID: Oh, sorry!

He crosses to the hi-fi, interrupts the music and switches off the record player.

DAVID: Been down the village?

ANNE: No. I went for a walk.

DAVID: At this time!

ANNE: I've been out for a while.

DAVID: Oh, I see. Well I wish I had been home earlier. I'd have come with you. Anywhere special?

ANNE: (shaking her head) Just around.

DAVID: Enjoy it.

ANNE: It started to get a bit chilly.

DAVID: I'm making myself a sandwich. Didn't have time to get anything to eat at lunchtime. Want one?

ANNE: No thanks.

DAVID moves back into the kitchen.

ANNE crosses to the drinks table, reaches for a bottle of whisky but then changes her mind.

DAVID: (from the kitchen) Had a good day today.

ANNE: Did you?

DAVID: (from the kitchen) Very good. Or at least I think so.

He re-enters eating the sandwich he's just made.

ANNE: You're not sure?

DAVID: You know Meyer. He's never that direct. Likes to hedge things. Keep all his options open.

ANNE: Well?

DAVID: (grinning broadly) I think he and Goldman are going to offer to take me into the partnership! How about that?

ANNE: Congratulations.

DAVID: (indicating the sign with his hand) Meyer, Goldman and Ryder. Not bad, eh?

ANNE: What would it mean?

DAVID: More money for a start. Plus a share in the profits. And no more trips abroad. Or not so many at least.

ANNE: But wouldn't you miss that?

DAVID: Not at all. Oh, it was OK at the beginning. Exciting in a way. But now.....Well it's just the same old routine.

ANNE crosses to the stove, opens it and looks inside.

DAVID is crestfallen at her apparent lack of interest or enthusiasm. He crosses to her.

DAVID: You don't seem very pleased.

ANNE: Of course I am. If it's what you want.

DAVID: It doesn't show.

ANNE: What did you expect me to say? It's your career.

DAVID: But it's our future. 'Oh, David, darling! What wonderful news!' would have been nice. I'd have even settled for, 'I'm happy for you.'

ANNE: So, I'm happy for you. OK?

She picks up the empty log basket from alongside the stove.

ANNE: (contd) We need some more logs.

Frowning, DAVID studies her. Then he takes the basket from her and goes into the kitchen.

ANNE stares after him for a while and then crosses to the window beside the front door and gazes out of it.

DAVID returns with the basket which is now filled with logs. He opens the stove, peers into it and then adds two or three logs to the flames.

DAVID: We're getting low. Dunstan said he'd drop some round yesterday. Still I think there're enough to see you through until I get back.

ANNE: What time are you leaving?

DAVID: Usual. Around eight.

ANNE: I'll start getting a meal then.

DAVID: Are you hungry?

ANNE: No, Not a bit.

DAVID: Don't bother then. That sandwich will do me for now. If I get peckish I'll have something on the boat. (A pause) Let's talk

ANNE draws the the curtains across the window.

ANNE: No. Not now.

DAVID: We need to

ANNE: Maybe. But I don't feel like it. Not today.

DAVID: Are you OK?

ANNE: Yes. Why?

DAVID: You seem a bit on edge.

ANNE: Not specially.

DAVID: No more than usual you mean.

ANNE: I mean, not specially.

She crosses to the drinks table
and picks up a bottle of whisky.

DAVID: Bit early, isn't it?

ANNE: Oh, for God's sake, David!

She sighs and replaces the
bottle.

DAVID: Seems to me you've been doing a lot of that
these past few days.

ANNE: How would you know? Since you haven't been
here.

DAVID: When I have been. Yesterday evening for
instance.

ANNE: Nonsense!

DAVID: More than usual anyway.

ANNE: So now I'm becoming an alcoholic!

DAVID: I didn't say that. But you must admit
you've been rather.....

ANNE: Look. I felt like a drink! But you don't
want me to have one. So I'm not going to.
All right?

DAVID crosses to her.

DAVID: Come on, Anne. Tell me. What is it? What's
the matter?

ANNE: Nothing.

DAVID: Is it something I've said? Something I've
done? Something I haven't said or done?

ANNE: No it's nothing you've said or done.
(dismissively) It's just me.

DAVID: Or is it us?

ANNE: I'm just feeling a bit low. What has 'us'
got to do with it?

DAVID: Good question.

ANNE: So what's the answer?

DAVID: Well we can't pretend that things are great between us, can we? Or that ours has been the perfect marriage. And things don't seem to be getting any better.

ANNE: Last night? Is that what you mean?

DAVID: No. I mean generally.

ANNE: I just wasn't in the mood. Which is your cue to say, "You never are".

DAVID: Have I ever complained?

ANNE: Not in so many words. Perhaps you should have.

DAVID: And what would that have achieved?

ANNE: I don't know. Nothing I suppose. But at least you'd have got it out of your system.

DAVID: Well since you've brought it up I must say there have been occasions, specially this last year or so, when I've felt.....

ANNE: What?

DAVID: Look, be honest with me. Is there someone else?

ANNE: (with a hollow laugh) Don't be ridiculous! Chance would be a fine thing. Stuck down here.

DAVID: But you're not. How many times have you been to London recently?

ANNE: Occasionally. To shop.

DAVID: Besides I thought you liked living here. You were the one who was so keen on us buying this place. That first time we came down to look at it you said you'd fallen in love with it. Remember?

ANNE: That was four years ago. Things change. People change.

DAVID: (studying her) Don't they though. Look maybe you ought to see a doctor.

ANNE: What kind of a doctor do you have in mind?

DAVID: Just the local quack. He seems pretty bright.

ANNE: And tell him what?

DAVID: I dunno. How you feel. Everything. It might help.

ANNE: No thanks. I don't need a doctor.

DAVID: Then what do you need? What is you want? A divorce? Is that it. Tell me. Talk to me.

ANNE: (irritably) Look I told you. I don't want to talk about anything. Not now.

DAVID: When I get back?

ANNE: Yes all right. Fine. We'll talk about it then.

DAVID: Tell you what. We could go away for a while. Have a holiday somewhere. Really sort things out. Lets do that.

ANNE: (flatly) If you like.

The telephone rings and ANNE moves quickly to answer it.

ANNE: (into telephone) 41274.....No I'm sorry you've got the wrong number. (she hangs up) Someone wanting a Mrs. Dexter.

She picks up her coat from the bannisters and puts it on.

DAVID: Where are you off to?

ANNE moves to the bureau, opens the flap and takes out two or three letters.

ANNE: I forgot to post these.

DAVID: I can do that for you on my way.

ANNE: (shaking her head) They'll miss the last collection then.

DAVID: (stroking his chin) Well I'm going to have a shower and a shave.

ANNE moves to the front door and DAVID watches her. At the door she hesitates and turns.

ANNE: David!.....

DAVID: What?

ANNE studies him. She shakes her head.

ANNE: Nothing. It doesn't matter.

She exits and we hear a car start up and move off. DAVID gazes after her for a while and then, with a sigh, he makes for the stairs.

He is halfway there when the front door bell rings so he deviates and opens it to ALFRED DUNSTAN.

DUNSTAN is a jovial, good natured man in his early 60's. He owns a smallholding and he and his family are the Ryder's nearest neighbours.

DAVID: Oh hello there. Come on in.

DUNSTAN: (with a broad smile) 'Evening.

He steps into the room and DAVID closes the door.

DUNSTAN: Brought the logs up I have.

DAVID: Oh great! Thanks very much, Fred.

DUNSTAN: Just tipped 'em round the back for now. Me and me old boy'll stack 'em tidy along the wall later. In the light. Need to see what we're doing.

DAVID: Oh, no. Leave 'em. I'll do it.

DUNSTAN: You're too busy to be wasting your time on things like that, Mr. Ryder. 'Sides, time you get back from London tomorrow it'll be dark like now.

DAVID: Couldn't do it tomorrow anyway. I'll be in Holland.

DUNSTAN: There you are then. Off on another one of your trips, are you?

DAVID: (with a nod) Not for long though. Just in and out.

DUNSTAN: Well don't you worry. Me and me old boy'll stack 'em.

DAVID: I appreciate it. How is your son?

DUNSTAN: Well he don't get any brighter. But he's a good lad. Even if he is a bit slow in his mind.

DAVID: And Mrs. Dunstan?

DUNSTAN: Couldn't be better. Save her legs of course. Something awful they are. You should see her veins! And now she's having trouble with her breathing.

DAVID: Oh, poor dear! Sounds nasty.

DUNSTAN: Still keeps going though. Down the pub regular she is. Don't matter what the doctor says. She's not going to give up her drink. Or her fags. Them's what keep her cheerful. And that's the main thing, innit? Well I'll let you get on.

DAVID escorts him over to the door. DUNSTAN pauses.

DUNSTAN: Fancy a couple of pheasants? Mind you'll need to hang 'em for a while. (he winks) Tripped over 'em only this afternoon I did.

DAVID laughs

DAVID: Yes please.

DUNSTAN: Right. I'll bring 'em by.

He goes to leave.

DAVID: Hang about! I haven't paid you for the logs.

DUNSTAN: Settle up with me when I drop the birds in. A fiver all right with you for them?

DAVID: Fine. Cheers!

DUNSTAN exits and DAVID closes the door.

Crossing to the picture with the wall safe behind it he hinges it back, works the combination of the safe, opens it and takes from it the sealed packets and a light canvas body belt.

Having closed the safe again, he crosses to the table and lays the packets and the bodybelt on his briefcase. One by one he slips the packets into the compartments of the belt and secures the flaps.

Then, leaving the belt where it is, he goes upstairs and into the master bedroom. A little later he re-appears, stripped to his underpants. He is about to enter the bathroom when the front doorbell rings.

DAVID: Damn!

He reaches behind the bathroom door for his bathrobe, puts it on, comes downstairs and goes to the door and opens it.

Standing outside is JESSICA INNES.

She is around 33 years old, about 5'7"/5'8" tall and strikingly attractive but with a boyish figure. Her hair is cut short.

JESSICA: I'm so sorry to bother you.

DAVID: Thats OK. What can I do for you?

JESSICA: My wretched car's broken down.

DAVID: Oh dear. Come on in.

JESSICA enters and DAVID closes the door. Seeing how he's dressed JESSICA gives him an embarrassed smile.

JESSICA: Oh look! I'm disturbing you. Forgive me.

DAVID: Don't be silly. I was about to take a shower that's all. You must forgive me for the informal dress.

JESSICA smiles.

DAVID: What's the trouble?

JESSICA: I've no idea. It just sort of spluttered and stopped. And I can't get it to go again.

DAVID: Well if you give me a minute or two to get some clothes on perhaps I could have a look at it. I'm no great shakes as a mechanic
.....

JESSICA: Snap!

DAVID: Where is it?

JESSICA: Far end of the lane.

DAVID: Want me to have a go?

JESSICA: No, please! That's too much to ask. But if I could use your telephone to call the breakdown people I'd be most grateful.

DAVID: Of course. And that's probably best. Checking the sparking plugs and making sure the battery's connected are just about my limit.

He leads her over to the telephone. JESSICA takes a small wallet from her shoulder bag and removes her Road Aid membership card from it.

DAVID: (contd) There you are. A.A?

JESSICA: Road Aid.

DAVID nods.

DAVID: Got the number?

JESSICA: Yes thanks. I wonder, could I have a glass of water?

DAVID: Certainly. (concerned) You feeling OK?

JESSICA: Oh yes. Don't worry. I'm not going to pass out on you or anything like that. I'm just terribly thirsty.

DAVID: Well I can do better than water. How about a cup of tea? Or a drink maybe?

JESSICA: A cup of tea would be great. But only if it's not putting you out.

DAVID: Not a bit. I'll get the kettle on. You make your call.

He goes into the kitchen.
JESSICA picks up the telephone and dials. Then, before the call can be answered, she puts a finger on the connection switch and disconnects it.

Her eyes on the door to the kitchen, she keeps her finger on the switch for a few seconds and then releases it.

JESSICA: (into dead telephone) Oh hello. My name's Innes and my membership number is AK4392122.....Yes, that's it..... Well my car's broken down and I'd like someone to come out to it please.....I've no idea. It just won't go.....It's a Golf GTi and the registration number's H616DFL.....

DAVID re-enters from the kitchen carrying a glass of water.

JESSICA: (contd and into telephone) It's just outside Great Felstead.....Yes, that's right. On the corner of.....(she looks enquiringly at DAVID)

DAVID: Mill Lane.

JESSICA: (contd) Mill Lane.....Yes okay. How long will you be?.....What!.....Well yes I understand but.....(she sighs) Well OK. If that's the best you can do.....Yes I will..... Right. 'Bye.

She hangs up.

DAVID: To be going on with.

He hands her the glass of water.

JESSICA: Oh thanks. (she takes a long drink) That's better.

DAVID: How long did they say?

JESSICA: Would you believe it? An hour at best. And they can't guarantee that. Which probably means closer to two.

DAVID: More than likely. Don't worry though. You can wait here till the last minute.

JESSICA: (doubtfully) That's very good of you but...

DAVID: Listen you'll be a lot safer here than you would be sitting in your car I promise. And a hell of a sight more comfortable. You'll have company too. My wife'll be back soon. She's only gone into the village to post some letters.

JESSICA: Well if you're sure.

DAVID: I insist. But only if you're easy in your mind about it.

JESSICA: Perfectly. You don't look like a rapist to me.

DAVID: (with a grin) Given it up. Just a Peeping Tom now.

JESSICA smiles.

DAVID: (contd and putting out his hand) My name's David. David Ryder.

JESSICA: Jessica Innes.

They shake hands.

DAVID: You're not from round here, are you?

JESSICA: No. London. I'm on my way to see from friends in Hadleigh.

DAVID: You're a bit off course. A12 and then the 1070 would've been best.

JESSICA: Thought I'd try a short cut, didn't I? But then, like fixing cars, navigation's not my strong point either.

There is the sound of a kettle whistling in the kitchen.

DAVID: Cup of tea coming up. Just a bag I'm afraid. Nothing fancy.

JESSICA: Sounds like home to me.

DAVID takes the glass from her and goes back into the kitchen.

JESSICA does a tour of the room. At the table she pauses, looks down at the body belt, puts out a finger and idly strokes it.

Crossing to the bookcase, she picks up the framed photograph of Anne and David which is standing on it and studies it.

DAVID: (off stage) Milk and sugar?

JESSICA: Milk but no sugar thanks.

She replaces the photograph.

DAVID re-enters with a cup and saucer.

DAVID: Here you go.

JESSICA: Thanks. Aren't you having one?

DAVID: No. Not just now. I really ought to.....

JESSICA: Yes of course. Look you don't have to entertain me. I've caused you enough trouble as it is. I'll be all right. You go ahead and have your shower.

DAVID: Do you mind?

JESSICA: Not in the least. Make me feel less guilty.

DAVID: No need for that. And, like I said, Anne'll be home soon.

JESSICA: To find a strange woman in the house.

DAVID laughs.

DAVID: Well just so long as we stick to the same story. Now, are you sure?

JESSICA: Of course. Please! Go ahead.

DAVID: Right. Won't be long anyway. Have a seat. (indicating the TV) Put the television on if you want to. Or maybe you'd rather listen to some music. Whatever. You choose.

He moves to the stairs, hesitates at the foot of them, moves back to the table and casually picks up the body belt.

Then he goes upstairs and enters the bathroom, leaving the door ajar.

Still standing, JESSICA sips her tea. From the bathroom there is the sound of an electric razor.

Putting the cup and saucer down, JESSICA crosses to the hi-fi unit and checks that there's a record on the turntable.

DAVID: (off stage and calling) Make yourself another cup if you want one. Or help yourself to a scotch or whatever.

JESSICA: (calling) Thanks.

The razor is switched off and there is the sound of the shower being turned on.

JESSICA switches on the record player and presses the 'play' button.

As before the music is 'Vilia'.

Turning up the volume, JESSICA crosses to the foot of the stairs and listens. Then, cautiously, she climbs them.

Outside the bathroom door she listens again.

Taking a .22 automatic from her shoulder bag, she pushes the door open wider and steps in, out of sight.

(Off stage dialogue)

DAVID: Who's that?.....That you, Anne?
 Anne!.....What the hell.....?

There is a shot followed a few
seconds later by a second.

Leaving the shower running,
JESSICA comes out of the
bathroom holding the gun in one
hand and the body belt in the
other and unhurriedly
descends the stairs.

She puts the automatic down on
the table, lays the belt
alongside it, removes the sealed
packets from it and weighs them
in her hand. She smiles.

Tossing them down onto the
table, she crosses to the hi-
fi unit and switches off the
record player.

Returning to her cup and saucer,
she calmly finishes her tea.

There is the sound of a car
pulling up outside. Alarmed,
JESSICA sets down her cup,
crosses to the table, snatches
up the gun and steps to the
side of the front door where she
will be hidden when it is
opened.

ANNE enters. Pushing the door
shut behind her, she goes to
the foot of the stairs and gazes
up at the open door of the
bathroom, frowning. Then seeing
the body belt on the table she
crosses to it and looks down
at it, puzzled.

JESSICA takes a step away from
the door and ANNE swings round
and gasps. Then, horrified, she
sees the gun.

ANNE: (fearfully) Have you.....?

JESSICA: Yes. It's all over.

She puts the gun back into her shoulder bag.

ANNE: Where.....where is he?

JESSICA: (with an upward jerk of her head) He was having a shower. Very convenient. It saves a lot of cleaning up.

ANNE: (a moan) Oh my God!

JESSICA: It's too late for regrets.. You knew I was on my way when I 'phoned just now

ANNE: But I didn't see your car.

JESSICA: I left it just inside a field down the lane. I'll bring it up later and put it in the garage.

ANNE nods. She moves to the drinks table, pours a large whisky and swallows it. JESSICA crosses to her and, before she can pour another, takes the glass from her.

JESSICA: That's enough.

ANNE: (pleading) I couldn't be here when.....I just couldn't!

JESSICA: Of course. I understand. And anyway we agreed. But you'll have to help me get him downstairs.

ANNE: (aghast) Oh no! I couldn't!

JESSICA: You'll have to. I can't manage that on my own.

ANNE: I can't! I can't!

JESSICA: Teh x" f ueh31 ||k oe' é||o |o r||mo'

ANNE: Perhaps. But I couldn't.....I just can't! I can't! Please don't ask me to.

JESSICA: Get a grip on yourself, Anne! You must. There's no way I can carry him down alone.

She takes some cord from her shoulder bag.

JESSICA: (contd) So come on. Let's get it over with.

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She takes ANNE by the arm and guides her to the foot of the stairs.

ANNE looks up them in dread.

ANNE: Hold me, Jess. Hold me.

JESSICA takes her into her arms.

JESSICA: It's all right. It's all right. It'll be over soon.

ANNE gazes into her face.

ANNE: And then? You'll never leave me, will you?

JESSICA kisses her on the cheek.

JESSICA: Never. (a pause) As if I could.

They climb the stairs and enter the bathroom. The shower is turned off.

(Offstage dialogue)

ANNE: (a cry) Oh my God!

She runs out of the bathroom and leans against the wall, a hand over her mouth. JESSICA joins her.

ANNE: I'm going to be sick.

JESSICA: (firmly) No you're not. Now come on.

She draws her back into the room.

(Offstage dialogue)

JESSICA: We need something to wrap him in. OK, this'll do.....Right. Take his legs.

ANNE: Oh no! I can't Don't make me. Please!

JESSICA: Yes you can. Now do as I say.....Well get hold of them.....Good. That's right. Now, lift!And down.....Roll him over.

There is silence for a while and then the two women come out of

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the bathroom carrying DAVID
RYDER's body swathed in a large
bath sheet secured with the cord
JESSICA brought with her.

They start down the stairs with
their burden.

BLACKOUT

Scene 2

The sitting room, Ryder house.
It is two hours later.

The door of the bathroom is
closed. DAVID's jacket is no
longer hanging over the back of
the chair and only two of the
lights in the room are now on.

ANNE is at the drinks table,
pouring a whisky. She is very
nervous and her hands tremble.
She downs the drink and goes to
pour another when the telephone
rings.

Startled, she jumps violently.
Clearly uncertain as to what to
do, she glances up at the
gallery. The telephone goes on
ringing. Very reluctantly she
answers it.

ANNE: (into telephone) 41274.....Yes.....Oh
 hello, Mr Meyer.....What!

In a momentary panic, she lowers
the telephone and covers the
mouthpiece with her hand. Then,
regaining some control, she
speaks into it again.

ANNE: (contd and into telephone)Yes I'm
 here.....No. No I'm fine.....Well
 yes he is but he's having a shower at the
 moment. Can I take a message?.....Yes
 I see.....Right. I'll tell him.....
 Of course. Goodbye.

She hangs up, moves back to the
drinks table and pours herself
another drink.

Glass in hand she walks
aimlessly around the room.
Pausing by the stove she opens
it and absently puts in a log or
two.

Seeing the body belt and packets
still lying on the table she

picks up one of the packets and gazes at it.

The front door bell rings and again ANNE is close to panic. Quickly she gathers up the rest of the packets and the belt, puts them into the briefcase and closes it. She hesitates. Then she puts her glass down, goes to the door and opens it.

It is ALFRED DUNSTAN. He is holding a brace of pheasants.

ANNE: (surprised and flustered) Mr. Dunstan!

DUNSTAN enters.

DUNSTAN: Here they are! And a very nice pair they are too. Eat lovely they will.

ANNE stares at the birds, non-plussed.

DUNSTAN: I told Mr. Ryder I'd bring 'em up when I was here earlier with the logs. Didn't he say?

ANNE: Oh yes of course. How silly of me. Thank you.

She reaches out to take the pheasants from him.

DUNSTAN: (jokingly) Careful now! Don't want to get blood on your hands, do you?

ANNE reacts with horror.

DUNSTAN: (contd) Best place for them's somewhere outside 'til they've got a good old smell to 'em. But in the dry mind. Your husband knows. Still meantime I'll put 'em in the kitchen, shall I?

ANNE: Thanks.

DUNSTAN takes the birds into the kitchen and then re-enters.

DUNSTAN: Mr. Ryder about, is he?

ANNE: (thoughtlessly) No.

DUNSTAN: (surprised) He hasn't left yet, has he? His car's still out front.

ANNE: (covering up) I mean.....Well what I meant to say was is he is here but he's getting ready to go. He's in the bathroom.

DUNSTAN: Oh I see. (frowning a little, he studies her) You all right, Mrs Ryder?

ANNE: Yes. Perfectly. Why?

DUNSTAN: Look a bit pale to me. And you seem a little.....

ANNE: Just tired. I didn't sleep too well last night. Something urgent you wanted to see him about, was there?

DUNSTAN: No it's not urgent. Just that he said he'd settle up with me when I came back.

ANNE: Oh yes. Of course. Well I can do that.

She picks up her handbag, opens it and takes out her cheque book.

ANNE: (contd) Only it'll have to be a cheque I'm afraid.

DUNSTAN: That'll do.

ANNE crosses to the bureau, opens it and presses the switch of the lamp standing on top of it. The light does not come on.

DUNSTAN: Oh dear! Bulb gone, has it?

ANNE: It doesn't matter. I'll do it over here.

She moves to the table and starts to write the cheque.

ANNE: (contd) What do we owe you?

DUNSTAN: Twentyfive for the logs and a fiver for the pheasants.

As ANNE is completing the cheque he removes the bulb from the table lamp and shakes it.

DUNSTAN: Bulb seems OK. Fuse must have gone.

He removes the plug from the wall socket and, taking a small

screwdriver from his top pocket,
starts to remove the cover.

DUNSTAN: Got a spare?

ANNE is desperate for him to
leave.

ANNE: I don't know. Probably not. But it doesn't matter.

DUNSTAN: You don't want to be without it, do you? If you haven't I'll pop back with one.

ANNE: Well that's very kind of you, Mr. Dunstan. But please don't bother.

DUNSTAN: No bother. Sure you haven't got one?

ANNE: (trapped) I'll look.

She hurries into the kitchen.
DUNSTAN removes the fuse from
the plug and studies it.

ANNE returns with a small
packet.

ANNE: There's these.

She gives the packet to DUNSTAN
who checks it.

DUNSTAN: That's what we want. 13 amp. Thought you'd have a spare. Not like your husband to be without some I'd say. And very sensible too.

As ANNE waits with ever
increasing concern, he fits the
fuse, replaces the cover on the
plug, plugs it into the wall
socket again and tries the lamp.
It lights.

DUNSTAN: There you go.

ANNE: Thank you so much. I'm most grateful. (she holds out the cheque) Here's your cheque.

DUNSTAN: (taking it) Ta. Well I'll be off then. The wife and me old boy'll be wondering where I got to.

He moves to the front door.

DUNSTAN: (calling) Cheerio, Mr Ryder! (he listens)

ANNE: He won't have heard you. Not if he's got
the shower on.

DUNSTAN: No I don't suppose so. Well goodnight.

ANNE: Goodnight.

DUNSTAN exits and ANNE closes
the door and leans back against
it, revelling in relief.

She crosses to the table, picks
up her glass and swallows the
remainder of the whisky in it.

The door of the master bedroom
opens and DAVID steps out onto
the gallery. He is wearing the
same suit he was earlier.

He stands at the rail looking
down at ANNE. She turns, sees
him, gasps and drops her glass.

She watches, transfixed, as he
slowly comes down the stairs.

BLACKOUT

Scene 3

Sitting room, Ryder house. It is the following morning.

There is a crumpled pillow and a disordered duvet on the settee and, on the floor beside it, an empty whisky bottle and a glass. DAVID's briefcase and portable telephone are no longer in view.

There is the sound of a car pulling up outside.

The front door is unlocked and ANNE and JESSICA enter. JESSICA is carrying an overnight holdall. ANNE crosses to the table and puts her handbag on it.

JESSICA puts down the holdall, moves to the settee and gives ANNE a questioning look.

ANNE: I couldn't even try to sleep upstairs. Not that close to.....Not that it made any difference.

She gathers up the duvet and folds it.

JESSICA nudges the empty whisky bottle with the toe of her shoe.

JESSICA: And this?

ANNE: (desperately) Oh Jess! I had to! You can't imagine what it was like for me being here last night.

JESSICA: You'd have been better off taking one of your sleeping tablets.

ANNE: I took two.

JESSICA: (appalled) As well as all that whisky! You're crazy. They don't mix well you know. Never, never do that again! You hear me?

ANNE: Yes, OK. I'm sorry.

Picking up the duvet and pillow she takes them upstairs and enters the master bedroom.

JESSICA retrieves the whiskey bottle and glass from beside the settee and exits into the kitchen with them.

Re-emerging from the bedroom, ANNE comes down the stairs, makes straight for the drinks table and reaches for a bottle.

Re-entering, JESSICA sees what she is about to do, crosses quickly to her and grabs her arm.

JESSICA: Pull yourself together! We've nothing to worry about. It went like a dream.

Reluctantly ANNE replaces the bottle.

ANNE: But are you sure?

JESSICA: Positive. I told you. There was absolutely no problem at Harwich. The man on the desk barely glanced at the passport. And as soon as I was on board I went straight to the cabin and stayed there until we got the Hook.

ANNE. You didn't speak to anyone, did you?

JESSICA: I didn't need to. Not even when I filled up with petrol outside Leiden.

ANNE: (alarmed) Oh my God! Why did you do that?

JESSICA: So I could pay for it with your husband's credit card. Luckily his signature's very easy to forge. And I had plenty of time to practise on the way over.

ANNE: I still think that was taking far too much of a risk.

JESSICA: Nonsense. And it was necessary. That's further proof that he was there. Besides there was nothing to it. I just handed over the card, signed the slip and that was it.

ANNE: How long do you think it'll be before they find his car?

JESSICA: There were hundreds in the multi-storey at Schiphol. So it'll be a while.

JESSICA takes a packet of cigarettes from her shoulder bag and lights one.

JESSICA checks her watch.

JESSICA: Quarter past eleven. Funny, isn't it? But with the hours difference the 'plane landed at Stansted five minutes before it took off from Amsterdam. I can never get used to that.

The telephone rings and ANNE reacts with a look of alarm.

JESSICA: (calmly) That'll most likely be his office.

ANNE crosses to the telephone but does not pick it up. She gives JESSICA a worried look.

JESSICA: Answer it then.

Nervously ANNE picks up the telephone.

ANNE: (into telephone) 41274.....Yes.....No he's in Amsterdam.....Oh I see No he hasn't.....Well yes if he had missed the ferry I'm sure he'd have called me. But there's no reason why he should've. He left in plenty of time..... Yes it is.....Yes that has to be the answer. The traffic can be dreadful over there, can't it?.....No I'm sure there isn't.....Of course I will..... Thank you. 'Bye.

She hangs up.

JESSICA: Good girl! You handled that well.

ANNE: Van Oppen's have been on to them asking where he is.

JESSICA: And the next call you get'll probably be from the police. Or a visit more likely.

ANNE: (greatly alarmed) The police!

JESSICA: Of course. You expected that surely.

ANNE: But why?

JESSICA: Anne, darling! Your husband's disappeared with what has to be a fortune in uncut diamonds. They're bound to want to talk to you.

ANNE: But he's gone missing in Holland. Why should the police over here be involved?

JESSICA: Because when he doesn't turn up and it looks like he's skipped, his bosses will be on to them in a flash. And in any case, even at this stage, the Dutch are bound to ask for their co-operation.

ANNE: What shall I say to them?

JESSICA: It's open and shut. So they're not going to be doing a lot of nosying around here. They'll ask a few questions, that's all.

ANNE: But what if they search the place?

JESSICA: Why should they? They've no reason to. Not with all the evidence there is that the man they're looking for left the country. Besides even if they did have a look around they're certainly not going to drag the mill-pool. So don't worry. All you need do is stick pretty much to what you said on the telephone just now. He drove off last night to catch the ferry and you haven't heard from him since. You're very worried of course and you can't imagine what's happened. Just be the loving, concerned wife. (pause. And then with a wicked smile) And you know how to do that, don't you? After all it's a part you've played well enough over the last few years.

ANNE: (wincing) Oh, don't!

JESSICA: (genuinely) Sorry.

She kisses ANNE on the cheek.

ANNE: And I haven't really been able to keep that up. Not recently anyway.

JESSICA: Poor darling! But it's over. You're free. Now it's just the two of us. And very soon, together. No more hiding, no more snatched meetings, no more pretending.

ANNE: Oh, Jess! I love you so much. You won't ever walk out on me, will you?

JESSICA: It wasn't me who walked out the first time round, was it? We had a wonderful two years and then, suddenly, one day you're not there anymore.

ANNE: I didn't want to leave. Not deep down. You know that. It's just that, despite everything, I still couldn't accept that I was.....Not then.

JESSICA: OK. I can understand that. But if only you'd said. We could've talked it through. And rushing off and marrying the first man you met! Well that was a hell of a way of finding out for sure.

ANNE: It was awful!

JESSICA: Of course it was.

ANNE: And it got worse and worse. God knows what I'd have done if I hadn't met you again that day in Regents Street.

JESSICA: Left him and found another me I guess. Frankly I'm surprised you didn't do that.

ANNE: I thought about it. Just didn't have the nerve. And then, there we were, face to face again. And later, back at your place, well it seemed like David had never happened.

JESSICA takes her hand, kisses it and then holds it against her cheek. Then she picks up the holdall, moves to the table and puts it down on it alongside ANNE's handbag.

JESSICA: I left his briefcase and the telephone in the car. But you'll have to dispose of this stuff.

ANNE: How?

JESSICA: Have you got an incinerator?

ANNE nods

JESSICA: (contd) Then burn the lot. Bag and all. And dump the ashes in the river. Along with his glasses. What did you do with the stones?

ANNE goes to the bureau, opens it and takes the sealed packets

from one of the small drawers.
They have been opened.

JESSICA: Best they're not here. Give them to me.

ANNE: What are you going to do with them?

JESSICA: I've got a safety deposit box.

ANNE hesitates.

JESSICA: (contd) Don't you trust me?

ANNE: Of course I do.

She gives the packets to
JESSICA.

JESSICA: In six months or so you and I'll fly out to Tel Aviv and my good friend Haim Yaacobi will give us a good price for these.

She puts the packets into her
shoulder bag.

JESSICA: (contd) And no questions asked.

ANNE: How much?

JESSICA: Oh he'll haggle. Probably start off offering us as low as ten or twelve percent of what they'll make. But we won't settle for any thing less than half. And we'll get it.

ANNE: Are you sure he's safe?

JESSICA: He's as crooked as they come. And diamonds are his line of business. From wherever.

ANNE: And you say he's a friend of yours?

JESSICA: A very good friend. More than that even. A very close friend.

ANNE: How close?

JESSICA: (with a smile) He's gay, Anne. OK?

ANNE: I'm sorry. It's just that I couldn't bear to think of you.....

JESSICA: I know. It's hurtful. But I had to. Remember?

She looks at her watch.

JESSICA: I've got to go.

ANNE's reaction is one of
consternation.

ANNE: You're not leaving!

JESSICA: I have to. For one thing there's no reason for my being here. Not at the moment. And for another I've got a meeting with a BBC producer at two thirty. Might be a job in it for me. And I could do with the money. We're not rich yet.

ANNE: Oh, no! Don't go. Please!

JESSICA: I must.

ANNE: (desperately) But I can't spend another night in this house alone. I really can't!

JESSICA: Don't be silly. You're going to have to. But I'll be back soon. And there's absolutely nothing to be afraid of. He's dead, Anne! And weighted down under fifteen or twenty feet of water. And, believe me, there aren't such things as ghosts.

ANNE: You don't understand.

JESSICA: I'll give you a call this evening. And then on the hour if you like. There, how about that?

She kisses her on the cheek.

JESSICA: (contd) 'Bye.

She moves to the front door
where she turns.

JESSICA: And get rid of those things now.

She exits. ANNE runs after her
but gets halfway to the door and
gives up. There is the sound of
JESSICA's car starting up and
pulling away.

Disconsolately, ANNE moves to
the table and opens the holdall.
She pulls out the clothes
which DAVID (JESSICA) was
wearing when we last saw him and
piles them on the table. Among
them is a wig and DAVID's
spectacles.

She goes through the pockets of the jacket taking out a wallet, small notebook and a credit card case. These she lays on top of the other clothes.

In another inside pocket of the jacket she finds a passport. She opens it, studies it briefly and then puts it to one side.

The front door bell rings and, startled, alarmed and confused, ANNE stuffs the clothes and the other items back into the holdall. She looks around wildly for somewhere to hide it, crosses to an old wooden blanket chest standing at the foot of the stairs and bundles the holdall into it. The door bell rings again.

Crossing to the door, ANNE sees the passport lying on the table. She snatches it up and slips it into the back pocket of her hand bag and closes the zip. Then she goes to the door and opens it. The caller is DUNSTAN.

DUNSTAN: 'Morning! Won't stop. Just to say that me and me old boy have stacked the logs like I said we would. All neat and tidy they are now.

ANNE: Oh, thank you, Mr. Dunstan. That's very good of you,

DUNSTAN: Pleasure. Mr. Ryder got away all right then. Saw him driving off as I was going down the pub. Gave him a wave but he can't have seen me. And you mind. Anything needs doing around the place while he's not here you give me a shout.

ANNE: Right. Yes I will. And thanks again.

She closes the door, goes to the window and watches until DUNSTAN is out of sight.

As soon as he is she returns to the blanket chest, takes the

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holdall from it and, pausing
only to pick up a box of matches
from beside the wood stove,
exits with it through the front
door.

CURTAIN