

CUCKOO

A small apartment shared by Joe Orton, 35, and Kenneth Halliwell, 41. The walls are covered in collages and reviews of Orton's plays with the words DISGUSTING, FILTH, and DEGRADING. There's lino on the floor, a typewriter on a table, two single beds with boxes of stuff under them, a bedside table with a diary, a radio, and an old-fashioned TV in the corner. Joe is sleeping in one bed.

Kenneth, completely bald, slightly stout, stands over Joe in the bed and holds a bowl of rice. He places the bowl on the bedside table, picks up a dirty towel from the floor and whips the sleeping Joe with it.

KEN: Move your arse we've got a play to write. It's afternoon already, I've been waiting for you to get up. I've made notes on *What the Butler Saw*

Joe reaches his arm out and switches the radio beside the bed on – it's the Beatles song 'A day in the Life'

(shouting over music) Come on, a genius like us must work!

Ken puts off the radio. Joe sits up in bed.

I made you rice.

JOE: With golden syrup?

KEN: What's the occasion?

JOE: I've got the clap.

KEN: I'm not impressed by that you know.

JOE: Well I am highly sexed, what do you expect?

KEN: You're not highly sexed with me.

Want to be? On second thoughts..after the doctor has seen to your dick.

Joe eats the rice.

JOE: You look like a zombie do you know that?

KEN: And so I should. I lead the life of a zombie.

Joe puts the radio back on - 'A day in the Life' by the Beatles continues to play. Ken puts on a wig, and starts tidying up, picking up underwear from the floor. Joe watches and eats.

JOE: Oh why are you fussing around - I was sleeping.

Ken puts off the music

KEN: I'm going to wash your underwear. You've been wearing them for five days at least.

JOE: You were the last one wearing those.

KEN: *(Ken grabs another bit of laundry)* Was I the last person wearing this?

JOE: You know I hate this Matron persona you've adopted.

KEN: I'm doing what has to be done because you don't lift a finger. When was the last time you cooked me dinner? When was the last time you cleaned up after yourself? Oh that's right, you're too busy being an acclaimed playwright.

JOE: I don't like you acting like a harassed wife.

KEN: I feel like a harassed wife.

JOE: I don't want a wife - unless she's a 15 year old boy.

KEN: You think a 15 year old would put up with the crap I do?

Want sardines for dinner tonight? I want to make you something nice. I
feel like something nice, do you?

JOE: I've got plans.

KEN: What plans?

JOE: People to see-

KEN: Arses to kiss-

JOE: Behave

KEN: When are we going to write this play?!

JOE: I'm busy! Soon.

Joe opens his drawer beside him and takes out a notebook and pen.

KEN: Are you writing ideas for the play in that book..let me see.

Joe pulls away from him with the notebook.

Go on, we're supposed to share everything. You know you're going to
tell me all about it eventually.

JOE: Not yet, it isn't ready.

He writes a little in the notebook then puts it back in his drawer.

Just now I need to get away from all this domesticity.

Joe gets up and dresses while they have the following conversation.

KEN: What do you expect me to do about it? Live in your filth? Soon there'll be more cockroaches than food in this place.

JOE: Kenneth, I think it's a bad thing we spend 24 hours a day 365 days a year together.

KEN: Do whatever you want. It's all the same to me. Where are you going exactly?

silence

Joe..our next play.. let's really write it together, like we used to.

silence

I want to contribute more... I came up with the title for Loot remember

JOE: And when they give out awards for titles, you'll be in the money.

KEN: I spent all my money on us.

JOE: I know.

KEN: Let me back in the game.

JOE: I have to go out now.

KEN: Go out... go out.. enjoy yourself. Leave me here.

Go to the parties, meet Vivien Leigh and Harold Pinter. Just pretend I don't exist.

JOE: Vivien Leigh is dead.

KEN: I know she's bloody dead! If you hadn't all conspired to keep me away from the party..

Joe continues to smarten himself up to go out, and poses in front of the mirror, ignoring Ken.

I'm not being nasty!

JOE: You are, you're being a nasty old queen.

KEN: I AM NOT A HOMOSEXUAL!

JOE: There's no need to tell all Kensington about your rampant 'non-homosexuality'

KEN: Homosexuality disgusts me.

JOE: It would take a fleet of psychoanalysts to fathom that one out.

KEN: Come back to bed. Want a cuddle?

JOE: Don't be silly. If you want a wank, have one without me.

Joe puts his cap and jacket on, and picks up The Times newspaper

Look at this.

KEN: You write to the Times to condemn yourself again?

JOE: -you'll love it-

'Bestial is how I describe this most loathsome play on in London at the moment.... filthy details of a sexual and psychopathic nature. Mrs Edna Weltorpe'

KEN: Congratulations.

JOE: You're a nobody until somebody loves you.

KEN: Aren't I aware of it?

JOE: You alright?

KEN: How can I be alright if you always ask me if I'm alright.

JOE: Do I? You look a bit down that's all

KEN: It's my face... it's not a cheerful one. Do you want me to put on a fake smile to make you feel better? Like this?

JOE: No

KEN: I could try and walk around with a big fake smile for you..to go with my fake hair-

JOE: -If you never want me to ask you again-

KEN: I never want you to ask again..

What are you looking at me like that for?

What business is it of yours if my jaw is clenched?

JOE: Well have a nice day.

Joe leaves

KEN: What do you think my plans are... 'have a nice day'

Ken looks at himself in the mirror like Joe did. He adjusts the wig, takes his shirt off, sucks in his tummy then releases, walks round bare-chested. He touches the typewriter and sits as if about to write but doesn't. He goes over to the bedside drawer and looks through his own, then decides to open Joe's drawer. He takes out the notebook Joe was writing in. He opens it expecting to see notes for a play, it is Joe's diary. Ken is surprised to discover what it is, but reads it, furtively at first.

JOE: *(voice-over)* We sat talking about how happy we both felt and of how, it couldn't, surely, last. We'd have to pay for it. Or we'd be struck down from afar by disaster because we were, perhaps, too happy. To be young, good-looking, healthy, famous, rich and happy is surely going against nature.

Ken flicks to another page

(voice-over) Picked up three men in Hornsey Road lavatory. Had an orgy while the people walked above us.

Ken jumps forward to another page

(vo) A dwarf in the khazi in Kings Cross sucked me off last night.

KEN: So that's where you were whore.

JOE (VO) I think I'll put him in my next play.

KEN: Our next play whore.

Ken goes to another page.

JOE (VO): Everyone thinks Kenneth is too dull to hate.

Peter says I should leave him.

A separate life is becoming more appealing.

Especially now.

Ken freezes in shock. He reads and rereads it. He gets up, paces, puts the diary down, returns to it and rereads. He glances through other pages but hears a noise outside and stuffs the diary back in Joe's drawer.

Enter Joe, who prances about dancing to imaginary music, grabs the dazed Ken and wheels him around. Ken shoves him off.

KEN: Stop it!

JOE: I'm high as a kite! The Beatles want to meet me-

KEN: -They don't like you, they want to be macho young lads not associated with queers like you-

JOE: -I'll win them round. That Paul McCartney..well I'd fuck them all to be honest.

(looks at watch) I'm on the tele, put it on quick!

Ken doesn't move so Joe puts it on.

TV (clipped BBC VO):

1967, in the middle of what they call the swinging sixties. London is the centre of a new youth cultural revolution

Joe tunes it to a new station.

TV (new station, VO) :

And today (*jingle*)..our famous guests are Eva Gabor, Joe Orton..

and The Bachelors (*audience clapping*)

Joe Orton, award winning playwright, with two shows currently on the West End, one of them appropriately named Loot since the film rights just sold for £100,000. It's quite a change of fortune for this young man
(*TV clapping*)

You're a very successful writer now Joe if I may call you Joe.

JOE (VO): You may (*audience laughter*)

Ken rolls eyes, Joe is pleased with himself.

TV (VO); You've had a battle with the censors and Mary Whitehouse I know.

JOE (VO): Well I'm a very naughty boy (*audience laughter*)

TV (VO): What sort of writing do you like and how did you become a writer?

JOE (VO): Oh, I like the classics Eamon. I admire Voltaire, Aristophanes.. I just sort of fell into writing you know. I taught myself and I found I had a talent for it.

KEN: My arse

JOE: Shhhh...

TV (VO): What will you do with the £100,000 you got for Loot?

JOE (VO): As a single man, I've got nothing I want to spend it on. (*audience laughing*)

Ken gives Joe the middle finger repeatedly

I'll put it in the bank for when I'm no longer a writer. I don't want to be a writer all of my life. We have a shelf life you know, I hope I never write anything as bad as early Shakespeare (*audience laughing*).

KEN: You wouldn't know a classic if I slapped your arse with one.

JOE: I've read Wuthering Heights.

KEN: And hated it

JOE: I'm not big on romances, so what?

Ken switches off the TV.

KEN: Wuthering Heights is not a romance, it's about the death of romance.

JOE: It's not finished! Put it back on.

Joe goes to put it back on but Ken stops him, Joe keeps trying but when he gets it on his segment is over. He puts it back off.

JOE: Oh great, just fucking great, thanks.

KEN: Isn't it interesting?

JOE: What?

KEN: Isn't it interesting that you didn't mention me on tele?

JOE: He didn't ask about you... the host.

KEN: Because no-one knows my contribution..the man isn't psychic

JOE: You shouldn't care about all that stuff, it's not important.

KEN: It's important to me. And you know it's important to me. It's our work.

JOE: It's my work.

KEN: I help. You use my ideas, you recycle our old stuff. You can't exclude me forever. I see what you're doing. Soaking up all the fame and glory for yourself and leaving me here in this lousy flat on my own while you're out swigging champagne with luvvies and producers-

JOE: If you knew what idiots some of them are you wouldn't even bother.

KEN: Did you meet anyone when you were out?

JOE: There are people outside, so yes.

KEN: Who?

JOE: Just general people. Look sorry I didn't mention you. I don't know how

KEN: You just say we write together, you don't have to say the rest

JOE: They'll know

KEN: They won't-

JOE: Then all the questions.. I don't want people to know about me..my intimate life.

KEN: So I get shut out.

I've wasted my talent... all I ever wanted was to be a writer.

Instead I'll die like my Dad someday with my head in the oven.

That's my talent.

JOE: Maybe you should use your talent and not grudge me.

KEN: You think you're so beautiful don't you? So smart, so funny, and I'm just this lump. This staid old bald lump you're stuck with, but you're not stuck, you can go at any minute, but what would you do without me, how would you write, get your material, who would be your editor then?

JOE: I'd pay for one.

KEN: You'd pay for one. Well isn't that charming after all these years and all I've given you. We are a team. We have always been a team. I won't be left behind. Even though they all hate me...your new celebrity friends. They don't know anything-

JOE: Well you shouldn't have called Kenneth Cranham ugly...nevermind very ugly... and to his face too. He's a very pretty boy and one of my actors.

KEN: What was he doing wearing your coat?

JOE: I gave it to him.

KEN: How about instead of giving young men your coat, you mention me on the tele?

JOE: Next time ok?

KEN: You'd better. I won't put up with this.

JOE: Fine

KEN: Why wasn't I invited to the party with Vivien Leigh?

JOE: She died before it could happen.

KEN: I wasn't invited before then.

JOE: So what do you want me to do about it?

KEN: Stick up for me. I'm not some nobody, don't let them think it. You need me. All I'm asking for is a bit of respect.

JOE: Hum to yourself if you're sad.

KEN: Oh fuck off.

JOE: Gladly

Joe leaves

KEN: *(after him)* Are you coming back for dinner?

No answer. Ken sits on the bed, opens Joe's drawer, takes out the diary and flicks through it again.

JOE (VO): A separate life is more and more appealing. Especially now.

He goes to another page.

'Kenneth said 'Oh, all the boys will do anything.' 'They won't,' I said. 'There's a lot of things they won't do.' It was irritating to be told by someone who likes being masturbated that the boys 'will do anything.' He's knows nothing but must always pretend. Ken can never be wrong about anything.

He always says I can't do without him but really I don't know what he would do without me.

He flicks to another page.

I dread to think what Ken will do when he finds out he's not invited to another big party... he'll kill me, although it's himself he keeps threatening to kill when he's in one of his moods.

Ken goes into his own drawer, takes out his pills and pops some.

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Joe knocks on his friend and BBC producer Peter Willis's door. Peter answers and kisses his cheek.

PETER: Well come in you clever darling. How are things at home?

JOE: Ken's in a mood.

PETER: You know he's not invited to the party with her Maj. He'll just embarrass everyone with his crazy defensiveness and hostility.

JOE: He's still very sore about Vivien Leigh.

PETER: Poor Vivien, it's horrible. I mean I wanted to meet her too. I was in shock.

JOE: If he finds out it's happening again.

PETER: He will find out *after the fact*, now listen to me love-

JOE: He'll throw a real strop. It will be: 'What would you do if you came home and I was dead on the floor?' 'How would you feel if you came back and found me with my head in the oven like my Dad?'

PETER: You've got to shake him off, he's not presentable.

JOE: I thought buying him the wig would help more, but it looks like a teacosy perched on his big bald head.

PETER: He looks better with it than without it.

JOE: When he gets enraged it shakes.

Peter laughs

He wants to give everyone the impression that he writes my plays.

PETER: Anyone who has ever met Kenneth knows he did not write those plays. He's so depressing and boring, he could never have written them-

JOE: I run stuff past him.

PETER: You're very good mannered about it darling but stop fucking things up.

JOE: He's on tranquilizers now.

PETER: You've got bigger better things ahead of you. Ken will never be anybody.

JOE: I'm the one with the big bank balance now, the big name..he can't stand it.. he wants me in the same gutter he found me

PETER: I wouldn't call RADA a gutter.

JOE: He couldn't cope without me. I don't know what to do..I..
well I do other things to take my mind off it all

PETER: I know but sex with strangers is a waste of your energy, a dead-end..
you should know that

JOE: I can't give up. When I meet people for sex I call myself a packer, a
metalworker, a crimper's assistant, that way I put people off guard
and their dialogue is more natural. It's also better for sex. I like the
forbidden.

PETER: Not forbidden anymore.

JOE: They still have to be 21.

..I hate this tight assed civilisation. In Morocco you can do anything,
things that in England would have the police and angry parents after
you.

PETER: Which reminds me love - now I don't mind hearing about your sexual
experience at first hand but I do object to hearing about it from the
other side of a crowded restaurant.

JOE: Who by?

PETER: Kenneth Williams was in Biagi's and he was talking about Morocco and
somebody who must be you, and the gentleman he was with kept
saying "Oh my goodness!" and laughing. And Kenneth was camping
loudly and offensively and fluttering his eyelashes.

JOE: Well I've no control over him.

Look I better warn you..to make up for Ken not being invited to the party with her Maj, I'm bringing him to your dinner instead.

PETER: Oh no!

JOE: It's only fair. Anyway, I've got to go - I'm meeting a man in a toilet.

PETER: You always go to such interesting places darling.

They kiss on the cheek goodbye.

Are you ever going to wash that filthy tee-shirt of yours? You've been wearing it every time I've seen you lately.

JOE: I let the sweat collect, and then when I pick someone up it gives them a kinky thrill.

Joe leaves.

In Joe and Ken's apartment, Ken is typing, finishes a sheet and adds it to a small pile of paper, and holds them up in his hand.

He stands, a fantasy audience clap, he bows.

He traverses the fantasy stage, sits, shakes the interviewer's hand.

KEN: *(he nods, listening to imaginary questions, smiling at the audience)*
Well, I've always been a writer Eamon. I'm theatre-trained. Rada you know. But to me the most important thing in life is love. And love is involvement. Nothing should be allowed to threaten it, not even art.
(imagined audience clapping). There are many great artists in this world who don't, for some reason or other, not their own fault, just don't

make it big. Some do, it's usually just fashion of course. But, quality does have its part. My new play.. it's about well.. let me read you a little part of it... 'He wanted to die. To get back to a dim memory of a better place. In his heart each man carries some lost paradise, a ruined world of submerged continents. He wished to return.' (*imaginary audience clapping*)..

Yes I'm delighted to be meeting Her Majesty. Imagine the surprise when the party was thrown just for me (*imagined audience appreciation*)

A knock at the door. Ken ignores it, the knocking continues.

PETER: It's Peter, open the door!

KEN: Joe's out!

PETER: (*through the letterbox*) I've come to see you Kenneth.

Ken opens the door, and Peter enters.

KEN: What do you want?

PETER: I just came to check up on you. See how you're doing.

KEN: I don't need checked up on. Why do you think I need checked up on?

PETER: How's that doctor I sent you to working out?

KEN: Oh him.. I told him everything that's been happening to me and all about Joe.. and about my art...and well..he gave me these pills.

He shows Peter several different tubs of pills.

PETER: Are you wearing slap Kenneth?

KEN: *(touches face self-consciously)* Do you like it? It's only a little rouge

Ken goes to the mirror and looks at himself, he puts on his wig, he thinks for a moment of how it used to be between him and Joe.

Joe has always found me quite impressive you know.

Thinking back

It used to be a lot of fun.

There is a glance between them and Peter looks away, to Joe's diary.

PETER: Have you been writing again Ken?

KEN: Oh that. It's *his*. He writes in it about his life. Well it's mostly about me of course. Ken said this. Ken did this. Yes, there's a lot of me in here... not all of it I would wish repeated *(trying to make an innuendo)*

silence

What you think of me.. that's in here too..

silence

You know all I ever wanted to be was a great artist, a writer, to make a difference. I'm very well read you know..more than him.

PETER: He's doing well.

KEN: I know that! Don't you think I know that?

PETER: Are YOU doing well?

KEN: If that's a joke, it's in very poor taste.

PETER: You been rowing a lot with Joe?

KEN: No

PETER: He says you are.

KEN: Why would he tell you that? Why would he tell you anything?

PETER: I'm his friend. I'm both your friends.

KEN: We don't have any friends.. and we don't need them. I haven't the faintest idea what you are doing here.

PETER: I'm keeping an eye out for you that's all..since Joe isn't.

KEN: Huh!

He's changing isn't he? You see it too. He's becoming so big, that's the problem. He came from nothing, you can't go from nothing to big without going a bit strange in the head.

He used to look up to me. I know that will surprise you but people don't know us as well as they think.

It's *our* art you see. I do make a huge contribution. It's not fair. He does the writing now, but I used to and he reuses a lot of my stuff you know and I made up the title of Loot. But I'm treated like a persona non grata.

And I'm fed up with it. In this diary he calls me a nag!

A pain, an obstacle! Listen to this

(flicks to a random page, then another until he gets a bit he wants to read out)

"When I got home Kenneth was in a rage. I'm getting sick and tired of him."

Did you hear that?!

When I gave him everything he has...I taught him..used up my inheritance looking after him. I'm his editor! But he's grown so famous now that he's leaving me behind, after all these years. He thinks he's better than me now! He said, can you believe it.. he said 'I can pay for an editor now.'

PETER: That's true of course.

KEN: But nobody can do it like I can! I can see what you think. You think I'm a failure.. a half dead thing in old clothes... washed up.. but did you know that.. that we came up with the idea for *The Boy Hairdresser* together?

But now! Now he's erasing me from life.. from memory.. I'm sick of treading behind him like some corpse. He'd be nothing without me but he treats me-

PETER: -You need to try and cheer up Kenneth, for your own sake and everyone else.

KEN: How in God's name do you propose I do it?

PETER: You have a choice darling..either accept that Joe is doing well and be happy for him whatever that means.. even if it means he leaves you

KEN: Do you think he's leaving me? Did he say that? What did he say?

PETER: No no no..but you have a choice. You're a writer too, some of your ideas might be the best ones. You could maybe make it on your own.

KEN: You really think so Peter? That means a lot... but no..no.. we've always worked together

PETER: Well if you change your mind, you can always send me something over and I'll take a look.

KEN: *(clutches Peter's arm)* Will you really? That means a lot to me. Did Peggy tell you I sent her my play? I wanted her to be my agent too.

PETER: Will she be?

KEN: Well what does she know? But you..you're bigger than her. I'll send you something soon. Maybe Joe doesn't have everything after-all?

PETER: No, not everything. Take care of yourself Ken.

Peter leaves.

Ken sits at the typewriter and rolls in a sheet of paper. He sits there..notices the diary out and gets up to put it away. Sits back down..rubs his hands together.. types the title.. stares at the page..thinks.. gets up and tidies a little.. sits back down..

Joe returns

JOE: What are you up to?

KEN: You're back! Peter was round and he wants me to write something for him

JOE: Are you sure?

KEN: What do you mean? Of course I'm sure.

JOE: Peter was round. Ok. What did he say?

KEN: That he wants me to write something for him.

JOE: Why don't you just rework that thing you sent Peggy? It just needs a little-

KEN: She hated that! The cow. What does she know? Peter was very enthusiastic about me.

Where is the play I sent Peggy?

Joe sits on his bed.

JOE: I think you threw it out after what she said about it.

KEN: Have you eaten?

JOE: I'll get us something in. You work.

KEN: Alright, thanks. Better start afresh anyway

Silence in the room. Ken sits at the typewriter doing nothing. Seeing this, Joe interrupts.

JOE: I've got an invite for you.

KEN: *(excited, thinks it might be the party with her Majesty)* Oh really!! When is it?

JOE: It's Peter's dinner tomorrow night.

KEN: *(loss of excitement, dull)* Oh fantastic. Who'll be there?

JOE: I don't know. Just the usual I expect. Maybe Twiggy. Frankie Howard. Did I tell you I did a photoshoot with her the other day and Susannah York and there was a man in a gold mini skirt? I asked him, do you always go around in drag like that and he said, no, he changed into it upstairs.

KEN: I better get an outfit ready.

JOE: There's plenty time.

KEN: No but it might need washed.

Ken goes through his wardrobe and pulls out a shirt and an Eton tie and puts it round his neck

JOE: You're not going to wear that Eton tie are you?

KEN: It will be a real laugh, and give us something to talk about other than your career.

JOE: I'll go get us in milk for cornflakes.

Joe leaves, Ken puts on the shirt and tie in the mirror. He sits on the bed. Gets back up and puts on a beret on top of his wig.

The next day they go to the dinner party

Peter opens the door wearing his own Eton tie, the noise of the rest of the room is behind him.

PETER: Come in darlings, lovely to see you.

Ken and Joe enter. Joe smiles, waves and blows kisses to other guests. Ken stands back shyly.

You look gorgeous as always, and you too Ken..don't you look a picture in that shirt..*(sees the tie and stops short)*.. what is that round your neck? Is that an Etonian tie? You never went to Eton..why are you wearing it?

KEN: Pardon

PETER: You're not entitled to wear that tie!

The noise in the room has subsided as the people present watch the encounter

KEN: It's a joke, meant to be funny.

PETER: The joke's on you I'm afraid. You're trying to pass yourself off as going to Eton which, quite frankly, is pathetic!

KEN: I don't care. I don't care if I offend old Etonians *(Ken looks Peter up and down)* It's a joke.

PETER: As if people don't dislike you enough already Kenneth. Of course if you were younger you might get away with it, but you're not, you're a middle aged non-entity!

silence, some audible gasps from the room, and some titters

..trying to pass yourself off as having gone to Eton-

JOE: Ok stop it! It's just a stupid tie.

PETER: I still don't know what you see in him I'm afraid. Ridiculous!

KEN: *(explodes)* All you people are all mad on Joe but really you have no idea what he's really like!

 He's a jumped-up prick! He doesn't care for anyone but himself! None of you see that-

Joe leaves and Ken runs after him.

They have a hushed argument in the street

KEN: *(grabs Joe)* I'm sorry..

JOE: *(shakes him off)* Thanks for wrecking our relationship with a BBC producer and his friends. They'll be laughing their heads off at us right now.

KEN: But can't you see he's only interested in you. I thought..he led me to believe he might be interested in me.. but- he called me a middle-aged non-entity! Did you hear that!!

Ken keeps grabbing at Joe but Joe is shoving him off

JOE: The non-entity comment was out of line, but don't take it out on me. I'm sure he didn't really mean it but you might have blown things for us *both* now at the BBC.

KEN: He did mean it... they all do.

 I hate myself. I'm pathetic. I've led such a dreadful unhappy life.
 Everyone treats me like shit!

 I'm always treated like shit!

They'll get their just desserts for what they're doing to me

JOE: Let's go home.

KEN: Hold me tonight, I'm mad for you tonight.

Everything seems further away, the world thinks it would be better without me. I'm being left behind.

Things used to be better. It's a lost paradise. But it's my heart.

JOE: Come on, it's the swinging 60s. Things are going our way.

KEN: I hate the fucking sixties.

JOE: Let's go.

At this rate the sharpies will be after us.

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The next day, Joe is at his desk.

KEN: I cannot believe how that Peter spoke to me last night.

JOE: I'm writing.

KEN: Write. Write. Who's stopping you writing?

JOE: I can't write if you're talking.

KEN: You used to write when I talked to you. You used to write stuff down that I said. You think I don't recognise some things I said in *What the Butler Saw?*

JOE: It's a play about mad people.

KEN: I know it's a play about mad people. I've made notes.

JOE: I've seen them.

KEN: What did they say then?

JOE: I'll read them again later.

KEN: Again? You had to add 'again' didn't you?

Silence

Where did you go last night after we got home?

JOE: Nowhere interesting.

KEN: Do public lavatories not count as interesting?

JOE: Are you my keeper now?

KEN: One day you'll meet some weirdo who'll bash your head in.

JOE: I like a bad boy.

KEN: Death does have depth.

JOE: *(looking at Ken's notes)* I hope you've not taken out the naughty gay subtext.

KEN: The gay subtext is what they've got going for them.

JOE: Not my quick wit then.

KEN: They're witty enough, but ideally they'd have more feeling.

JOE: I'll go out later to try and find some.

Joe types on the typewriter.

Ken goes to him. He stands over him. Joe eventually ceases typing.

KEN: I am disgusted at your immorality.

JOE: Where did *that* come from?

KEN: You're not meeting any of my needs!

I'm getting palpitations again. And there's these spots on my legs..look.. *(he shows)* and I'm getting pains in my chest. It's all the worry about you.

JOE: Lie down if you're not feeling well.

KEN: Have you brought other men back to this flat?

JOE: Would you like me to?

But if I do you'll have to do more than make him tea and moan about the weather. Or he'll think you're impotent.

KEN: Stop it! I won't take this from you.

JOE: Fine.

KEN: I saved you beans for dinner last night... since we didn't eat at Peters.. I was hungry but I saved them for you

JOE: I ate out.

KEN: Who with?

JOE: Peggy. We don't have any beans in.

KEN: Oh yes we do, why would I say that if we didn't! We have a quarter can.

Joe shrugs

But you were down the pisser, Peggy my arse. I know what you've been eating.

pause

JOE: It's good material for my work.

KEN: You're full of shit.

JOE: Just because you're frightened of fucking, doesn't mean we all have to be.

Ken loses it and hits Joe about the head.

KEN: You're a nobody....You think you're such a big somebody because people fawn over you. Everyone wants you at their parties..you think it's you they want.. it's not..it's your celebrity. They're parties for sycophantic fools..and you're just a stupid twat!

JOE: So what if I'm enjoying myself?

KEN: But I want to enjoy it with you! As an equal.

JOE: We are equal. I was a nobody all my life too-

KEN: - you want to hit the big-time on your own-without me-

JOE: -Ken please!-

KEN: -I'm not even small-time. I don't exist...

And you pretend you're single so people don't know you're a queer.

JOE: Everyone knows I'm not single and I'm a queer. You think people don't know about you? They do. I'm getting sick of you blaming me, is that the only way you can feel good?

KEN: -I never feel good, you know better than to say a foolish thing like that. Since when have I felt good?

JOE: You're such a martyr these days, it's intolerable.

KEN: Me intolerable? You're intolerable. Everything is all about you...

JOE: I've tried..I have. I've included you despite-

KEN: No you haven't!

JOE: -You fuck it up! I invite you places-

KEN: You've passed my work off as your own.

JOE: -No I haven't- IT'S MY WORK!

KEN: -You let them exclude me from the all these parties!

JOE: Oh for God's sake. I don't write the invites do I? You're being very unreasonable.

KEN: People hate me, they always have. Except you. Don't hate me. You used to look up to me. Now you agree with the rest of them, that

glamorous set you're hanging with, don't you? That I'm the middle-aged non-entity.

JOE: You're getting to be a fucking mater delorosa aren't you?

KEN: And you're turning into a real bully. Do you know that? Does it penetrate your tiny consciousness? Can I pierce your colossal vanity?

JOE: Don't keep insulting me.

KEN: You've met someone else. If you have, I'll blow my brains out.

pause

JOE: Don't be silly.

Joe goes to his desk and types. In a moment of quiet, Ken speaks.

KEN: You'll have to face up to the world someday, for what you're putting me through.

JOE: God laughs and snaps his fingers, the only thing man can do is snap his fingers too.

KEN: I'm invisible to God.

JOE: You're never invisible. Not to anyone.

KEN: Fate doesn't look as kindly on me as it does on you.

JOE: You don't look kindly at Fate either, why shouldn't she vomit on your kaffies?

KEN: Life's a joke to you. Love's a joke. I miss you so much I could die...

Joe doesn't seem to hear

and you don't care.

Long pause. Joe looks over at Ken who is sitting with his head in his hands. He pauses longer as if to think what to do, gets up and goes over to him, and sits beside him. Ken leans into him and puts his arms round him. Joe pats Ken gently but seems uncomfortable in the embrace. After a moment he removes Ken's arms, but Ken takes and holds his hand in place.

JOE: You're looking wan these days.

KEN: It's this wilderness London. We must leave here. Maybe out of the city
I can get back to writing again.

Joe extracts his hand from Ken. But Ken renews contact. Joe moves again, Ken re-establishes contact. Joe withdraws, Ken holds on. Finally it ends in a short struggle where Joe throws Ken off, and rushes out the door with Ken pulling at him.

KEN: Fine, go you bastard. Don't let me get in your way.

He goes under the bed and pulls out a box which has been stuffed under it.

Maybe you've got another television interview to give all about YOU.

He tips it out over the floor. It is full of household stuff, tools and a hammer, a tin of paint and a brush,

It's our anniversary soon, perhaps you'd like a tin of poisoned salmon for it, or a glass of cyanide champagne. You'll enjoy that, you've always wanted to die young so you don't become one of those disgusting old men out looking for sex.

Seeing the paint and brush, Ken opens the tin.

I could kill you just like that (*clicks fingers*) if I was so inclined. I'm used to death.

My life is death.

He paints in huge letters on the wall 'Joe Orton is a spineless twat.'

He just leaves all the stuff from the box out on the floor when he is finished. He opens the bedside drawer, picks up the diary and reads near the end.

JOE (vo): Arguments continue sporadically with Ken, breaking out like sudden flames in a dying fire.

Thank God for other people. Life is perfect and the pleasures of the flesh have never been better.

Sometimes I feel as if the whole of creation is conspiring to make me happy.

KEN: I'll cut my wrists in the bathtub and then you'll be sorry. If I was dead when you come back from the toilets would you even give a damn?

Ken picks up the hammer and goes over to the typewriter as if he's going to smash it. But instead he throws it down.

Joe returns, sees wall, pauses

KEN: Where have you been? Don't you know how worried I get? My nerves can't stand it! Are you trying to hurt me on purpose?

JOE: Sometimes you have this look, like you hate me.

KEN: What's the matter - life in depravity town not exciting enough to keep you occupied?

JOE: Then you look away.

silence

I like what you've done to the flat.

KEN: I've been cleaning.

Joe is looking at the wall

JOE: Well, what is all this about?

KEN: Sex rotten out tonight?

JOE: I wasn't-

KEN: There's no need to lie to me about it. I know what you're like. You'd walk the Charing Cross Road until your balls dropped off if you thought you'd get a fuck out of it.

pause

JOE: Bunch of ugly old men out tonight that's all.

There was a beautiful young man in red though, but alas - not for fucking.

KEN: Have you given any thought to my predicament?

...Of course not, you're obsessed with your own.

JOE: Well my predicament is you.

KEN: What do you mean by that! 'my predicament is you'

Silence

I asked you a civil question..

You know I'm on these tablets to calm me down. Are you working overtime to override the effects of them?

JOE: At least you get some space to yourself, I'm-

KEN: - I don't fucking want it

JOE: When I go out is the only space I get, and that's in public!

KEN: Don't lie, you're not out for 'space'

JOE: At least you have time to yourself

KEN: I have time alright. But it's all empty.

Pause.

JOE: You should come out with me one night

..you might meet someone who'd touch it for you.

KEN: The only thing I'd want to do with the creatures you meet is whip them senseless.

JOE: You're just substituting sex for violence. Oh, I understand, for me lust and anger are indistinguishable. One day I might run mad and commit rape.

KEN: Just what you need, another stint in jail.

JOE: It would be good for my work.

KEN: Oh yes, you have such a big purpose. You want to punish society because it's straight and you're bent, that's your big cause.

To shove it in their face. What even is society? Nothing. It's worthless, temporary.

JOE: I want to expose bloody British hypocrisy. Their nuclear family bullshit, 2.4 kids, stupid stuck-up crone-like fucking British civilisation The English have it coming, I'd rip them to pieces and stick it up their collective arse. Tear them up and let them sit and shit in the ruins of their 'well-mannered' culture. I am a defender of the truth. YOU? You do nothing but sit and curse fate!

KEN: I shouldn't expect you to understand. You're a writer. I'm a mere laundry-maid.

Joe makes to go right back out again.

I thought it was just disgusting old men out tonight.

JOE: I shall be a disgusting old man myself one day.

KEN: It's raining.

JOE: I like the rain at night.

KEN: I went out in the rain the other night. The city looked like a waterfall of colours. It reminded me of you.

All beautiful things remind me of you.

JOE: You didn't say that when it was pissing down in Brighton last week.

KEN: Has it ever happened to you?

JOE: What?

KEN: What you're doing to me?

silence

No, of course it hasn't.

JOE: I was going to suggest something nice but if you're going to be like this.

KEN: I'm not like anything, what's the nice thing? Is it about the party?

JOE: I was going to suggest we go back to Morocco..after I've finished the play. Think of it - hash, wine, and boys.

KEN: You just want to see that ugly Mustafa again. He's so ugly-

JOE: -There's plenty for us both.

KEN: They don't like me as much as you.

JOE: What do they care as long as they get paid?

pause

KEN: I want to spend the rest of my life with you, do you want to spend the rest of your life with me?

Joe pulls a torn newspaper page from his pocket and sticks it to the wall - it's a headline about his recent play with the word 'GENIUS'

I don't want to go back to Morocco.

JOE: Why not? I thought you wanted to leave London.

KEN: If you cared about me at all you couldn't be this insensitive.

JOE: You're too sensitive. Look at the way you behaved last week in the theatre.

KEN: You shouldn't carry on like that with that actress Susan, she'll think you're after her. I wanted to rip all the hair out her stupid fat head.

JOE: She's just a girl. Don't be so jealous. I don't like girls. I don't even like men who act like girls. Why do so many men act like girls because they're homosexual?

KEN: I don't.

JOE: No you never did.

pause

KEN: I was imposing wasn't I, back then... they were all scared of me.. but not you

JOE: You had presence.

KEN: but it was just fear. And rage. I wanted to punish everyone. Now I just want the quiet.

JOE: I'm not going to some God-forsaken hole in the middle of nowhere.

silence

KEN: Why do I need you so much?

JOE: Because I'm your only friend.

KEN: I get so sad sometimes I just want something nice in my life now. But I can feel you separating. I'm so lonely. So empty without you. And your people, all those people at the BBC like Peter..

silence

I don't want you to leave me Joe. I'm very disappointed in life. It's given me so little, you're all it's given me.

Silence

Ken moves over to Joe and puts his hand on him intimately. Joe moves away.

JOE: Let's not start all that again.

KEN: You can't even fuck me anymore, you don't want to put your body in mine.

JOE: I don't know why.

KEN: I want to make it work but I don't know how.... I know I'm not easy ...but you can't make it on your own and you know it

Silence

Let's leave here. This town makes me want to scream.

JOE: Sorry, I have my film to be pushed to directors, my new play going on television, Loot is still on in the West End and I've got rewrites to do.

KEN: How dead all the people look.

Joe?

JOE: Yes?

KEN: Give me a reason to live.

Long pause, too long

JOE: I want to help you I do, it's just hard. You see I'm happy, I'm gloriously happy. I wish I could infect you with it but the happier I get the more you hate me for it.

I haven't taken anything from you-not a thing.. I don't want to hear about shit things anymore. I love my life! And right now all I want to do is add more fucking to my script..until the audience scream in hysterics. I've not got much time as I'm meeting someone later, but for now I need to write!

KEN: Write. Go.

Joe types

Ken goes to the drawer and pulls out Joe's diary. He walks over and stands right behind Joe with it in his hands, quiet.

JOE: *(with his back to him)* What are you doing there?

KEN: Trying to remember a quote. I think-

JOE: From *What The Butler Saw*?

KEN: I think it was 'especially now'

Joe ignores him.

Let me remember. Yes, 'a separate life is becoming more appealing..especially now.'

Joe turns round, sees the diary, grabs at it, they struggle, Ken throws him off.

JOE: That's private. I don't blame you for reading it but-

KEN: (*flicks through pages*) Let me get it right

Joe makes more grabs for it and gets it.

KEN: (*stands upright and tries to quote the diary*) I don't need it, I remember... 'Kenneth is too dull to hate'

JOE: I didn't say that!

KEN: -Why did you write a separate life is becoming more appealing, and why 'especially now?' Have you met someone?

JOE: Where does it say that?

KEN: 'How will Kenneth react when he finds out?'

JOE: Oh fuck off! I'm going out! I don't have to put up with this.

KEN: That I'm not invited to a party with Her Majesty!

JOE: -that's not my fault-

KEN: It is your fucking fault! You could have insisted, you could have stuck up for me-

JOE: -I did! They don't want you there-

KEN: -you could have said you wouldn't go without me! You could have said that! In here you call me things! moan about me.. you are sick and tired of me.. you said it here! I can't believe it..do you really think I'm going to put up with this treatment forever? I tell you I won't tolerate it for a moment more. It's making me ill. You are making me ill! Do you know how much pain this is causing me? Do you ever give me one moment's thought. No. You've got to stop this Joe, do you understand?

pause

JOE: Maybe I should think about buying a new house down in Brighton.

.. With the £100,000 from the film.

Pause

What do you say?

KEN: ...

Do you mean it?

Joe nods

That would show all these bastards up here who hate me. It would show them that I am a more important part of this partnership than they know. We can try to go back to how things were. The world, these people, they'll never understand us. Maybe I can work on my talent again with some peace.

JOE: I'm glad you're happy.

Joe puts on the radio.

Ken turns it down.

KEN: And you'll be away from this sordid city with all the lavatories and
 celebrity parties. Well we can come up occasionally to go to them, just
 to show how above it we are. Eat and drink then go back home. That
 will be so much better than this shit life.

pause

JOE: But obviously I'll have to spend a lot of time up in London too...

Silence

For work

But I can come and go you know, come down to Brighton at the
weekends..

Silence

When I can.

Silence

KEN: Weekends?

Pause, it sinks in that Joe is trying to leave him

When you can.

Joe turns the music back up and types.

...

Weekends.

Ken goes across the room unseen by Joe whose back is to him, he picks up the hammer. He moves to the seated Joe, stands behind him and then swings the hammer down several times on Joe's head, killing him with horrible swift violence.

He places the bloody hammer down on top of the diary. Takes an overdose of pills and lies down on the floor beside Joe to die.