

# Threads

by Michael Olsen

**Characters:**

ALEX, early 20s, music composition student

MELINDA, mid 20s, social worker

NATHAN, late 20s, journalist

PAUL, late 20s, public servant

BREE, late 20s, university tutor

\*TAMARA, graphics student

\*GILDA, herbalist

\*JOCELYN, Arts student

\*REBECCA, unemployed

\*The roles of TAMARA, GILDA, JOCELYN & REBECCA could be played by the same actor, early 20s, using wigs, glasses, costumes & make-up to distinguish each character.

**Music:**

The music should be electronic but Romantic, lush and melodic. It should not be atonal or dissonant at all.

**Setting:**

The living-dining room of an inner city terrace house in Melbourne. All scenes take place here.

ALEX's bedroom, the front door and the kitchen open onto the living-dining room area; the other bedrooms are accessed via a hallway.

**Time:**

The events of the play take place over roughly three months, from late February to early June.

**Note:**

The essential component of Alex's mania is *charm*.

## ACT ONE

*Overture music: the Household Theme played in a richly orchestrated, romantic style.*

### SCENE 1:

*The living room is empty. Bree rushes in with a yell.*

**BREE:** And yea there was no more wailing and gnashing of teeth.

*Melinda enters with Nathan, who's holding a can of beer.*

**NATHAN:** Things couldn't have gone better. All I had to do was shake his hand and say: "All the best" like I meant it.

**MELINDA:** He seemed upset though don't you think?

**BREE:** He just looked out of it I reckon.

**MELINDA:** There was a history with Jim.

**BREE:** That was the problem: we didn't know it before he moved in.

**MELINDA:** He had such a lost quality about him, as if he didn't belong anywhere.

**NATHAN:** He didn't. He was always cruising that reality bypass of his.

**BREE:** You know what really got to me? He was such a phoney. He thought he was so cool with that hothouse in his bedroom, rigging the hydroponics to the house guttering. (*Bree grabs a choked ashtray.*) But this is where it all wound up.

**NATHAN:** He was kind of fun to have around though. Like a pet. He was always glad to see you.

**MELINDA:** That was part of his charm.

**BREE:** Honestly Mel you can see charm in a psychopath.

*Paul enters, wearing an apron, with a duster under one arm and a can of air freshener in the other which he sprays all over the room.*

**NATHAN:** Hey take it easy. There is an ozone layer you know.

**PAUL:** That little—he stunk out the whole house. I don't want a trace of him left by the time we have dinner.

**MELINDA:** It was only a few plants.

**PAUL:** Veritable forest more like.

**NATHAN:** It was nice ganga.

**PAUL:** You weren't here when the police called in were you?

**NATHAN:** He was your mate.

**PAUL:** Serial killers go to work every day and you never know what they're really like.

**MELINDA:** Where did we go wrong?

**BREE:** "We?" Wasn't it your job to spot him?

**NATHAN:** Next time we do a thorough job: interview, references, the lot.

**BREE:** Absolutely. No half-wit's going to move into my house.

**MELINDA:** But we do make exceptions dear.

**BREE:** Ha ha.

**NATHAN:** Makes me wonder why we need to get someone in in the first place.

**BREE:** Exactly.

**PAUL:** We've always had someone in the spare room. From the beginning. It's always been like that. Besides, who wants to pay more rent?

**BREE:** You're right. You're right. This is the way it is. *(Bree ruffles Paul's hair.)*  
We'll get it right next time.

**MELINDA:** Actually—

*The phone rings. Bree answers it.*

**BREE:** I'll just check. It's your Uncle Bill.

**MELINDA:** Tell him I'm not here.

**BREE:** You tell him.

**MELINDA:** Please.

**BREE:** I am not going to keep doing this.

*Bree says the right thing and hangs up the phone.*

**MELINDA:** Thanks.

- BREE:** You're gonna have to deal with him sooner or later.
- MELINDA:** Actually I've just thought. I've got someone who might be interested.
- BREE:** Here we go. Some hard luck story looking for a break.
- MELINDA:** His name's Alex. He's a music student at uni. He's a friend of a friend. He's from the country and he's looking for a place.
- BREE:** But what's he like? What's he *really* like?
- MELINDA:** He's pretty low key. Studious. Fun, but in a quiet way. He'd be perfect.
- BREE:** He sounds a bit of a drip.
- PAUL:** We'll have to interview him of course.
- NATHAN:** I hope he doesn't play the tuba.
- MELINDA:** He plays the piano and a synthesiser. He's actually a composition student.
- BREE:** An arty farty. Great.
- MELINDA:** I've got a photo of him from that fantastic ball we went to last year.
- Melinda exits.*
- BREE:** You said that ball was a dud.
- NATHAN:** It was but don't tell Mel: she's thinking of taking me again this year.
- Melinda enters holding a small photo album.*
- MELINDA:** There. He's kind of cute don't you think?
- BREE:** No.
- PAUL:** Can he cook?
- MELINDA:** Can't all country boys cook?
- NATHAN:** See if you can tee up an interview as soon as possible. The sooner we sort this whole thing out the better.
- BREE:** Hey come on. Let's put up a notice at Readings first. That's the rule isn't it?
- MELINDA:** There's no harm in calling him.
- BREE:** What the hell is this? I thought we had a process here.
- NATHAN:** We do—but if we can get someone in quickly . . .

*Melinda rings Alex, arranges the interview.*

**BREE:** Did you guys know about this?

**PAUL:** You know I tell you everything.

**BREE:** When things happen behind my back . . .

**PAUL:** It's happening quickly that's all.

*Paul puts an arm around Bree. Melinda returns.*

**MELINDA:** It's all arranged.

**BREE:** When's he moving in?

**NATHAN:** It's just an interview. We'll write out the window ad now.

**BREE:** We want someone who's committed and upfront.

**NATHAN:** Sincere and reliable.

**PAUL:** Someone who can cook.

*There is a knock at the door.*

**NATHAN:** That's for me.

*Nathan answers the front door.*

**MELINDA:** Someone kind and generous.

**BREE:** Honest.

**PAUL:** Someone who has a regular income.

**BREE:** They've got to be sensitive to others.

**MELINDA:** And willing to pitch in for the common good.

**BREE:** We want someone who's aware of the world and what's going on in it.

**PAUL:** They've got to be dependable. Reliable. Someone you can trust.

*Nathan enters and unfurls the Aboriginal flag.*

**NATHAN:** Someone who knows what matters.

**BREE:** Absolutely.

**NATHAN:** I'm so glad the co-op saw the sense in getting one more flag than they needed.

**PAUL:** I don't know how you can use them like that.

**NATHAN:** They're a caring sharing bunch. I'm sure if they knew they'd approve of what we're doing.

**BREE:** Makes you think about who was here first, doesn't it?

**NATHAN:** Hey did I ever tell you that one of my distant ancestors was Aboriginal?

**PAUL:** We wanted you to declare the house a sacred site so we could claim it as our own permanently.

*Paul starts to hammer up the flag over a section of wall which has a large crack running through it, but discovers a small packet wedged in the crack.*

**PAUL:** What's this?

**BREE:** He talked about his secret stash, remember?

**NATHAN:** We could have it tonight. A celebration.

**PAUL:** Or we could just throw it out and be done with it.

**NATHAN:** Hey come on. If you don't want it.

**PAUL:** We don't want this stuff in here. The police are probably watching this place as we speak.

**NATHAN:** Hey relax. It's here we might as well.

**PAUL:** Maybe he'll come back for it.

**NATHAN:** He forgot where the front door was. Come on.

**PAUL:** I don't want it affecting everyone. You saw what he was like.

**BREE:** Let's have some fun for chrissake. *(Bree takes the stash off Paul.)* The last time you smoked was college.

**MELINDA:** Didn't you take off your clothes and jump into that fountain?

**PAUL:** That was Nathan.

**MELINDA:** And Bree went in as well.

**BREE:** I was overcome by the moment darlings what can I say? I was an impetuous youth.

*Melinda laughs, shakes her head.*

**BREE:** What's so funny?

**MELINDA:** I can't believe this: you couldn't bear Jim smoking when he was here, but as soon as he goes you want to light up!

**BREE:** Don't you want any? Come on. One joint won't make you mad.

**MELINDA:** I've got to finish off that report on Sylvia.

**BREE:** Ah the weight of the world.

**MELINDA:** Don't you—

**NATHAN:** Hey what about the film?

**PAUL:** What film?

**MELINDA:** Sorry I forgot all about it.

**NATHAN:** Are you ready? There's a 3.15 session. If we hurry we could—

**MELINDA:** What about tomorrow?

**NATHAN:** I've got that seminar on post-structural ecology.

**BREE:** And you're meeting with the collective tonight aren't you?

**MELINDA:** Damn.

**BREE:** The film sounds great.

**NATHAN:** Do you—well, do you want to come?

**MELINDA:** Yeah you two go. Tell me what it's like.

**NATHAN:** Paul?

**PAUL:** No I'll clean up here. That alfoil in Jim's room won't be coming off by itself.

**NATHAN:** We'll be home soon enough. I'll pick up something nice from K and G's OK?  
*(To Paul)* How does that sound?

**MELINDA:** You forgot something. *(Melinda kisses Nathan.)* Don't be late.

*Nathan's mobile phone rings.*

**NATHAN:** Damn! I hate this thing. Yes? Oh hi John. Yes, I'm coming tonight. I don't know what time. Probably later. Yes. You guys can manage without me, can't you? Alright. Hey now don't pass any resolutions without me being there. Alright. Bye. Never stops. We're out of here.

*Paul kisses Bree goodbye. Bree and Nathan exit. Paul looks at Melinda, shakes his head.*

**MELINDA:** He's gone. It's over.

**PAUL:** With things at work being what they are, I really can't afford another dud.

**MELINDA:** What's going on at work?

**PAUL:** They're looking to outsource. There's some consultant poking his nose into everything. *(Pause)* He is going to be good, right?

**MELINDA:** You want a guarantee?

**PAUL:** We really don't need another Jim.

**MELINDA:** What can I say? Each time I've met Alex he strikes me as upfront. Decent.

*Paul nods.*

**PAUL:** OK. Hell, how much damage can an honest man do?

*Melinda smiles.*

**MELINDA:** He might be the biggest liar in the world.

## **SCENE 2:**

*The lights come up on Alex, walking around the living-dining room.*

**ALEX:** How could you just abandon her? If she was in that much trouble I would have thought you'd intervene straightaway.

*Melinda enters struggling to carry a couple of Alex's heavy bags which she finally drops on the floor.*

**MELINDA:** There are some people who can only be helped by leaving them alone. Sylvia needs to learn responsibility. What's the matter?

**ALEX:** Can you hear that?



**MELINDA:** Hear what?

**ALEX:** Shhh listen.

**MELINDA:** I can't hear anything.

**ALEX:** The sound of the city. Traffic. People. It's incredible. This is exactly where I want to be. Thanks for—you know—everything.

**MELINDA:** My pleasure.

*Alex picks up some embroidery on a chair.*

**ALEX:** What's this? *Yakuwa tya*: dreaming land.

**MELINDA:** We translate it as "place of dreams."

**ALEX:** This place? Well, if I'm dreaming don't wake me up.

*Paul and Bree enter.*

**PAUL:** Alex! Good to see you.

*Alex shakes hands with Paul and Bree, Bree a little taken aback by Alex's enthusiasm.*

**ALEX:** It's great to see you. Here's that cookbook you asked for.

**PAUL:** Gee I'd forgotten all about that. What's this?

**ALEX:** My synthesiser.

**MELINDA:** How about a demonstration? Come on. Give us a blast.

*Alex plays a simple tune—the Household Theme we heard at the opening of the play.*

**PAUL:** Wonderful. Who's it by?

**ALEX:** Just something I've been working on. It's not finished yet.

**PAUL:** You're kidding. What do you think of that Bree?

**BREE:** It certainly fills the room doesn't it?

**MELINDA:** It's beautiful Bree.

**BREE:** I hope you don't practice too loudly.

**ALEX:** I've got headphones. You won't even know I'm here most of the time.

**MELINDA:** So what inspires you?

**ALEX:** All sorts of things: an idea, a sound—

**BREE:** A beautiful woman?

**ALEX:** Of course.

**BREE:** I'll try not to be too inspirational then.

**MELINDA:** Bree, as you've probably guessed, is blessed with one of the most modest natures around.

**BREE:** If you have a problem with that you can see Melinda.

**ALEX:** I'm sure there's no shortage of people who can tell me where to go.

**PAUL:** It's a shame you had to come down by train. I would have liked to have met your father.

**ALEX:** He said he couldn't spare the time. The fact is he's never left the farm since my mother died. I suppose some people can't let go of the past because that's where they live.

**MELINDA:** How old were you when she passed away?

**ALEX:** Old enough to know who she was and why dad would sometimes feel a million miles away standing right next to me.

**PAUL:** (*coughing*) Well then um—is this all your gear?

*Nathan enters with a ten speed bike which he leans up against the wall.*

**NATHAN:** Bloody committees! Couldn't fight their way out of a wet paper bag if their life depended on it! Alex! Welcome aboard.

*Nathan and Alex shake hands.*

**ALEX:** Thanks.

**PAUL:** What on earth happened at the co-op?

**NATHAN:** Morons! They were going to stop buying coffee from some African shit hole because of a takeover by some junta. I told them, hey! we should still support the economy no matter what. It's the people who matter the most. I threatened to resign if they didn't agree. Sometimes you really have to beat some sense into people.

**PAUL:** But everything's OK now?

**NATHAN:** Bluff is the heart of every committee. Once you can do that, you've got it made.

*Nathan's mobile phone goes off.*

**NATHAN:** That'll be them now saying they've achieved consensus.

*Nathan wanders off to answer it.*

**PAUL:** Well, we've got some rosters and so forth for you to fill in.

**MELINDA:** Goodness he's hardly set foot inside the place and we've got him all signed up!

**BREE:** All in good time. Tell me Alex, I was curious as to why you're going part time this year. You didn't say anything about it in the interview.

**ALEX:** Just felt like a break. You know how it is.

**BREE:** But it's your final year. You'll be dragging it out.

**MELINDA:** The interview's over Bree.

**BREE:** I think Alex would agree that you can never be too careful these days can you?

**ALEX:** There are all sorts of people around.

**BREE:** We just got rid of one the other week as you know. Sometimes you have to be ruthless in communal housing otherwise there's just chaos. Things get—

**ALEX:** Wow is that White Linen you've got on?

**BREE:** You know it?

**ALEX:** Beautiful perfume. Very classy. My mum used to wear it.

**BREE:** Well—um—I'm bound to see you around campus. Come over to the Women's Centre some time. We'll have a coffee.

*Bree leaves.*

**ALEX:** Speaking of food. I'd love to cook something as soon as I can. I've got something in mind.

**PAUL:** Great. We can go over what you need.

*Alex and Paul go into the kitchen. Nathan hangs up his phone and draws Melinda aside.*

**NATHAN:** I think Alex is going to work out just fine.

**SCENE 3:**

*Night. The dining table is set out lavishly with napkins, knives and forks, plates, glasses and flowers. Melinda and Paul are sitting beside each other, admiring the table setting. Bree enters with an armful of books that she puts down. She kisses Paul, sits down. Bree pours herself a glass of wine and downs it quickly, then pours another.*

**PAUL:** How was your day?

**BREE:** I had to skip lunch because I got bailed up in my office by some snottynosed young thing blubbering about her father and how he's not supporting her at uni.

**MELINDA:** How did you counsel her?

**BREE:** "Counsel" her? I told her we'd all been there and to get a grip on herself. Besides she was wearing these hideous earrings. If your life is going down the toilet at least have the sense to look good. How long has he been at it?

**PAUL:** Since about 4.30.

**BREE:** Doesn't he know after Melinda's cooking we'll eat baked beans on toast?

**MELINDA:** Now I know what to make next time!

**BREE:** How's Sylvia?

**MELINDA:** I wish I knew. She's run away again. She'll be back. She knows that. She has nowhere else to go.

**BREE:** We could always put her up here.

**MELINDA:** Your room's not big enough.

*Nathan enters.*

**NATHAN:** Sorry I'm late. Any leftovers?

**MELINDA:** We haven't had firsts yet.

**PAUL:** Maybe we should make a rule about cooking times in this house.

**BREE:** I don't think I ask much of my food. Really. All it has to do is be there in front of me before my stomach jumps up and strangles my—

*Alex enters carrying a dish.*

**ALEX:** Not long now folks. This is the appetiser: guacamole á la Lewis. Enjoy.

*Alex puts the dish in the centre of the table, then returns to the kitchen. There are looks all round, then Nathan dips a biscuit and eats. Nathan spits out his mouthful.*

**NATHAN:** Christ! He's put ginger in it! Didn't I tell him I hate ginger?

**BREE:** *(coughs)* It's a little strong.

*Paul laughs. Nathan reaches for a drink and washes the guacamole down, as does Bree. Alex enters.*

**ALEX:** Everything OK?

**MELINDA:** It's delicious.

**PAUL:** It's great.

**BREE:** We're all ready for the main course.

**ALEX:** After all you guys have done for me I want this to be extra special, a way of saying thanks. I promise this'll be one meal you're never ever gonna forget.

*Alex returns to the kitchen.*

**NATHAN:** We have to eat it first.

**BREE:** At least we've got something to drink.

*Bree pours herself another glass of wine.*

**PAUL:** Are you sure you've had enough?

**BREE:** Nathan?

*Bree pours Nathan another glass of wine.*

**NATHAN:** I say we prepare ourselves for the maestro. *(Nathan and Bree clink glasses.)* Come on. Have another one.

*Bree fills Melinda's glass.*

**BREE:** You should try getting drunk more often Melinda. It's a political act. Patriarchal society can't abide any woman of excessive appetites.

**MELINDA:** Are my appetites excessive darling?

*Melinda squeezes Nathan's thigh under the table. Nathan laughs nervously and moves away.*

**NATHAN:** Only in the best way.

**PAUL:** Drunks of both sexes are equally—objectionable.

**BREE:** Objectionable? Are you saying you object to—

*We hear a baroque-like march begin, rhythmic and pulsing: it is the Household Theme re-orchestrated for an orchestra. Melinda dims the lights.*

**BREE:** Hey! Are you in on this?

**ALEX:** *(off)* Please be seated, ladies and gentlemen!

**BREE:** Cut the bullshit I just want my dinner!

**NATHAN:** All promise no delivery.

**MELINDA:** Well let's find out.

*Suddenly the door to the kitchen opens and light pours out. Alex stands silhouetted in the doorway. He is wearing a chef's outfit. To the beat of the music he slowly comes out holding before him a large, long dish covered with a shiny cover topped with an ornate handle. Paul clears away some of the flowers so Alex can set this dish down in the centre of the table. Then Alex lights a taper and lights the candles on the table.*

**BREE:** What is it?

**PAUL:** Wow!

*Alex whips off the cover on the dish to reveal a gelatin-covered shape which looks vaguely like a two-storey terrace house. There is more than polite applause from the group. Alex walks around the table and fills everyone's glass with a twist and a flourish. Melinda inspects the dish closely.*

**BREE:** What do we do—eat it or look at it?

**PAUL:** Incredible.

**MELINDA:** See the number on the front?

**NATHAN:** Yeah but what does it taste like?

**ALEX:** The implements to dish up.

*Alex hands Paul a pair of large ornate spoons.*

**PAUL:** Should we wait for the flames to go or—

**BREE:** I'm not having any!

*Alex sits down and raises his hands. They stop. He raises a glass.*

**ALEX:** A toast. To *Yakuwa tya*, an honest meal for all these honest folk, may it fill their empty spaces but leave them hungry for more.

**EVERYONE:** *Yakuwa tya!*

**MELINDA:** And to our newest arrival. His first meal!

**EVERYONE:** The First Meal!

*Paul makes the first cut and slowly everyone gets dished up. Nathan is the first to taste it.*

**NATHAN:** Hey this is absolutely delicious.

**MELINDA:** Come on Bree have some.

**PAUL:** Just a taste.

**MELINDA:** It won't kill you.

**PAUL:** You were so hungry before.

**NATHAN:** You have to have some now—we've all had a taste.

*Nathan offers Bree a slice. Bree puts out her tongue in a provocative manner and accepts the offering.*

**ALEX:** So what do you think, huh?

*Pause*

**BREE:** It's good. It's really good.

**ALEX:** Great.

**MELINDA:** Maybe Alex has figured out that the way to your heart is through your stomach.

**BREE:** Well Paul knows that—why do you think he's doing Cooking 3 at the CAE this year?

**ALEX:** Aren't those classes for bachelor boys who don't know how to boil an egg?

**BREE:** If you were here the other night you would have had some of Paul's cooking. It was much more than a boiled egg.

**ALEX:** I think yours is pretty good. That green Thai curry was fantastic. Paul thought it was a little heavy on the spice maybe, but—

**BREE:** Well it doesn't of course scale the heights of this—

*Bree brushes a finger through the flame, and recoils in pain.*

**BREE:** Shit!

**ALEX:** Careful careful.

**NATHAN:** Put it under some water.

*Bree gets up to go into the kitchen. Paul gets up to follow.*

**BREE:** I'm OK. Don't fuss.

*Bree goes into the kitchen. Paul sits down.*

**PAUL:** I hope your other meals are safer.

**ALEX:** Reminds me of a bushfire that went through a couple of years ago. It got some of our sheep even though we tried to move them into a larger paddock. The worst thing was going around afterwards and shooting all the injured ones. You couldn't kill them quick enough. If an animal's *really* sick you just put it out of its misery.

**PAUL:** I'm sure Bree will be fine.

**ALEX:** Oh I didn't mean—

**MELINDA:** All we lack for is a 202.

**NATHAN:** Charming. They're the best of friends. Really.

**PAUL:** Sometimes I wonder they don't have a rifle at work. Be nicer than the long drawn out process they have in place.

**NATHAN:** I thought you said you were OK.

**PAUL:** That was yesterday. You can't say the public service doesn't advance—every year they sack you in a different way.

**NATHAN:** But that's what any hierarchy has to do. One way—

**PAUL:** Here we go again.

**NATHAN:** Hey come on. You know the chiefs maintain their position by blaming the indians. It's a pattern repeated all the way up to the national level as well.



**PAUL:** I'm tired of this old argument. The next thing you're going to say is that power corrupts.

**NATHAN:** Well of course it does.

**PAUL:** It's the liars and cheats who make it so high that depress me.

**NATHAN:** But that's the nature of power. It corrupts—yes, alright, it corrupts. Of course it does.

**PAUL:** Not necessarily. Power can be exercised judiciously.

**NATHAN:** No way. By its very nature it undoes those who think they know how to rule. Power's the exercise of might by those who *think* they know over those who think they know *better* but lack the will to—

**PAUL:** But how can representative democracy exist in a world still governed by greed and malice? It just won't work. You're trusting fools with the means of destruction.

**NATHAN:** Well what's the alternative? You have to give people a voice and the faith to use it. Look at the blame that gets dished out to unions, environmentalists, migrants. We're made to think the fabric of society would tear apart if we even so much as listened sensibly to what these people had to say.

**PAUL:** Yes but—

**ALEX:** Is that what *Green Oz* is all about—a voice-in-the-wilderness type of thing?

**NATHAN:** Hey—the voice *of* the wilderness. For example at the moment—

**PAUL:** And this one's important I reckon.

**NATHAN:** There's plans to build a toxic waste dump in East Gippsland. Now I ask you, can we let that go ahead?

**ALEX:** So you think you make a difference?

**NATHAN:** I couldn't leave work every day thinking I hadn't made some kind of difference to the big picture.

**MELINDA:** It's the same for me.

**ALEX:** (*To Melinda*) You're right at the front line, aren't you, with the sick, the lonely, the dispossessed, the poor. How do you know you make a difference?

**MELINDA:** The fact that people do get over their problems and do go on and lead happy lives.

**ALEX:** Is happiness the goal?

**MELINDA:** Don't you want to be happy?

**ALEX:** What does it mean to be happy? I can put it into my music, but I can't put it into words.

*Bree enters, nursing her finger.*

**PAUL:** Are you OK?

**BREE:** I'll live.

**ALEX:** I better put the coffee on.

*Alex goes into the kitchen.*

**BREE:** Thank God I'm not doing the dishes tonight. He's used everything—every plate, pot, pan—

**MELINDA:** It is your turn.

**BREE:** No it's not. Today's Wednesday.

**NATHAN:** It's Thursday.

**BREE:** Oh shit. As they say in the classics, I've got a bad feeling about this.

#### **SCENE 4:**

*Melinda, Paul, Bree and Nathan are sitting in the living room. Paul closes an accounts book loudly.*

**MELINDA:** He must have got caught up somewhere.

**NATHAN:** He could have phoned.

**MELINDA:** He doesn't have a mobile.

**BREE:** Maybe we should give him one.

**MELINDA:** Just tell him how much he owes.

**PAUL:** A housemeeting is the only time we're together. It's important. We told him that.

**MELINDA:** So? He's paying his way. What more do we need?

**PAUL:** This is the way we've organised things here, OK? If he wants to go buck the system . . .

**BREE:** He can just piss off.

**MELINDA:** I'll talk to him alright?

**BREE:** How do you expect the house to—

**MELINDA:** I said I'll talk to him.

**PAUL:** OK OK. *(Pause)* Things at work being what they are I don't need this aggravation.

**MELINDA:** What's up?

**PAUL:** That consultant's report is coming out soon. It's going to name names, positions, whatever they think is superfluous.

**BREE:** You aren't superfluous.

**PAUL:** Everybody's in the crosshairs.

**NATHAN:** Management wouldn't be.

**PAUL:** We've been told they're under consideration too.

**NATHAN:** Of course. How silly of me.

**PAUL:** The way things are these days nobody's safe.

**NATHAN:** Do you really think they'd employ a toecutter to sack themselves?

**BREE:** Nathan, behave. Don't scare people. *(Bree puts her arms around Paul.)* Everything'll be OK. I won't let Alex upset you—or Mr Happy here.

**PAUL:** Alex isn't uppermost on my mind at the moment.

**BREE:** We haven't descended into chaos yet.

**NATHAN:** Give anyone time enough and they can do anything.

**MELINDA:** Jesus Christ. You make him sound like the devil or something!

*Alex enters.*

**MELINDA:** Alex!

**ALEX:** Hi guys.

*Alex goes to his room.*

**MELINDA:** Er, Alex. Alex!

**ALEX:** What?

**MELINDA:** We just had a house meeting. I told you yesterday.

**ALEX:** How'd it go? Everything sort—

**PAUL:** You were supposed to be here.

**ALEX:** Sorry must have slipped my mind—I've got a million and one things—

**PAUL:** You've got gas and electricity to pay—that's 56 dollars—and kitty, which is—

**ALEX:** Just tell me how much—don't worry about the details. I trust you.

**PAUL:** It's 86 dollars.

**ALEX:** I haven't got that much money on me right now. Could I pay you on Friday?

**PAUL:** We really need the money here tonight to pay everything off. We can't let little amounts float around like that.

**ALEX:** It's just this one time. I promise. I'm not used to all this stuff, money going here there and everywhere. *(Laughs)* It all sort of gets confusing and—

**MELINDA:** I'll cover it.

**NATHAN:** What?

**MELINDA:** Pay me back on Friday.

*Melinda goes through her purse, pulls out some money, gives it to Paul.*

**MELINDA:** I trust you.

**ALEX:** This is excellent. I won't forget this.

**MELINDA:** I won't let you.

**ALEX:** I'll be prepared next time. Absolutely.

*Alex goes into his room. We hear some music start up.*

**NATHAN:** Why did you do that?

**MELINDA:** Because he needed it.

**NATHAN:** Make sure he pays you back.

**PAUL:** Did he really forget or he just didn't care?

**MELINDA:** I'm sure it just slipped his mind. He's a creative guy. He gets carried away. He's still settling in.

**BREE:** Well he better settle in quickly that's all I can say.

**MELINDA:** Bree!

**BREE:** If he doesn't pull his head in I'm liable to bite it off.

### **SCENE 5:**

*Lights come up on Bree reading. Melinda lies on the floor looking at the framed Yakuwa tya she has just finished. We hear music coming from Alex's room. Nathan and Paul enter, dressed in gym gear, and sword fighting with their squash racquets. Alex pokes his head in and out of the room.*

**BREE:** Careful! Save it for the court.

**NATHAN:** This is the warm-up.

*Nathan's racquet clips Paul's shoulder.*

**PAUL:** A touch, a touch; I do confess't.

**BREE:** I mean it. After all these years you'd think you two could behave when you put on a pair of gym shorts.

*Paul and Nathan laugh.*

**NATHAN:** We need to top up our testosterone levels every week.

**BREE:** You go away and talk about us, that's what you do.

**PAUL:** Exactly. Adieu sweet princess.

*Paul goes over and kisses Bree.*

**BREE:** That's not a kiss. This is a kiss.

*Bree grabs Paul and kisses him long and hard, taking Paul's breath away. Nathan pats Melinda's bum with his racquet.*

**NATHAN:** Catch you later.

**MELINDA:** Bye.

*Nathan and Paul exit. Alex pops back into his room. Melinda's Theme starts up. Alex rushes in.*

**ALEX:** Whadda think huh? Is it alright? It's yours. I wrote it for you. It's called *Melindony No. 1*.

**BREE:** Where's mine?

**ALEX:** I'm working on it don't you worry. I'm working on it. I just haven't got an angle on it yet. The truth of you in music. That's the challenge.

**BREE:** I don't think I can help you there. I don't know what I sound like.

**ALEX:** You sound like velvet stone. Like a storm inside amber. A diamond-studded sponge cake. Liquid metal. I just need to get that into a sound, a theme, something that feels like that.

*Alex exits. Melinda hangs the embroidered Yakuwa tya on the wall.*

**BREE:** I wonder what he thought you sounded like? A strangled swan? What do you think of it? Mel?

**MELINDA:** Nathan wrote me a poem once. Years ago. In all that time, just one poem.

**BREE:** He's not the poetic type.

**MELINDA:** Alex is an artist. It's nice to think someone makes an effort to say how they feel.

## **SCENE 6:**

*Lights come up on Bree reading. Melinda lies on the floor looking at the framed Yakuwa tya she has just finished. We hear music coming from Alex's room. Nathan and Paul enter, dressed in gym gear, and sword fighting with their squash racquets. Alex pokes his head in and out of the room.*

**BREE:** Careful! Save it for the court.

**NATHAN:** This is the warm-up.

*Nathan's racquet clips Paul's shoulder.*

**PAUL:** A touch, a touch; I do confess't.

**BREE:** I mean it. After all these years you'd think you two could behave when you put on a pair of gym shorts.

*(Paul and Nathan laugh.)*

**NATHAN:** We need to top up our testosterone levels every week.

**BREE:** You go away and talk about us, that's what you do.

**PAUL:** Exactly. Adieu sweet princess.

*Paul goes over and kisses Bree.*

**BREE:** That's not a kiss. This is a kiss.

*Bree grabs Paul and kisses him long and hard, taking Paul's breath away. Nathan pats Melinda's bum with his racquet.*

**NATHAN:** Catch you later.

**MELINDA:** Bye.

*Nathan and Paul exit. Alex pops back into his room. Melinda's Theme starts up. Alex rushes in.*

**ALEX:** Whadda ya think huh? Is it alright? It's yours. I wrote it for you. It's called *Melindony No. 1*.

**BREE:** Where's mine?

**ALEX:** I'm working on it don't you worry. I'm working on it. I just haven't got an angle on it yet. The truth of you in music. That's the challenge.

**BREE:** I don't think I can help you there. I don't know what I sound like.

**ALEX:** You sound like velvet stone. Like a storm inside amber. A diamond-studded sponge cake. Liquid metal. I just need to get that into a sound, a theme, something that feels like that.

*Alex exits. Melinda hangs the embroidered Yakuwa tya on the wall.*

**BREE:** I wonder what he thought you sounded like? A strangled swan? What do you think of it? Mel?

**MELINDA:** Nathan wrote me a poem once. Years ago. In all that time, just one poem.

**BREE:** He's not the poetic type.

**MELINDA:** Alex is an artist. It's nice to think someone makes an effort to say how they feel.

**SCENE 7:**

*Lights come up on Paul, Nathan, Bree and Melinda sitting down to dinner. There is music coming from Alex's room. It is the Adultery Canto: rhythmic, baroque almost, but also industrial. Alex rushes out.*

**ALEX:** How about this one? It's the Adultery Canto. You can hear the pain in it, can't you? The loss. The revenge. The way people find it easier to lie to those closest to them than to a total stranger. It's all in the lyrics. Do you want to see them? Bree? Nathan?

**BREE:** That's great Alex, now—

**ALEX:** Actually I'll play your one, Nathan.

*Alex rushes back into his room and we hear Nathan's Theme, with the sound of water birds, and a didgeridoo in it.*

**BREE:** This is just like last night. Why doesn't he just come and sit down?

**MELINDA:** I'm sure it's not your cooking.

*Alex rushes out.*

**ALEX:** Sorry I can't stay for dinner. Bye.

**MELINDA:** Alex, you do like Bree's cooking don't you?

**ALEX:** Of course. *(Alex takes Bree's hand and kisses it.)* It's magnificent.

*Alex rushes out.*

**MELINDA:** See? I told you.

**BREE:** Peace at last.

**NATHAN:** No-one's seen my phone have they?

*There is a collective shaking of heads. Alex rushes in with his hands behind his back.*



**ALEX:** I forgot this. Happy birthday Bree.

*Alex hands Bree a present.*

**BREE:** My birthday's not till next week.

**ALEX:** I know. I know. Got in early. Wanted to surprise you. Surprise!

*Alex quickly kisses Bree. Bree unwraps the present. It is a small etching.*

**BREE:** It's beautiful. Thank you.

**MELINDA:** Where are you going?

**ALEX:** Out. See ya.

*Alex leaves.*

**MELINDA:** Wow. What is it? An etching?

*There is a knock at the door. Paul goes to answer it.*

**NATHAN:** Where did he get the money for this? It looks really expensive.

**BREE:** It does seem a little—excessive don't you think?

**MELINDA:** Maybe he just likes you.

**BREE:** He never ceases to overwhelm.

**MELINDA:** *(To Paul)* What is it?

**PAUL:** That was the police. Some etchings were stolen from the gallery around the corner. I told them we didn't know anything about it.

### **SCENE 8:**

*Lights come up on Paul, Bree, Melinda and sitting down to dinner. Nathan enters, runs his fingers over the crack in the wall. The Aboriginal flag is gone.*

**NATHAN:** Has anyone seen it?

*Everyone shakes their head: No. Gilda enters from Alex's room. She is naked—except for the large Aboriginal flag wrapped around her like a sari. Gilda smiles, notices Paul, and walks over to him.*

**GILDA:** Alex told me about you—the real Othello. If you ever need a massage—let me know.

*She smiles at him, ruffles his hair, then exits. The household, for a moment, doesn't know what to do.*

### **SCENE 9:**

*Lights come up on Paul, Bree and Melinda sitting at dinner. The Aboriginal flag is back up over the large crack. Nathan comes out of the kitchen.*

**NATHAN:** I really am going mad.

**BREE:** All of it?

**NATHAN:** A whole kilo.

**PAUL:** Maybe you mislaid it.

**NATHAN:** *(sarcastic)* Oh yeah. It's easy to get lost in that fridge.

**MELINDA:** I'm sure there's a logical—

*Alex enters.*

**PAUL:** Alex you wouldn't know anything about some meat in the fridge?

**ALEX:** That beef? It looked like it was off. I fed it to the cats in the laneway. They loved it.

**NATHAN:** That was tonight's dinner!

**ALEX:** Was it? Oh. Sorry about that. Look, I found this outside. I think it's yours. You must have dropped it. *(Alex hands Nathan a mobile phone.)* Dinner huh? Don't worry. I'll nick up to the supermarket and get some. Alright?

**PAUL:** Alex wait.

*But Alex is gone.*

**BREE:** What's the bet he won't be back till midnight?

**MELINDA:** Give the guy a chance.

*Bree takes Nathan's phone.*

**BREE:** Pizza anyone?

**SCENE 10:**

*Lights come up on the household. There is a huge aerial sculpture made up of all the cutlery in the house. Melinda, Paul and Nathan are sitting around the dining table, looking at it. Bree enters with soup and proceeds to put a bowl of soup in front of everyone.*

**BREE:** If you want cutlery, you'll have to wreck his work of art.

*Paul shakes his head, stands up and cuts off some spoons.*

**NATHAN:** What's this?

**BREE:** Campbell's Tomato soup.

**PAUL:** I thought you went shopping.

**BREE:** I was supposed to shop with Alex but he never showed up. This is all that's left.

**PAUL:** No vegetables? Nothing?

**BREE:** Nothing.

**NATHAN:** How could he forget?

**MELINDA:** You've forgotten plenty of times. Some demo you just had to go on, a meeting you couldn't avoid. Maybe he had an accident or something.

**BREE:** That'd be too much to hope for.

**MELINDA:** Bree.

**BREE:** Why are you always defending him?

**MELINDA:** Why are you always trying to put him down?

**BREE:** The facts speak for themselves.

**PAUL:** Everyone. Please.

**MELINDA:** He's had a tough time the last year or so. Just cut him some slack for godssake.

**BREE:** Why so he can hang himself?

*Alex and Jocelyn enter. Alex is carrying a bag of groceries from 7-Eleven.*

**ALEX:** Hi guys. Everyone this is Jocelyn Jocelyn everyone.

**JOCELYN:** Hi. *(To Paul, smiling)* Hi there.

**ALEX:** We got something to eat on the way home. Did the shopping too. How 'bout that so—

**NATHAN:** You said you'd be here for dinner.

*Jocelyn walks up to Paul, studies his face.*

**JOCELYN:** What a sad face Alex. You can see the lines of sorrow across his forehead, under his eyes.

**ALEX:** We need to get a shot then.

*Alex pulls out an expensive-looking camera and aims it around the group.*

**ALEX:** I bought it off Jocelyn. She does photography. This is the kind of camera that takes a picture of what you think you see and not what's really there. Alright hang on everyone. *(Alex starts taking photos.)* Now one of Lancelot and Guinevere. *(Alex takes a shot of Nathan and Bree together.)* One of King Arthur. *(Alex takes a shot of Paul.)* And finally—who? Morgana? *(Alex takes a shot of Melinda.)* OK. That's everyone. Great. I'll get Jocelyn to put these in her next exhibition: "The Communal Camelot: Part—The First." That'll be great won't it?

**JOCELYN:** Yes.

**ALEX:** Come on. Wait. Come slowly.

*As Alex backs away towards his room Jocelyn slowly follows with Alex taking photos of her all the time.*

**NATHAN:** Alex.

**MELINDA:** Nathan.

**ALEX:** Yeah?

**NATHAN:** Nothing.

*Alex and Jocelyn go into Alex's room. Paul looks at Melinda.*

**MELINDA:** I said I'd talk to him.

**PAUL:** Did I say anything?

**BREE:** It's gone beyond talk if you ask me.

**NATHAN:** I think we know enough to make an informed decision.

**MELINDA:** Is that the best you can do?

**BREE:** Where's the law that says we have to look after every imbecile we meet?

**MELINDA:** We all put up with you.

**PAUL:** We just want things to settle down, that's all. Is that so much to ask?

**MELINDA:** I'll do what I can.

**NATHAN:** He hasn't paid you back for that kitty has he.

**BREE:** Who was it said they could trust him?

**MELINDA:** He's paid some back.

**BREE:** How much did he pay for that camera?

**NATHAN:** We can't carry him for another month for goodness sake.

**MELINDA:** OK OK. Just give it a rest.

*Alex rushes out of his room, shirt all unbuttoned, hair a mess, and missing one shoe.*

**ALEX:** Has anyone got any spare condoms? I've run out.

**BREE:** Jesus Christ!

**PAUL:** So much for being prepared!

**MELINDA:** I think I've got some.

**NATHAN:** You have?

*Melinda goes to her handbag.*

**ALEX:** Can you believe it! There I was in the 7-Eleven and I completely forgot about them!

*Melinda hands two condoms to Alex.*

**ALEX:** Fantastic. Thanks. Carry on.

*Alex disappears back into his room.*

**MELINDA:** At least he did some shopping.

**PAUL:** A packet of Guylian chocolates, some Homer Hudson ice cream and a couple of bottles of red.

**NATHAN:** Hey! Party anyone?

*There is the sound of feet hitting the wall and a shriek of laughter. People look at each other, expecting the noise to stop soon, but it doesn't. There is more laughter, more shrieks, more crashing. Everyone looks at each other, trying to be cool, but it doesn't work.*

**PAUL:** Well, um, I'm off to bed.

*Melinda rubs her foot up Nathan's leg. Nathan moves away a little.*

**NATHAN:** There's a time and place for everything.

*Melinda moves over to Nathan, puts her arms around his neck, nips his ear.*

**MELINDA:** I've got the time if—

*Nathan slides out of Melinda's arms.*

**NATHAN:** I've got that article to finish. It has to be at the printer's first thing tomorrow.

*Nathan goes into the study.*

**BREE:** You know what he's like.

**MELINDA:** I know I know. The weight of the forests. What a shame I'm not a tree.

### **SCENE 11:**

*The next night. Melinda is hanging out some washing on a clothes horse. Bree slowly enters.*

**BREE:** How was your day?

**MELINDA:** Remember that client of mine? Sylvia? I found out she's back with her husband. Some things just never change. You?

**BREE:** Fine. Fine. I was just remembering Robert Pascoe. From college. Now there was a lost cause.

**MELINDA:** All poets are lost causes.

**BREE:** I knew there was something in you back then that always went for the wrong type of guy.

**MELINDA:** What about you and Mark Jenkins? You were really gone on him.

**BREE:** I don't know. I think it's every woman's right to be involved with at least one psychopath. You have to know the bad before you know the good. *(Pause)* He is mad. You know that don't you?

**MELINDA:** You don't know the first thing about him.

**BREE:** I have the advantage of not being attracted to him. You know it's a common feature in social workers—falling in love with their clients.

**MELINDA:** He's not my client.

**BREE:** So you are attracted to him. Honestly it doesn't bother me. I just don't want to see you get hurt. I know what you're like. You think you can help by crossing the line but it just stuffs things right up.

**MELINDA:** I am not attracted to Alex, he is not crazy, and we are not having this conversation.

*Nathan enters with a bag of groceries.*

**NATHAN:** You ready for the film? I told everyone we'd meet them there in half an hour.

**MELINDA:** I really don't feel like going. Why don't you take Bree?

**NATHAN:** Are you sure?

**BREE:** What are you seeing?

**NATHAN:** It's a retrospective on black exploitation films.

**BREE:** Oh right. That sounds interesting.

**NATHAN:** We haven't been out in ages. Get you away from this place.

**MELINDA:** That's fine. You guys go. I've got stuff to do here. I promised I'd ring Uncle Bill so I'll do that.

**NATHAN:** Another day won't matter.

**MELINDA:** You're the one telling me I should ring.

**NATHAN:** You're the one who thinks he's an asshole. Look whatever. Could you put these groceries away for me? Please?

**MELINDA:** Sure. Kiss.

*Nathan and Melinda kiss.*

**BREE:** See you later.

**MELINDA:** Have fun. You haven't seen my Renaissance shirt anywhere have you?

**NATHAN:** I thought you threw it in the laundry basket last week—after that party.

**MELINDA:** I did.

**NATHAN:** Must be somewhere. It'll turn up. See you.

**MELINDA:** Yeah bye.

*Bree and Nathan leave. Melinda looks around the room.*

**MELINDA:** Bloody shirt.

## **SCENE 12:**

*Melinda is standing in the room, worried. She holds a framed photograph. Alex enters, drying his hair, wearing a bathrobe.*

**MELINDA:** Alex.

**ALEX:** These bloody towels! You can't leave them long in the bathroom or they'll go all mouldy on you.

**MELINDA:** Can you . . .

*Melinda sits on the couch. She pats the couch beside her.*

**ALEX:** Right now? Ooh, this looks serious. You've got your "I-am-a-social-worker" face on.

**MELINDA:** Alex. Please.

**ALEX:** OK OK I'm sitting down. See? I'm sitting down.

*Alex sits down on the couch next to Melinda. Melinda hands Alex the framed photo.*

**MELINDA:** I found this when I was cleaning up. Your mother? *(Alex nods.)* You've never said much about her.



**ALEX:** I can't remember her very clearly.

**MELINDA:** You knew her perfume.

**ALEX:** Sometimes stuff like that just comes out automatically—just to shut people up.

**MELINDA:** Are you feeling alright?

**ALEX:** I'm fine. You?

**MELINDA:** I'm worried. About you.

**ALEX:** Me? I've never felt so good in my whole life.

**MELINDA:** You told me what happened last year. Maybe you've bounced back too far the other way.

**ALEX:** How could something this good be bad? I walk down the street these days and I feel like a god.

**MELINDA:** This is what I mean, Alex. It sounds like—

**ALEX:** Am I a case am I? Is that what I am? Because—

**MELINDA:** Alex listen. It sounds like moodswing. After these crashing lows you have these super confident highs that make you feel not just on top of the world, but as if you own it.

**ALEX:** Everything's under control. I've got my life in order now. How can this be—

**MELINDA:** Trust me Alex I think you need professional help.

**ALEX:** What? This is crazy! How could you say—

**MELINDA:** People are worried about you Alex. I'm worried. We're friends. I want to help.

**ALEX:** Come here.

*Melinda moves closer to Alex and he hugs her.*

**ALEX:** I know you're the best friend I have in the world and I thank you for worrying about me—I really do—but everything's fine. I feel fine. The world is fine. And that's all that needs to be said on the subject.

**MELINDA:** But—

**ALEX:** No more buts no more ifs no more anythings.

**MELINDA:** But—

*Alex quietly kisses Melinda.*

**ALEX:** See? I'm fine. I really am. How could a crazy kiss you like that? Bye.

*Alex goes to his room.*

**MELINDA:** *(A little breathless.)* 'Bye.

### **SCENE 13:**

*The house is in darkness. The front door opens. Voices offstage: Melinda, Nathan, Paul and Bree returning home late at night. Paul knocks the bike over.*

**PAUL:** *(off)* It was brilliant. The subtext in the scene with the prostitute was incredible.

**MELINDA:** *(off)* But the bit with the dwarf and the black man. Really. It was so tokenistic.

**BREE:** *(off)* I think life is tokenistic then.

**PAUL:** *(off)* I think it will be the most important film of the year. What do you think Nathan?

**NATHAN:** Jesus Christ.

*Nathan turns the living room light on. Alex is on the couch entangled, making love with a woman we can't see. The group pour into the room and stop when they see Alex.*

**MELINDA:** Alex?

*Alex stops his love making and turns around.*

**ALEX:** Hi guys. How was the film?

**MELINDA:** Er—fine.

**ALEX:** I think you've met everyone.

**PAUL:** Hi.

**REBECCA:** Hi.

**ALEX:** I thought it was a double feature.

**REBECCA:** Alex.

**ALEX:** We might adjourn to the boudoir I think.

**REBECCA:** See you.

*Alex and Rebecca go into Alex's room, Alex and Rebecca both laughing.*

**PAUL:** There's a proper place for everything!

**NATHAN:** Talk about in your face!

**BREE:** He shows no respect at all!

**MELINDA:** He just gets carried away by things, that's all. *(shooting a look at Nathan)*  
When the feeling takes you . . .

**BREE:** He wanted us to find him. He wanted to upset people.

**MELINDA:** Oh come on. I'm sure he—

**BREE:** Obviously that talk you had made a world of difference! Can't you see what he's doing?

**MELINDA:** Of course I—

**BREE:** You can't. Or you won't.

**PAUL:** Nothing's to be served standing around yelling at each other. Goodnight.  
Bree?

*Bree follows Paul.*

**MELINDA:** 'Night.

*Nathan goes into the kitchen to make the tea. Suddenly there is a scream.*

**BREE:** *(off)* Look at this! Look at this! For god's sake!

*Bree and Paul enter. In her hand Bree holds a rubber snake. Nathan rushes in.*

**NATHAN:** Are you alright? What is it?

**BREE:** Someone put this fucking thing in our bed. No prizes for guessing who.

*Bree charges towards Alex's room, but Melinda intercepts her.*

**MELINDA:** Not tonight. In the morning. In the morning alright?

**BREE:** Melinda!

**MELINDA:** Tomorrow OK? Come on. It's late. You don't need this.

**BREE:** Tell him he can screw wherever he damnwell likes but he can stay the fuck out of my life—and my bed.

*Bree throws the snake to the floor and storms off. Paul picks up the snake, hands it to Melinda.*

**PAUL:** Maybe another talk?

*Paul exits.*

**NATHAN:** He's a fucking idiot. Something's gotta give.

**MELINDA:** Maybe I should ring his dad.

**NATHAN:** You can't even ring your Uncle Bill. Why didn't you tell us about what happened to him last year?

**MELINDA:** Did Bree tell you? I didn't think it was important.

**NATHAN:** Maybe if we knew all the facts we wouldn't have let him in.

**MELINDA:** Paul withdrew from second year. Does that count him out?

**NATHAN:** Like Paul says, we do have some standards here.

**MELINDA:** Given the criteria we used only Jesus Christ would have been let in.

**NATHAN:** Alright. Talk to his father. See if Alex senior can lay down the law for us.

*Melinda slowly takes Nathan's hand.*

**MELINDA:** Now I want to lay down the law.

**NATHAN:** You do?

**MELINDA:** Uh huh. Like this one.

*Melinda kisses Nathan, long and deep. Nathan is taken aback by the suddenness and passion of Melinda's kiss. He breaks away.*

**NATHAN:** Where did that come from?

**MELINDA:** Just letting things take their natural course. It's nice to surrender to a feeling.

**NATHAN:** Well I—

**MELINDA:** Give in to it. Now.

**NATHAN:** I don't—

**MELINDA:** You want to I can tell.

**NATHAN:** Mel—

**MELINDA:** Come on. We—

*Bree appears in her dressing gown. Nathan disentangles himself from Melinda.*

**BREE:** Just getting a drink.

*Bree hurries around into the kitchen. Melinda quickly collects herself. Bree gets her drink, then returns to her room.*

**MELINDA:** Is something the matter?

**NATHAN:** Like what?

**MELINDA:** I don't know. You tell me.

**NATHAN:** Just stuff at work.

**MELINDA:** What's up? It's not secret men's business is it?

*Nathan moves off, but Melinda holds him back.*

**MELINDA:** I'm sorry.

**NATHAN:** Let's go to bed.

*Melinda and Nathan exit.*

#### **SCENE 14:**

*The house is in darkness. Alex enters wearing a long over coat. He moves around slowly, shining a flashlight around the room. He tears off his coat, revealing that he is wearing the white Renaissance shirt with the ruffles at the cuffs. He paces back and forth. He takes out some pages of manuscript from the shirt and wedges them into the large crack. He resumes his pacing, then collapses on the floor, crying.*

**SCENE 15:**

*Lights come up on Paul, Nathan, Bree and Melinda sitting around the table.*

**MELINDA:** Why me?

**BREE:** You know why.

**PAUL:** It's only proper.

**NATHAN:** Who else could do it?

**MELINDA:** It was a group decision in the first place.

**NATHAN:** You're closest to him.

**PAUL:** It would be easiest coming from you.

**BREE:** He trusts you.

**MELINDA:** And where will you all be—out? Hiding behind the arras?

**BREE:** We know it's not going to be easy.

**MELINDA:** That's why you don't want to do it.

**BREE:** You're the professional.

**NATHAN:** It has to be handled carefully. Tactfully.

**MELINDA:** No-one had any problem kicking Jim out.

**NATHAN:** Jim was out of it already.

**PAUL:** There's no telling what Alex might do.

**BREE:** Cut the wrong wire—boom.

**NATHAN:** We need someone who's prepared.

**PAUL:** Someone who can handle that sort of situation.

**MELINDA:** I still think it's a group responsibility. We should all tell him.

**BREE:** Jesus Christ! Can't you accept responsibility for once?

**NATHAN:** Bree.

**BREE:** You can't even go and see your own uncle for chrissake!

**MELINDA:** What the hell has that got to do with anything?

**BREE:** You run away from things all the time.

**MELINDA:** And what do you do at uni? You're in a fucking theory bubble! You don't know what the real world's like at all.

**PAUL:** Will you two knock it off?

**MELINDA:** Why the hell do I have to bear the brunt of everything? Get someone else to do your dirty work.

**NATHAN:** Mel it's not like that. Come on.

**BREE:** Sounds pretty gutless to me.

**NATHAN:** You shut up.

**PAUL:** Don't talk to Bree like that!

**NATHAN:** Well come on! We're fucking adults aren't we?

*Alex enters. Throughout the rest of this scene Alex does not get angry.*

**ALEX:** Hi guys.

**MELINDA:** Alex.

**BREE:** We were just having a house meeting.

**ALEX:** Sorry I'm late. What's happened? Can't stay long. I'm going out to see Vicki and then we're—

**PAUL:** Who's Vicki?

**ALEX:** Just a friend from Inferno.

**NATHAN:** We can imagine.

**ALEX:** Oh really? What can you imagine?

**BREE:** *(under her breath)* This place is turning into a brothel!

**ALEX:** Brothel's are much cleaner than this house.

**PAUL:** You've been to brothels?

**ALEX:** Haven't you?

**PAUL:** No!

**ALEX:** You should go. The air is scented. They have clean sheets every time, clean towels. And of course you have a shower before you get into it. And—

**NATHAN:** Where'd you go?

**ALEX:** Cowboy Dreams is my favourite.

**BREE:** Your favourite?

**ALEX:** Saloon-type western kind of thing. You know? Low roof, wooden floors, girls dressed up in corsets and long flowing dresses. And the beds are these big four poster things that—

**BREE:** This is all beside the point.

**NATHAN:** Ah yes. We've been talking—

**ALEX:** About what?

**NATHAN:** Melinda can—

**MELINDA:** No you. You wanted to.

**ALEX:** (*laughing*) What's going on? You can tell me.

**PAUL:** We've had a long talk and—

**NATHAN:** It's only a majority decision, mind you, but—

**PAUL:** And there's no hard feelings of course so—

**MELINDA:** I had no say in this at all Alex.

**PAUL:** Sometimes it just happens.

**NATHAN:** No-one's to blame.

**PAUL:** Of course there's no blame. We just—

**BREE:** We want you to move out.

**ALEX:** Me?

**BREE:** We think it's for the best.



**PAUL:** Things haven't—clicked.

**NATHAN:** No hard feelings, huh?

**ALEX:** This is a joke, right? Because of that snake-in-the-bed thing right?

**BREE:** No.

**NATHAN:** It's just not working out.

*Alex laughs.*

**ALEX:** I pay the rent. Isn't that—

**BREE:** It's more than that. Much more. You just don't fit in to the way the whole house works.

**ALEX:** I know I've missed a few house meetings. If it's that important—

**BREE:** Sometimes it is. Sometimes who you are is more important than what you do.

**ALEX:** *(laughs)* Really? So it's OK for you and Nathan to be fucking your brains out?

**BREE:** What?

**ALEX:** Can't you guys see it? They're doing it right under your noses.

**NATHAN:** This is insane.

**ALEX:** I tried to warn you Paul about the snake in your bed, but you didn't get the message. Guinevere? Lancelot? Nobody got it.

**NATHAN:** You are speaking such bullshit. Do we have to listen to this?

**ALEX:** *(To Bree)* You should see your face. It's all just come right out of left field hasn't it? Is this what you meant about who you are being more important than what you do?

*Bree flies at Alex, and almost grabs him, but Paul grabs at Bree, pulling her away.*

**BREE:** I've had it! I've just had it! He drives me mad and now he tells vicious lies!

**PAUL:** Is it lies?

**BREE:** Of course it is you idiot. How could you doubt me?

*Paul leaves, slamming the front door behind him.*

**BREE:** Paul!

**ALEX:** Well that went really well I thought. No blood on the carpet, no strangulations, no romantic stains on the walls. What's next?

*Nathan grabs Alex by the upper arm, shakes him.*

**NATHAN:** Just shut the fuck up alright? *(Alex wrenches himself free.)* Jesus Christ! *(To Melinda)* You don't believe him do you? For godsake you know he's lying. He'd say anything to stay.

*Nathan reaches out for Melinda but she steps back.*

**NATHAN:** What's the matter? Come on.

**MELINDA:** I don't know what to think.

**NATHAN:** He's crazy. Come on. Bloody hell.

**MELINDA:** I don't know if it's true, but it certainly feels true.

*Melinda leaves.*

**ALEX:** You know what I think it's like? It's like living next to a tip every day of your life and telling people you live next to a rose garden.

*Alex laughs, and we hear the Household Theme, this time played as a circus carnival piece, with wild trumpets, pops and whistles. Nathan and Bree look at each other for a moment, then leave—but in the same direction. They realise they're going the same way, then separate and go in different directions. Alex laughs, briefly conducting the music.*