17. 'Great Hatred Little Room'

The Bridgwater company was run by a couple called Diplock. They were a smugly uxorious pair who had cast themselves as civic figures of theatrical respectability. They were keen on crèches, children and actors who were clean-living and time-servers of the community. Diplock was thirtyish, like a costive slug, wore a grubby beret and an open-necked shirt as worn by the Outward Bound of the time. On holiday he might have relaxed in the healthy mufti of an aertex shirt and knee-length shorts. As he ran the company like a Scout troop trained to rub plays together to make community bonfires it was an appropriate uniform. His wife was similarly open-necked, eager and odious. The company was mostly inexperienced, stupid or corrupt enough to accept Diplock's theatrical scouting ethic. Ivor, the leading man, an amiable lecher, was protected from paying much lip-service to the Diplocks' bob-a-job thespianism by his proven box-office pull with the Mendip maidens. Bob, the character man, like Mr Wood Palmer had been a major in the army, which impressed Diplock, who had spent the war in a reserved occupation. He was the kind of man for whom reserved occupations were created. Partly because of his wartime rank and fulsome eccentricity, Bob's pre-war clowning camp was tolerated, along with his mocking adoration of Maisie Gay, Jessie Matthews, Naomi Jacobs and Mary Ellis. He was almost forty, did the work of three men for six pounds a week and shone like a naughty deed in an unctuous world. Within days he had declared his hopeless love for me. It was a discouraging beginning.

Bargaining with my instinct, I decided I could cope with scouting actors, matinée queens and hostile yokels. Bridgwater was a small market town and I had no idea of the kind of scrutiny the Diplocks' troops aroused among the locals. I had inherited the previous juvenile's digs. Apart from Ivor, he alone seemed to have won Bridgwater's flinty heart. My landlady said he was a lovely boy, which also meant that he must have been a pretty good Scout to the Diplocks. A bustling bundle of non-theatrical motherliness, she told me that I reminded her of her son, which took me back to the fox terrier in Grimsby. Fortunately this son was alive and working in London. Less

fortunately, he had spurned his mother's advice, upset all the plans she had made for him and got married to a girl. The wording might have been Nellie Beatrice's own. The tautology was an exact one. Married—he was—to a girl. I had the impression that I too might develop into a fairly lovely boy, though not as lovely as the last one. For a start, I wouldn't get so many badges from the troop. The costive slug would see to that.

I was made welcome to the camp fire. It was evident that I was considered an acquisition to the troupe. It was puzzling. The first play I had to rehearse was a family comedy called *My Wife's Family*. I had naturally been cast as the lovely boy who opens the play being discovered with his arms round the housemaid and kissing her. This actress turned out to be a local girl who had been to RADA and returned to become one of the two ASMs in the company. Her home town was suspicious of her and resolute that she must only prove herself in Bridgwater under the fire of local ill-will. I was aware that I had left behind the sophistication and tolerance of the true provinces. Sprung from Fulham and Stoneleigh, where feelings rarely rose higher than a black look, the power of place, family and generation in small towns was new to me. In the suburbs, allegiances are lost or discarded on dutifully paid visits. The present kept itself to itself. In such a life there was no common graveyard for memory or future. The suburb has no graveyard.

Bridgwater's undoubted feelings about this one actress were muddled but obviously strong. My landlady hinted that she was wilful, even the kind of girl mother's sons went off and married. Renee's misery or future would never have aroused interest or speculation on the 8.17. In Stoneleigh you could be jilted in daylight and no one would come to your assistance. In Bridgwater it would still be discussed in your dotage. Local feeling was complicated. As professional players, even the Diplock company were interlopers living off the parish. Pamela Lane, even as a housemaid, had to be seen to excel over outsiders. Cravenly aware of the town's combined expectation and suspicion, the costive slug was cautious about giving her opportunities. There was a focus upon her that almost excluded the rest of us.

I was reminded of this by a story about Richard Burton. Wales is the well-guarded reserve of its natural and principal species, the amateur. Someone suggested that Burton be invited to lead a National Welsh Theatre. A distinguished leader of the principality asked what were Burton's qualifications. It was explained that he had played Henry V at Stratford and a Hamlet at the Old Vic applauded by Churchill. The reply, which evoked no surprise, was, 'Yes, I see that. But what has he done in Wales?'

Pamela's refusal to be drawn was the power of her sphynx's paw. I had not than realized it. She had just recently shorn her hair down to a defiant auburn stubble and I was impressed by the hostility she had created by this self-isolating act. I was unable to take my eyes from her hair, her huge green eyes which must mock or plead affection, preferably both, at least. I was sure of it, whether or not it was directed at me. She startled and confused me. The herd casting her out, as I saw it, drew me to her. There was no calculation in my instant obsession, no assessment, thought of present, future comfort or discomfort. I knew that I was in love as if the White Plague had claimed me earlier than I had calculated. I resigned myself to it, certain that indifference, including Pamela's own, would put out any smouldering excess of nature I might have thought my flesh or imagination heir to.

I waited for the curtain to go up, holding in my arms this powerful, drawn-up creature, dressed in a green maid's uniform of all things. Life was unimaginable without her matching green eyes. Pamela's emotional equivocation seemed so unstudied that I interpreted it as ineffable passion. It was as if she had once known a secret divinity that, in time, would reveal itself and her. With both of us rehearsing every morning and Pamela collecting props or furniture during the afternoon, we had little opportunity to be alone together. Rampant mystery would show itself like a blessed virgin to be taken into unfailing voluptuary. I began waiting for her to clear up the prop room before going back with her to the Lane Family Drapers. She made no excuses about my being uninvited beyond the door and I asked none. I had seen her parents and rugby-playing West Country brothers. I expected no gestures and looked for no quarter. What did surprise me was the tide of dislike that I had been able to attract and sustain so soon. The Diplocks, who could see pillars of salt in the desert of a Dorothy Perkins display window, became visibly cold. They put on disapproval like balaclavas, and with homely wartime style.

JIMMY: There is no limit to what the middle-aged mummy will do in the holy crusade against ruffians like me. Mummy and I took one quick look at each other, and, from then on, the age of chivalry was dead. I knew that, to protect her innocent young, she wouldn't hesitate to cheat, lie, bully and blackmail. Threatened with me, a young man without money, background or even looks, she'd bellow like a rhinoceros in labour—enough to make every male rhino for miles turn white, and pledge himself to celibacy. But even I under-estimated her strength. Mummy may look over-fed and a bit flabby on the outside,

but don't let that well-bred guzzler fool you. Underneath all that, she's armour plated—(*He clutches wildly for something to shock* HELENA *with.*) She's as rough as a night in a Bombay brothel, and as tough as a matelot's arm. She's probably in that bloody cistern, taking down every word we say. (*Kicks cistern.*) Can you 'ear me, mother. (*Sits on it, beats like bongo drums.*) Just about get her in there.

Look Back in Anger, 1956

Pamela had her twenty-first birthday party in April and prevailed upon herself to prevail upon her parents to invite me. I am certain I said very little. Pamela especially said little to me. I had been asked for provocation and offered none. I was not to be tricked into kicking against the heavy scrum of heavy Somerset pricks. Pamela had said almost nothing to me about her parents or brothers and I still assumed her support if I should be tackled. Still, I had an aptitude for charging down the ball while avoiding it altogether. It meant I need rely on no one, least of all the love of the one I meant to rely on most.

JIMMY: Let me give you an example of this lady's tactics. You may have noticed that I happen to wear my hair rather long. Now, if my wife is honest, or concerned enough to explain, she could tell you that this is not due to any dark, unnatural instincts I possess, but because (a) I can usually think of better things than a haircut to spend two bob on, and (b) I prefer long hair. But that obvious, innocent explanation didn't appeal to Mummy at all. So she hires detectives to watch me, to see if she can't somehow get me into the *News of the World*. All so that I shan't carry off her daughter on that poor old charger of mine, all tricked out and caparisoned in discredited passions and ideals! The old grey mare that actually once led the charge against the old order—well, she certainly ain't what she used to be. It was all she could do to carry me, but your weight (*to* ALISON) was too much for her. She just dropped dead on the way.

Look Back in Anger, 1956

The Lanes hired a private detective to follow my movements after it had been reported that they had seen Bob fumbling with my knee under the table in a teashop. I don't know where the detectives might have come from. Minehead now seems likely. But the report was true. The more I insisted on my passion for Pamela, the more he insisted upon his own for me and, like

Gerald in Ilfracombe, tried to persuade me that at my age, 'I didn't know what I wanted'. Mr and Mrs Lane were much coarser characters than Alison's mother and father, but their tactics were similar. They were certainly farther down in the class scale, firmly entrenched in trade for generations, and all the family had Wurzel-Somerset accents. Pamela herself still retained traces of a thick burr which RADA had not completely erased.

I began to feel surrounded and outflanked by hostility. I might have told myself that it emanated from Pamela's parents or even the Costive Slug but I had set off a crest of anger that had not been much more than drowsy before my arrival. Plainly I would not be able or allowed to stay in Bridgwater much longer. The Diplocks were touting for the merest grievance within the company to allow them to dismiss me as non-scouting material. This proved difficult. In spite of my general unpopularity, my coarse acting style had a perverted minority-following. Each actor had their band of admirers who helped to fill the theatre every week and even I had mine. The Diplocks couldn't discount or explain it. It surprised everyone, myself especially. It was scarcely important. Pamela was the battlement I was determined on.

HELENA: Oh for heaven's sake, don't be such a bully! You've no right to talk about her mother like that!

JIMMY: (*Capable of anything now*) I've got every right. That old bitch should be dead! (*To* ALISON.) Well? Aren't I right?

(CLIFF *and* HELENA *look at* ALISON *tensely, but she just gazes at her plate.*) I said she's an old bitch, and should be dead! What's the matter with you? Why don't you leap to her defence!

(CLIFF *gets up quickly, and takes his arm.*)

CLIFF: Jimmy, don't!

(JIMMY *pushes him back savagely, and he sits down helplessly, turning his head away on to his hand.*)

JIMMY: If someone said something like that about me, she'd react soon enough—she'd spring into her well-known lethargy, and say nothing! I say she ought to be dead. (*He breaks for a fresh spurt later. He's saving his strength for the knock-out.*) My God, those worms will need a good dose of salts the day they get through her! Alison's mother is on the way! (*In what he intends to be a comic declamatory voice.*) She will pass away my friends, leaving a trail of worms gasping for laxatives behind her—from purgatives to purgatory.

(*He smiles down at* ALISON, *but still she hasn't broken.* CLIFF *won't look at*

them. Only HELENA *looks at him. Denied the other two, he addresses her.*) Is anything the matter?

HELENA: I feel rather sick, that's all. Sick with contempt and loathing. (*He can feel her struggling on the end of his line, and he looks at her rather absently.*)

JIMMY: One day, when I'm no longer spending my days running a sweet-stall, I may write a book about us all. It's all here. (*Slapping his forehead.*) Written in flames a mile high. And it won't be recollected in tranquillity either, picking daffodils with Auntie Wordsworth. It'll be recollected in fire, and blood. My blood

Look Back in Anger, 1956

Early in June I asked Pamela to marry me. She accepted at once, warmly and casually. The problem was a plain one: to get married in secret. The local registrar was a personal friend of Pamela's father, so the Registry Office would be barred to us. I was in a vengeful mood but not one reckless enough to risk horse whips and rioting in the streets of Bridgwater. I knew nothing about the mechanics of getting married, so I went to the Public Library and looked up *Whitaker's Almanack*. Pamela and I got on the train to Wells and bought a special licence to get married within three days. It cost four pounds, half a week's salary. Holding this, we then went to a local vicar who scarcely knew Mr Lane and explained the situation. He was cautiously sympathetic and agreed to marry us on Saturday morning at eight o'clock, the earliest possible hour, before rehearsal at ten o'clock.

After the Friday evening performance, I broke the news to Bob, asking him if he would be a witness. He fell to the floor, grasped me by the knees weeping, and begged me not to do it. My landlady would have had second thoughts about her lovely boy if she had brought in his supper at that moment. Earlier I had approached Ivor, the leading man, to be my best man. He seemed the most appropriate choice and agreed to it almost as Pamela had done, as an absent-minded conspiracy.

JIMMY: The last time she was in church was when she was married to me. I expect that surprises you, doesn't it? It was expediency, pure and simple. We were in a hurry, you see. (*The comedy of this strikes him at once, and he laughs.*) Yes, we were actually in a hurry! Lusting for the slaughter! Well, the local registrar was a particular pal of Daddy's, and we knew he'd spill the beans to the Colonel like a shot. So we had to seek out some local vicar who didn't know him quite so well. But it was no use. When my best man—a chap I'd met in the pub that morning—

and I turned up, Mummy and Daddy were in the church already. They'd found out at the last moment, and had to come to watch the execution carried out. How I remember looking down at them, full of beer for breakfast, and feeling a bit buzzed. Mummy was slumped over her pew in a heap—the noble, female rhino, pole-axed at last! And Daddy sat beside her, upright and unafraid, dreaming of his days among the Indian Princes, and unable to believe he'd left his horsewhip at home. Just the two of them in that empty church—them and me. (*Coming out of his remembrance suddenly.*) I'm not sure what happened after that. We must have been married, I suppose. I think I remember being sick in the vestry. (*To* ALISON.) Was I?

Look Back in Anger, 1956

Apart from the references to Daddy and the Indian Princes, it is a fairly accurate description of our wedding. The vicar had lost his nerve at the last moment and rung the Lanes. When we left the church and got to rehearsal the whole of Bridgwater seemed to know what had taken place. The Saturday morning run-through in the theatre went on without interruption. Our marriage seemed to have settled the cast's lines and moves wonderfully. The Costive Slug looked more than ever as if he had been left to drown in a slow drizzle, and was reported to be stalking the theatre, telling staff and passers-by that he was about to get his service rifle (reserved, like his occupation, to harass the likes of me) and shoot me. In the event, he shook my hands and mumbled some congratulations, saying that of course he couldn't quite approve. I had my rehearsed answer lugubriously ready, which was that my wife and I were giving him a week's notice. 'So stick your job up your scoutmaster's arse.' I hope I did say it.

Mr Lane came to the theatre, more weary than angry, insisting that Pamela and I should have lunch with them at whatever hostelry catered for the town's Masons and Rotarians. We had pilchard salad and light ale in almost complete silence apart from an occasional wracking sob from the mottle-necked Mrs Lane. In the afternoon, we had a matinée and after the evening performance I saw Pamela back home. To my relief, I was not invited in. I was overcome with fatigue and the prospect of never-to-be-consummated excess. When I returned to my digs, the landlady was in the most motherly tears and told me what a wicked boy I was to have done such a thing. Pamela and I played the week out. Gratifyingly and, by Saturday, triumphantly, hardly a word was addressed to us. Well, not to me. The following Sunday Mr Lane saw us off on the train to Paddington. We spent our first night

alone in a small hotel in the Cromwell Road, patronized by polite impoverished Indian students. We had £20 between us. I was in some kind of excess even if it was not shared.

The good fortune of friendship and the comfort of love

BILL: I am almost forty years old, and I know I have never made a decision which I didn't either regret, or suspect was just plain commonplace or shifty or scamped and indulgent or mildly stupid or undistinguished. As you must see. As for why I am here, I have to confess this: I have to confess that: that I have depended almost entirely on other people's efforts. Anything else would have been impossible for me, and I always knew in my own heart that only that it was that kept me alive and functioning at all, let alone making decisions or being quick minded and all that nonsense about me . . . That I have never really been able to tell the difference between a friend and an enemy, and I have always made what seemed to me at the time to make the most exhausting efforts to find out. The difference. But is has never been clear to me, and there it is, the distinction, and as I have got older, and as I have worked my way up—up—to my present position. I find it even more, quite impossible. And out of the question. And then, then I have always been afraid of being found out.

. . .

I never hoped or wished for anything more than to have the good fortune of friendship and the excitement and comfort of love and the love of women in particular. I made a set at both of them in my own way. With the first with friendship, I hardly succeeded at all. Not really No. Not at all. With the second, with love, I succeeded, I succeeded in inflicting, quite certainly inflicting, more pain than pleasure. I am not equal to any of it. But I can't escape it, I can't forget it. And I can't begin again. You see?

Inadmissible Evidence, 1964

I felt I had acquitted myself in spite of Pamela's connivance. I was unable to take my eyes off her. I watched her eating, walking, bathing, making-up, dressing, undressing, my curiosity was insatiable. Seeing her clothes lying around the floor (she was hopelessly untidy, in contrast to my own spinsterish habits), I was captive, even to the contents of her open handbag

and the few possessions she had brought with her, including her twenty-first birthday present from her parents, a portable typewriter on which I was to type *Look Back in Anger*.

There was little doubt in my otherwise apprehensive spirit that I had carried off a unique prize. It certainly never occurred to me that it might slip away from me. Perhaps I interpreted what might have been bland complacency for the complaisance of a generous and loving heart. Perhaps there is no question to ask. It may be a dull mind which poses unanswerable questions.

We had nowhere to live and little left of the twenty pounds. There was no question of my going to Stoneleigh and none at all of telling my mother that I had married a girl. She had turned Anthony Creighton out of the house after I had written to him in reply to his complaint about the way she was treating him. The landlady of Black Look on Sea had made him stay out during the daytime when he had nowhere to go, and so on. The alternative was her forcible feeding and feigned concern marked down by voracious caprice. In my letter I had made clear, possibly for the first time, my detailed feelings about Nellie Beatrice. Going through his pockets one day, in the way of motherly women, she discovered the letter and read it. Later, she insisted that I had, in fact, written the letter to her. 'When I think of that terrible letter you wrote to me.' 'I didn't write a letter to you. I wrote a letter to Anthony which you opened.' 'I shall remember it as long as I live, that terrible letter. I don't know what your father would have said if he'd read it. He wouldn't have let you say all those terrible things about me.'

After a few days of looking through newspaper advertisements and newsagents' windows ('No Blacks, No Irish' was not yet a preference accountable to tribunals), we decided on one room in a block of flats next to Richmond Bridge. It was a tired, necessary decision. Pamela's opinion was elusive. Mutual indecision might have expressed it all. The occupant was no landlady but a colonial cast-off who agreed to rent us a room for £6 a week, on the condition that we played mah-jong with her in the evenings. The rent was three times what I had intended to pay, but the Cromwell Road hotel was out of the question for a longer stay. I did something which I had vowed never to do, like asking for unfancy salaries with other unqueer folk: I wrote to a manager called Harry Hanson who was a by-word for tatty, ill-paid, tyrannical, joyless work. He ran about half a dozen companies with queenly ruthlessness and he had a legendary wardrobe of various coloured wigs which he was said to change according to any bout of ill-humour he was indulging.

I had a swift reply and was summoned to the Palace Theatre,

Camberwell, where I was interviewed, rather as I had been for *No Room at the Inn*, by a doomed, distracted queen who was later arrested for offences against young men on the train to Deptford and committed suicide before being brought to trial. I was further surprised to find myself hired. Hanson's companies were dreaded as the last funk-hole for any actor, but they were not easy to penetrate. If there was a Hanson kind of theatre, there was a Hanson kind of actor, unpersonable, defeated from the outset and grateful to have any sort of job at all. They were apologetic about themselves, if not among themselves. Equity representatives were unknown to speak, fluffs and dries were entered into a book by the stage director and other misdemeanours, if committed enough times, ensured the sack, administered literally according to the Hanson Book. He was the theatre's Gradgrind and his theatres were administered like workhouses of despair. Binkie would have seemed all Samuel Smiles in comparison. I had to accept and Pamela must cope with mah-jong. Besides, I was convinced that her prospects must be better than mine. To understudy in the West End was the goal, an ambition open to her if not to me.

Working in Camberwell was as unpleasant as I had anticipated and the company were docile, like prisoners without heart or spirit. The repertory of plays was vintage Hanson, consisting of pre-1920s' melodramas, learnt from 'Sides', *Coming through the Rye*, hack adaptations of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *Gaslight*, *Dracula*, *Frankenstein*, *Charley's Aunt* and low, forgotten farces. The audience was noisy and inattentive. Rehearsals were conducted in a guilty kind of haste and the actors were only given moves where not indicated in the script. We committed our lines as if we were sewing mailbags. No one dared fudge them or forget a move.

The journey across London from Richmond to Camberwell involved several changes, including a slow-moving tram from the Embankment to the theatre. The second house ended about eleven o'clock. I had little time for sleep and less for my wife. When my rehearsal finished at one o'clock I would get on the tram across the river to Charing Cross Station and we would sit in the Embankment gardens with a packet of sandwiches she had prepared and a flask of tea. After a couple of hours I made my way back across the river knowing that when I got home to Richmond almost a dozen hours later she must be asleep. In spite of the tram rattle from Camberwell to Richmond, Pamela soon declared herself pregnant. No, she didn't declare it, she mentioned it like a passing comment. Mention seemed all we could offer each other. Anthony's mother sent us a packet of something called Penny Royal pills, with instructions to take these together with gin and a hot bath. Country girl that she was, Pamela followed Mrs Creighton's bucolic

wisdom and was rewarded. If she was relieved, she never expressed it, nor I my disappointment.

Dull and boring

'*I do believe intensely in the creative value of struggle.*' George Devine

I had less time to find work than I had for sex. Three months later the tardy Camberwell trams came to my rescue and I was sacked for being late twice. It probably had little to do with the trams. The Hanson companies operated a policy of spot sacking and I was no doubt selected by the director, in idle depression on the last train to Deptford, as being the most replaceable, and to encourage the others.

Camberwell had been a bleak period but it was over. I thought I knew that green eyes were smiling on me. For one thing, we had left Richmond. Our colonial landlady had decided that she didn't like having lodgers and particularly those who made tea in the kitchen and were unable to play mah-jong. Anthony had recovered his downstairs flat in Hammersmith and we moved into one of his two rooms at Number 14 Caithness Road, just off Brook Green where Holst had taught the girls of St Pauls. Our room was dark but friendly. We shared Anthony's comfortable chintzy sitting-room and paid him thirty shillings. It seemed a fine arrangement. For no clear reason, the Labour Exchange abandoned its punitive attitude and urged me to draw the unemployment benefit they had contested for so long. We all talked about work. I dreaded and tried to avoid the journey from Hammersmith to the Charing Cross Road and the agents' offices, but Pamela and Anthony seldom accompanied me, keeping house in Caithness Road in case the telephone should ring.

Noel Coward, who could shoot a cliché between the eyes of a gnat and make it burst into flower about the potency of cheap music, also got it right about certain kinds of love for all kinds of people. 'We were so ridiculously over in love.' It was I who was ridiculously over in love. The melodrama of Bridgwater and the overlapping drudgery of Camberwell were gone. I tried to conceal, I think, I am afraid, successfully, the panic loneliness that gripped me in our pleasant room from day to day. I had never known anything like it and I could think of no way of discovering if she were as untroubled as she seemed.

In the New Year Pamela got herself what seemed, in view of her inexperience, a good job. She went to see an actor-manager, Philip Barrett, who offered her the leading role, Joanna, in a tour of *Present Laughter*. He

was well known for having made a small living from touring narcissism, and marrying his leading lady, Eileen Herlie. He was still some improvement on Pat Desmond, and I found myself explaining why she should take the job, which she did. The tour was a short one, I would go on trying to get myself something and we would both save ourselves a little money. In the meantime, I had, so I said, decided to write another play. I had already spent most of my time between the Labour Exchange and the public library where, because of handy radiators, I would sit, write and try to take in the theology of Dante, 'with large sploshes of Eliot', as Jimmy Porter had it. The finished manuscript was written in longhand in three exercise books, which I gave to Pamela. She read it conscientiously and her verdict was characteristically bland, and possibly affectionate. 'Dull and boring'. The three words became a humourless bitter joke between us. If things weren't good, they were 'D and B'. Her own honesty, like so much else, possibly escaped her. My play was indeed Dull and Boring. The two words haunted me.

JIMMY: Thought of the title for a new song today. It's called 'You can quit hanging round my counter Mildred 'cos you'll find my position is closed.' (*Turning to* ALISON *suddenly.*) Good?

ALISON: Oh, very good.

JIMMY: Thought you'd like it. If I can slip in a religious angle, it should be a big hit. (*To* HELENA.) Don't you think so? I was thinking you might help me there. (*She doesn't reply.*) It might help you if I recite the lyrics. Let's see now, it's something like this:

I'm so tired of necking,
of pecking, home wrecking,
of empty bed blues—
just pass me the booze.
I'm tired of being hetero
Rather ride on the metero
Just pass me the booze.
This perpetual whoring
Gets quite dull and boring
So avoid that old python coil
And pass me the celibate oil.
You can quit etc.

No?

CLIFF: Very good, boyo.

JIMMY: Oh, yes, and I know what I meant to tell you—I wrote a poem

while I was at the market yesterday. If you're interested, which you obviously are. (*To* HELENA.) It should appeal to you, in particular. It's soaked in the theology of Dante, with a good slosh of Eliot as well. It starts off 'There are no dry cleaners in Cambodia!'

CLIFF: What do you call it?

JIMMY: 'The Cess Pool'. Myself being a stone dropped in it, you see—

CLIFF: You should be dropped in it, all right.

HELENA: (*To* JIMMY) Why do you try so hard to be unpleasant? (*He turns very deliberately, delighted that she should rise to the bait so soon—he's scarcely in his stride yet.*)

JIMMY: What's that?

HELENA: Do you have to be so offensive?

JIMMY: You mean now? You think I'm being offensive? You underestimate me. (*Turning to* ALISON.) Doesn't she?

HELENA: I think you're a very tiresome young man.

Look Back in Anger, 1956

She played a date near London and I went to see her. She had a playmaker's tailored effective scene in the second act with Philip Barrett who was taking himself more seriously than those servants of the Master himself. She wore a purple taffeta dress, and her hair and eyes seemed redder and greener than ever. I could think of nothing like her. She seemed also to have become a rather good actress, certainly better, more stylish and more beautiful than Stella had made seem possible to me. Later, I might have described the impact as her habitual, frenzied torpor. But when the tour was over she seemed relaxed, reassured and happy. I was delighted to have her back and, for a while, we achieved some sort of drifting mutual purpose and made no effort to look for work. Being a leading lady, even to Philip Barrett, instead of a despised assistant stage manager humping furniture and props through the streets of her own small town, had exhilarated her, and I told myself and Anthony that she had acquired a quickening sparkle, or something speakably like it.

I managed to get an odd week's work here or there around London, places like Hayes and Dartford. On Coronation Day, 2 June 1952, I was performing in a play in Dartford about the Festival of Britain. I came back every night by train with an actress in the company, committing what President Carter and others unknown were to call Adultery in my Heart. On the eve of Coronation night, after the performance, we arrived at Charing Cross Station which was like the London Underground during the war,

covered with slumbering bodies. It was pouring with rain and I had to walk most of the way back to Hammersmith, cursing Her Majesty's loyal lemmings. When I got back to Caithness Road at about four in the morning, Pamela was waiting—was it over-patiently?—for me and gave me my supper tray in bed. She looked agreeably sardonic, unchastening and secure in the belief that I had been committing adultery somewhere between Deptford and Hammersmith, and not only in my rheumaticky heart. If it implied reproof, it might just as well have implied love. I was too tired and depressed to accept either explanation.

My next job was working for the Under Thirty Theatre group at Frinton-on-Sea. Frinton, nearly thirty years ago, was about as untheatrical a town as one could imagine and I don't suppose it has changed. Its immovable feature was its middle-class characterlessness, rather like visiting the reproductions department in a large store. It was full of villas, bungalows and 1930s' concrete bunkers where the *Radio Times* was contained in an embossed leather cover. Nannies went there for the summer with their charges, group captains and admirals retired there and nuns recuperated from vespers. The theatre, which was a small hall, reflected some of this in its own company which seemed to have been selected deliberately by class. Bridgwater, Leicester and Camberwell, especially, had all been made up from lower middle- and working-class actors. If Camberwell never reflected Camberwell, Frinton seemed consciously to reflect Frinton.

I had been in the theatre for less than four years, suddenly I had unknowingly joined a golf club and I knew that I could expect a short stay by that kind of seaside, admitted by a careless secretary. Old ladies arrived in chauffeur-driven Rolls Royces to performances of more or less chauffeur-driven plays. I lasted about three weeks. No reason was given and it would have been bad form and obvious to ask. Like Camberwell, relief set in immediately. The sack was becoming my only feasible work satisfaction. I was replaced by a juvenile straight from RADA and the Wellington called James Villiers, who seemed an absolutely Frinton-type of actor, which indeed is what he has successfully become. The last production in rehearsal was *The Deep Blue Sea* and a young actor came down to play the judge, a part for which he was far too young. He was definitely not Frinton, more of a gypsy, I thought. His name was Peter Nichols.

Pamela worked on and off for Philip Barrett, who seemed to respect her as a useful and cheap leading lady for his tours. Pat Desmond sent for me, offering me a part as a sailor and ASM in a tour of *Rain*, with Stella as Sadie. I was hesitant and defensive. I felt wary of Stella. Tenderness is a self-abusing word, implying lesser emotions of gratitude and nostalgia, which is

what I more or less felt for her. I was liberated from her but had no wish to demonstrate it. I would have preferred her to think of me as affectionate, as I was, and dependent, which I wasn't, rather than a forgetful little ingrate.

I didn't tell Pamela about Stella 'leading' the company as it was then described. Being a Desmond production, I assumed that there would be no details about it in the *Stage* for Equity to look into. Stella made clear her lack of interest in me but without much pleasure. Similarly, I noted that she was not very good and assuredly never had been. She wore a blonde wig as Sadie, which helped to make a caricature of my remembrance. It was a dull production for all the sounding brassiness of her performance and Pat's billing 'For Adults Only'. Business was poor, morale was low and after a few weeks the tour came to an end.

Stella was impatient to go and I was the least reason. When I got back to Caithness Road, Pat rang me. As ever, he was transparently offhand, a little proud and sadistic as he told me that Stella had had to pack her trunks in a hurry and leave for America. The Inland Revenue men were closing in around the screens and Holloway was no date for someone of Stella's class. When I next saw her in Los Angeles ten years later we hardly recognized each other. She had become an American and, worse, an American blonde. There was no trace of the middle-class English gypsy, if there had ever been any. She regarded me as foreign in the way that only Americans assume, without doubt or suspicion. She might almost have talked about Brighton, England. As it was, she talked about a television programme involving puppets for which she wanted money. I made a pretence of interest which could scarcely have deceived even a foreigner. I couldn't quite bring myself to pretend enthusiasm for puppets, on television or off. As I saw her out, she walked towards a man some twenty years younger than herself, got into her car, an old MG, and drove off. The MG was the only English thing left about her. I am sure we would have both been relieved if I had after all slipped her the few hundred dollars I had ready in my pocket.

I spent the summer of 1953 as Juv. Char. at Kidderminster. The director was a red-veined, boozy poof called Gaston, the men all queer save the character man. I shared an underground dressing-room with the leading man who, like my own family, talked and never listened—in his case, about afternoon tennis and night-time guardsmen, and his prowess at both. The girls were dull on the whole, but better than your average brick walls. Pamela's absence was a sore aphrodisiac. Most companies resisted employing married couples, but I was hopeful. I still thought Pamela was my awarded prize to myself. The unknowing clouds of unwanted detachment faded when we were not together. I was certain that it would not be long

before I would get myself into a company like Birmingham or the Bristol Old Vic. Kidderminster courted producers, directors and journalists from Birmingham to come and see us. The leading man in Birmingham was Paul Daneman, who was hailed weekly by the local press as the next Laurence Olivier. Somewhere like Birmingham would pay off, just as Simpson's had paid off in Llandudno.

Kidderminster was sleepily agreeable, quite unlike Bridgwater or Camberwell, but I was incautious enough to think I was worth more than eight pounds a week. The leading man went off to find his guardsmen elsewhere and was unreplaced, leaving me as an accepted but inadequate fill-in. I demanded a rise of £1 which was refused without thought by the management, cheered on by the chairman of the local amateur dramatic society which paid our salary and hated us heartily for it. Pamela went in the autumn to Derby as leading lady. These titles were absurd but contractually definable. The Kidderminster Amateurs made their point easily and I left. Pamela seemed to be doing well at Derby. Like me, she thought that the prejudice against employing married actors could be overcome.

We had spent a little time together before she went up to Derby and a few weeks later she wrote saying that she thought she was pregnant again. Her letter, as always, was hard to interpret. She might have been displeased or dismayed. Delight would have been no less communicable. The Penny Royal pills may have been put to work again but the crisis stole away as it had come. She had scored a success, which was talked of in Derby during the following weeks, as Pamela Tanqueray. At Christmas I was working again at Blythe Road Post Office, as we had both done the Christmas before. Anthony had started work in a debt-collecting organization in Oxford Street.

My separation from Pamela had no consolation now that I was not working. There was no thought of prizes, only loss. I was absorbed in loss, unmistakable loss, inescapable loss, unacceptable to all but gamblers. It still needed the croupier's nod, the bland confirmation from Pamela herself.

She wrote to me saying that Mr Twelvetrees, the director, had agreed to employ me and that I could join her at once. The first night I went up to Derby I watched her play the leading role of Hester in *The Deep Blue Sea*. It was a popular choice in repertory at the time. The prize was there, all right, looking better than ever and I couldn't believe it possible that it might be slipping away. Afterwards, in bed, she said uncomplainingly that she found marriage and a career difficult. Sweet unreason was unanswerable, demoralizing as it did unconfident reason or passion. It was hard to believe that she had even uttered this women's magazine cliché about career and

marriage or to guess at the kind of arrangement she had in mind. She had none. Not only weariness made me refrain from asking. Women's Lib was a far-off aberration like Concorde, the Common Market or the National Theatre. The absurdity was patent, but without malice. Almost soothingly, she had absent-mindedly wiped our slate out.