

# A NICE OCTOBER DAY

*A one-act play  
by Peter Robins*

C/o Peter Scott-Presland  
17 Hathway House  
Gibbon Road  
London SE15 2AU  
07444 311695

## Scene

Robert Adamson's first floor flat in a decaying South London borough. Furniture is old, and décor old fashioned, reflecting his tastes.

The time is the late 1970s

## Characters

Robert Adamson	aged 70
Mrs Chambers	late 40s
Geoff	29 and a bit
Penny	late 20s

*[ROBERT seated, MRS CHAMBERS arranging chrysanthemums]*

- MRS C:               Gorgeous, aren't they? Just like gongs. I never could resist chrysanthemums ... the question is ... where?
- ROBERT:             Put them wherever you think best. I'm not fussed.
- MRS C:               Over there on the television? I say, what a lovely lot of cards. I might have known you'd not be forgotten ... Who's Andy?
- ROBERT:             Nobody very special. Just an echo, you might say. Do sit down if you're staying.
- MRS C:               Of course I'm staying. I planned all my visits today so as to finish here. You didn't mind my giving Roger your number?
- ROBERT:             Roger? Oh, your husband.
- MRS C:               Now, now. I'm sure I told you about Roger ages ago: my adopted son. Anyway, he'll pick me up at about five thirty. You're looking very fit, I must say,
- ROBERT:             Senility doesn't arrive with the post when you're seventy.
- MRS C:               We're not going to let this develop into one of your touchy days, are we? Who said anything about being senile?
- ROBERT:             No-one. Yet. It just happens to be thirteen weeks to the day since you last 'popped in', as you call it.
- MRS C:               So?
- ROBERT:             I suppose you'll be back for another quarterly check in three months' time. Except that would mean working on New Years' Day, wouldn't it?
- MRS C:               I'm never going to convince you, am I, that I simply drop in if I'm passing to find out how you're getting on?
- ROBERT:             Much the same, you know. No, let's be accurate. Cards on the table. While I was waiting for the kettle to boil this morning, I reached a decision ...

MRS C: And what did you decide?

ROBERT: Now don't get excited. It's got little bearing on my staying here. No, I thought to myself, I'm seventy. From today, I'm on a bonus, so, offend or please, I'm going to say exactly what I think in future. Time enough too, I reckon.

MRS C: Quite right. No-one could say that's an expensive luxury for our senior citizens. Now, you have to admit that it was you – not I – who brought up the subject of the flat ...

ROBERT: I really can't muster up the energy to go through all that again, Mrs Chambers. I'm staying, and that's final.

MRS C: I've no wish to upset your birthday, but I can only repeat that it just isn't possible ... not indefinitely, that is. After all, I'm sure I don't have to remind you ...

ADAMSON: Park Street is scheduled for redevelopment ... yes, yes, I'm word perfect. Wouldn't it all be so much neater, so much tidier for the books, like, if I snuffed it? Only one little local difficulty, isn't there? I have no intention of shuffling off for some years yet.

MRS C: Of course you haven't. Now ...

ADAMSON: I'd not quite finished. It so happens I've been doing a modest bit of research in the library. You're going to have to offer me comparable accommodation, Mrs Chambers ... That's the magic phrase, isn't it?

MRS C: Yes, that's quite true. Unfortunately, you know, in our Borough it won't be that easy. You do have to understand we've a very long queue indeed of newly-weds waiting for flats. The Council has a clear duty to young families as well, you know.

ADAMSON: And a duty to those who've taken second place all their lives... mm? What about the single folk, eh? Fleeced all our working years by the tax laws, conned by the works

pensions merchants ... What about us, then, Mrs Chambers?

MRS C: Oh, come on. There have been concessions, lots of them, in recent years ...

ADAMSON: And what do they all amount to after the election hand-outs have been chucked in the dustbins? Toleration at the best, and abuse – yes, abuse – at the worst by your much-quoted average families who'd be begging for bread if it wasn't for OUR subsidies.

MRS C: I've always said in the office that you have a refreshingly different way of looking at things, Mr Adamson. You know, I'm sure you'll find one has to pay the world over for being – well, a little different.

ADAMSON: Tell me the old, old story. And there was simple little me imagining that everyone was a distinct individual – a little different – behind the nylon nets. Be honest now. Don't you really mean I must go on paying extra for being gay?

MRS C: You don't think I'm going to sit and listen to that kind of nonsense. Shall I fill the kettle? You're far too intelligent to suppose everyone is against you because you're homosexual ...

ROBERT: Gay

MRS C: Gay, then. You know, this plug's none too safe. The Department is more than sympathetic towards gays as it happens.

ADAMSON: Damn and blast the Department's sympathy, as it happens. I don't need it. And would you, my dear Mrs Chambers, for one bare second, stop spewing up all the footnotes and suggestions from your latest refresher course? I don't doubt you're a very kind and very humane individual – at home.

MRS C: I'd like to think I am.

- ADAMSON: Then why in hell start to ram us all into neat little pigeonholes the minute you slam the front door behind you?
- MRS C: This is getting us nowhere at all.
- ADAMSON: Hooray! I've no wish to go anywhere. It is my fervent hope – even if I have to scrawl it across that wall as graffiti – that I will be left alone to live the balance of my life here. Everything was right as ninepence until your meddlesome council bought the street, All you've done so far for me is to grab rates with one paw and churn out eviction orders with the other.
- MRS C: You're going to make me laugh if you carry on like this. We are being just a tiny bit dramatic, aren't we?
- ADAMSON: We – whoever 'we' may be – are most surely not. I'm very ready to make a most un-English scene on this issue, Mrs Chambers. Don't underestimate me. No point in growing old unless you pick up a pinch of cunning along the way.
- MRS C: There'll be no calls for scenes or cunning, I can assure you. As I've said right from the start, you will have to go in the end but there will certainly be no eviction orders.
- ADAMSON: I'll bet my pension book on that. You'd have too many reporters and cameramen on the Town Hall steps. Come to that, I know a couple of Fleet Street editors who were young and lively once. They'd be delighted to help me if it came to the push. But then – as you say – it won't, Your Committee's learnt a bit of cunning too. These days they prise us out by putting tatty corrugated iron on the windows opposite as the flats fall vacant ...
- MRS C: Utter rubbish and you know it. We have to protect the property against vandals and squatters ...
- ADAMSON: Like hell. Three boos for the Housing Committee – they win the 1984 Brainwash Award. No, Mrs Chambers, we both know full well that the *unwritten* policy is to play on English respectability. Force us all to stagger round looking for

somewhere decent and then move off quietly. Except me. I'm staying ... And if my geraniums don't hide the squalor you're encouraging, I'll wheedle one of the artistic lads I know into scratching rampant athletes on the window glass itself.

MRS C: Mr Adamson, I do wish you'd stop fretting yourself quite needlessly about all this. What makes it so impossible for you to accept that I'm actually thinking about you – you as a person, I mean – not just as another case history? Surely it must be very lonely for you here? It certainly seemed to me coming along just now that a good half of the street's already derelict.

ADAMSON: What do you mean, lonely? I've always been *alone*, if that's what you mean. Who isn't, finally, married or single? Yes, yes, I know. I could have married. Half the gays of my generation did just that. But, d'you know, I'd have felt such a fraud. That's what it is, isn't it ... defrauding a wife, quite possibly kids as well? That's why I admire the youngsters. They've got guts. They stand up and yell, 'No, that isn't for me. I am what I am and the hell with your systems ...' What was I saying? Yes, of course I'm alone. Not lonely, though. That's a very different kettle of fish. Heavens, look at the time. Gone five already.

MRS C: Talking of kettles, yours will soon be as dry as I feel.

ADAMSON: Will you make it?

MRS C: Why not? Is that extra cup just in case?

ADAMSON: Now less of your hearts and flowers. 'Is there no-one who might knock? No kind neighbour to call on an old man's birthday?' Anyway, look for yourself. There's two extra. Geoff and Kenny will be along soon. The shop closes at five.

MRS C: I'll put some more water on then. Geoff and Kenny ... didn't you mention them once or twice before? I don't remember meeting them.

- ADAMSON: How could you? I weave them in the dying embers – my fantasy family with rainbow gossamer wings like all the fairies. Come back here for Heaven's sake and sit down.
- MRS C: Known them long?
- ADAMSON: Eight ... nine months maybe. We met in the War Museum Park for a spot of troilism on Good Friday, you know. No, they bought me a drink. No, maybe I bought them one. Well, does it matter how it started?
- MRS C: Not in the least! *(Pause)* Isn't this a pretty tea-set? Do they live together?
- ADAMSON: Share a flat in Stockwell. Have one of the sandwiches. Shouldn't think they sleep together. Of course, you could ask them ...
- MRS C: So they've befriended you?
- ADAMSON: No they have not. Nor have they taken evening classes on how to succour pensioners or tamper with other people's lives, because they can't untangle their own. Kenny and Geoff run a cycle shop in Victoria. They drop in. We have a laugh. Some evenings we go for a beer. Tonight they're treating me to a show ... milk?
- MRS C: Thank you. Just one sugar.
- ADAMSON: I was going to let you do that.
- MRS C: You musn't let me forget the present I brought –
- ADAMSON: Surely the flowers ...
- MRS C: No, no, They were a throw-in from mw. Now the real –
- ADAMSON: Not the address of a good removal firm?
- MRS C: No it isn't, Here you are. If you want to see it as a Rates rebate, you can, The Department thought you might like to



celebrate your three score years and ten with a little spree  
... a new suit or – well, whatever you ...

ADAMSON: Fifty pounds?!

MRS C: You're not going to refuse?

ADAMSON: You must be joking.

MRS C: Splendid. So there you are: a shopping day up West, or a bit of a fritter as Roger says, Why not a weekend by the sea before this nice weather breaks?

ADAMSON: Why not indeed? The sea, I mean. There's a young gardener over in the Park tell me he's never been to Brighton – quite a lusty twinkle in his eye, come to think of it. Brighton ... now that is a thought ...

*[GEOFF and KENNY appear in the open doorway.]*

There they are. Come in, you two, we're open as usual. Mrs Chambers ... And this is Kenny. *[To them:]* No need to ask if you two are fighting fit. Tea?

PENNY: Gasping, love.

GEOFF: Look at those bloody chrysanths. I always swore you were middle class at heart.

PENNY: Straight in with both boots, as usual.

MRS C: Don't worry. You won't have to look at them, will you?

GEOFF: Sorry and all that. One of the neighbours, are you?

MRS C: No. I'm from the Welfare at the Town Hall.

GEOFF: Now why didn't I guess?

KENNY: There's a thing, Geoff. Edible crabs. A whole new experience for you.

GEOFF: Piss off.

- MRS C:                So nice to have something that's not shop-bought.
- ADAMSON:           Mrs Chambers has just given me another present. Or rather, the Department has. Fifty pounds. I was wondering about taking that sandy-haired gardener for a filthy weekend by the sea. In our present economic climate one should put the ratepayer's money to constructive use, Don't choke so noisily, Geoff.
- GEOFF:                Oh, doctor, doctor. Shall I ever see the daffodils?
- KENNY:                No. Next question.
- ADAMSON:           I was about to ask what's new in saucy Stockwell. Geoff, that kettle's having a climax, I think.
- KENNY:                My dears, he had to restrain me forcibly from wearing seventy yards of deepest black. Old Droopy Drawers has snuffed it.
- GEOFF:                Boxed her up tight on Monday they did. A right handsome send-off with five glossy Daimlers.
- KENNY:                Pig here was itching to send a wreath of pink carnations shaped like grandma's passion killers.
- GEOFF:                Just a little whimsey I thought of to brighten my coley and chips.
- ADAMSON:           I feel quite impoverished already. No more sagas of Droopy to brighten the winter evenings. Droopy Drawers, Mrs Chambers, is – was – the name these two gummed on their upstairs neighbour.
- KENNY:                'Can I have my fish slice?'
- GEOFF:                'Darling you can have the whole bloody fish.'
- ADAMSON:           The quotes are from their favourite Droopy story.
- MRS C:                Well, come on. Let's hear it.

- KENNY: Sure you want to? I suppose she's cold by now. Well, anyway, Action Man here was leching after this timid electrician – we're both gay, by the way, but there's no competition. You're not, I take it?
- MRS C: I'm married, dear.
- KENNY: Don't fret, doll. You could be a late developer.
- GEOFF: Will you get on with it?
- KENNY: Shut up, you, scoff your crabs. Anyway, Geoff here – Britain's best male impersonator if you don't count that television detective – decides to cook his victim somey randy goo with shellfish and celery ...
- GEOFF: ... when our Droopy, sniffing there's something afoot –
- KENNY: - abed more like –
- GEOFF: - hammers on the door, hands me an unpleasant-looking registered envelope she's signed for and lingers to look at the stove, and offers to lend me her bloody fish-slice ...
- KENNY: 'Let me have it back any time you like, dearies, no hurry at all.' Ha bloody ha.
- GEOFF: Get the picture? Right. New readers begin here. Electrician arrives. An hour passes; the lights are low and the Sinatra lower.
- KENNY: Not as low as your intentions, darling.
- GEOFF: Too kind. So. I'm resting one hand all careless and nonch. on his thigh as we discuss the artistry of the record sleeve. Any moment I calculate he just has to wriggle himself down a fraction more on our settee – the old seduction special number when ...
- KENNY: Bang – bang – bang! That's the door, not super-fuck here ...

BOTH: 'Can I have my fish slice?'

MRS C: Oh no! The whole evening ruined!

GEOFF: Not a bit of it. I ran into the kitchen, grabbed the frying pan, fish slice and saucy goo and all, thrust it in his hands, and said, 'Darling, you can have the whole bloody fish', and shoved him out of the door, and when I got back to the sofa, there he was naked to the knackers on the rug with his gear and sneakers all folded ship-shape on the television. That's Approved School training for you.

KENNY: Could even be true. This one considers himself Stockwell's number one stud. Says he's had more men in a week than most politicians score free dinners. Anything's possible.

ADAMSON: An outspoken generation. But I don't imagine you're shocked too easily, Mrs. Chambers. Your son must be about their age.

MRS C: A couple of years younger, I'd guess. Roger was at Approved School, by the way, Geoff, but he's not an electrician.

KENNY: Is he gay?

GEOFF: Honest, love. You need a woman. You harp on about people being gay like a shop steward looking for recruits.

KENNY: Knickers

GEOFF: Knockers

ADAMSON: He's not married?

MRS C: Roger? Not yet. Next year, we hope.

GEOFF: That'll be nice. Watch he doesn't nip off with the best man.

- MRS C: I don't think that's likely, somehow, Geoff.
- KENNY: Has happened.
- GEOFF: So it's the forty-year stretch for Roger and then the sunset path to Pensionville.
- MRS C: And why not, if that's what he wants? It hardly seems likely either one of you is going to do much about carrying on civilisation –
- GEOFF: as we know it –
- MRS C: as anyone has ever known it. Oh, I realise you're just being witty but you just listen a moment. I may be a hum-drum mum with a Social Service diploma, but there are one or two things I do understand –
- GEOFF: Absolutely –
- MRS C: and one of them is, no matter how tolerant or intolerant people have been in the past to minorities, the ordinary Bloggs family is the unit on which every civilisation has been founded.
- GEOFF: Here we go with the tatty party line all the power groups of history have used to drill their wage slaves. Come Inquisition, come Belsen, conform and breed's the cry.
- MRS C: Tell me, you're sure, absolutely one hundred percent certain, there's no hint of jealousy in you? I mean, even when your boyfriend has walked out, you don't for one instant want to be shot of it all and settle down to father a family. Come on now, look me in the eye.
- GEOFF: I've no desire to be the father of two-point-four, if that's what you mean. None. And that doesn't even for one second make me feel some kind of second-class male...
- KENNY: Two quick gins and you'd feel any kind of male, duckie.

- GEOFF:           Piss off, will you? [*To Mrs C:*] But that's what you really think, isn't it, Mrs C? You as a person, I mean, when you've put your liberal shopping basket away at the end of a long day.
- MRS C:           If you want to know, I do think that on balance a family man is a happier man.
- ADAMSON:       Oh, you disappoint me, Mrs Chambers. I was quite enjoying it, you both seemed so nicely matched. But really – 'A family man is ...' It's almost a Victorian sampler.
- KENNY:           Gothic lettering, I see it all. A touch of the moss-green wool. 'Bearing one child a year, I have no time to be queer'.
- GEOFF:           Mrs Chambers, I'm not some kind of neuter. None of us is. Look, if you really want to study one, watch your famous married man on pension day plus one –
- MRS C:           Now you really are being nonsensical.
- GEOFF:           I'm being v. serious – who trots along behind Mum then in the shopping precinct?
- KENNY:           Even calls her Mother.
- GEOFF:           There he goes, your standard-issue butch male, all fertilising and all grafting done. Glad to be of one last service he drags a trolley through the supermarket. Is that what we poor bags of worms shinned down from the trees for? Is that what it's all been about?
- MRS C:           What's so shameful about that? I was pushing trolleys round the Co-op before you were even born.
- ADAMSON:       Geoff? Mrs Chambers wouldn't mind an inter-round refill, I'm sure.
- MRS C:           Well, I'm beginning to wonder where simple heterosexuals like me feature in your scheme of things. What does all this

make me, Geoff? Am I some kind of prize mare fitted to breed handsome youths as a comfort for your middle years?

GEOFF: Oh come on. I'm not saying we're superior. No-one's knocking you or any of the Mums. All I'm asking is equal freedom not to conform.

MRS C: For heaven's sake, you've had all that for some years now.

KENNY: Oh, sure, doll. You have a go at a joint mortgage or equal employment rights.

GEOFF: Don't you see we're bound to buck the system a bit? It's the first time this century, isn't it, that the bloody politicians haven't managed to cream off awkward questioners like us in a holy war.

MRS C: Yes, yes, I see all that. And I think I begin to realise that you and Mr. Adamson have a thing or two in common. Quite a cell of gay radicals.

GEOFF: Too right. The revolution for freedom of choice is ongoing, Mrs C. Counter-revolutionaries lurk everywhere in the concrete thickets, I can tell you.

KENNY: So, if we spot 'em: careerists, conformists, dog-collars – shoot from the lip.

MRS C: What the hell do you want then? Go on, tell me. I've sat for ten minutes listening to your catalogue of woes. So what's to be done to please you? Or maybe you just thought you'd stumbled on an Aunt Sally. Understand – I was raised to think that the family was the right aim for all of us as kids. That's how we saw it; many still do. Maybe it was tyrannical or cruel or inhuman or some other damn word to push everyone into the same mould.

GEOFF: Great stuff. Zoom in Camera One on Conversion Street. Mrs Chambers appears below a blinding light ...

MRS C: You'll get a blinding light across your ear any moment, my lad –

GEOFF: Watch it, I'm a pacifist!

MRS C: And I'm not. And what's more, I'm no superwoman. No-one pays me twenty thousand a year to brood in a little think tank on how we can stop all gay people from feeling sorry for themselves. I just go to see people who are on my list. That's all I'm paid for. I'm damn sure there's nothing I can do will satisfy you. In fact, I'm not sure what anyone can do. Perhaps that's it! Is it? You enjoy being anti-social. Do you look forward to Judgement Day and parading up and down with banners saying 'Unfair to Geoff and Penny Whichever Way It Goes'? Well, do you? Don't tell me you've dried up.

ADAMSON: There's still a drop in the pot.

MRS C: I could certainly do with another cup.

GEOFF: Where do you start?

KENNY: What did you do in the war, Mrs Chambers?

MRS C: In the war ...? What's that got to do with it? I was in the army. The ATS, if you want to know. I hope you're not going to ask be about my gay experiences in the Forces.

KENNY: You can die with your secret so far as that goes, doll. What did you do exactly?

MRS C: I was in the Quartermaster's Stores.

KENNY: Love it! Couldn't be more perfect. Right, Mrs C, if they trogged in demanding twelve sweaty blankets, how many did you give them?

MRS C: Six, of course! I'm not that naïve, I never was.

KENNY: Exactly. And that is why the ever-lovely Geoff overstates. That is why I pile on the agony, and why we're making so much noise today, so that we can grab a tolerable slice of life tomorrow. Get it?



MRS C: And do you agree with this, Mr Adamson?

ADAMSON: Thought of it for half a century, m'dear. Even dared to mutter it to a lover now and again. It's for the youngsters to live it, though. Now why don't we all sit back, call it quits for the time being, and have a go at this bottle of sherry I've been hoarding? Kenny, you do the honours, I must have a pee. Married or single, the machinery needs more maintenance after prolonged wear. The sherry ... Kenny ...

KENNY: OK, OK love. You trot off and have your pee.

MRS C: Tell me, apart from your own, well, idealism, if that's the word –

GEOFF: It is.

MRS C: All right. A birthday truce for the moment. But apart from that, what else do you have in common, really, with Mr. Adamson?

GEOFF: Come off it, he's got some terrific stories about the old days. He's got something for us, like –

MRS C: Something to pass on.

GEOFF: Right. The inheritance of experience, or whatever shit they dress it up as in New Society. Now you know Auntie Margaret Mead would have agreed with all that.

MRS C: Geoff ...

KENNY: Cool it, eh? Honest, Mrs C., there were some crazy characters drifting about in the Edwardian Twilight when he was a lad. Old William-Henry for instance ...

GEOFF: Magic. There was this old boy he knew, would have been all of a hundred by now. Was at yer actual Oscar's trial ... in the public gallery, not the witness box ...

KENNY: More luck than anything else.

- GEOFF: Right. So, William-Henry used to advocate the public hanging of Sir Allan Lane and Mr TV Baird. Too much public discussion with all these books and television, he used to say.
- MRS C: Bit contradictory, that, isn't it? I mean, without them we'd hardly be talking so easily now, would we?
- KENNY: He didn't think so at all. When William-Henry was young, any bloke could go to a reception leaning heavily on his lover's arm and no hostess with the moistest raised an eyebrow because, just like fat Vickie, she couldn't conceive that such things ever happened.
- MRS C: Nice for people with the right connections, I suppose. So, Mr Adamson gives you a laugh about the old days –
- ADAMSON: And a bit more than that, I trust. Geoff won't tell you, Mrs Chambers, but then perhaps there's something he won't tell himself. I help him – what's the word? – confront – yes, that's it, confront – a nightmare he'd rather not mention. He's a bit scared, and in a way, I help.
- GEOFF: What are you cracking on about?
- ADAMSON: Geoff is twenty-nine and a bit more. He's beginning to doubt if his always-expected other half will ever come tapping at the door. If not, well, it's a long path alone. But he sees I've made it and –
- KENNY: If you can, so can we. He's right, superstud.
- GEOFF: Nuts.
- ADAMSON: Don't you 'nuts' us. You know I'm right. Mrs Chambers is right in a way too. You don't envy her Roger his way of life, but you're a tiny bit jealous that he's found someone that suits him.
- GEOFF: Christ, it's the least any of us can expect.

ADAMSON: We could all drink to that if you'd give Mrs Chambers a spot more.

MRS C: Let me tell you something that's always surprised me. You've never shown me any snaps of yourself or your friends, Mr Adamson. Surely you must have saved one or two over the years? I bet you looked quite a stunner in uniform.

ADAMSON: Not a bit of it. Well, a touch of vitality, shall we say, when I was seventeen. Little more. No, I've never had any looks to speak of – something of an advantage, I've found. You've nothing to regret then. D'you know, I had three friends – three – who killed themselves in their thirties. Shall I tell you for why? All because some odious little chicken at one party or another said, 'Sorry, I'm not into older men.' Imagine that waste. Hideous.

KENNY: Oh, come on. This is your party and nobody's saying 'No'. Well, within limits. Surely there has to be someone special you recall. Come on – secrets, secrets! Tell us about the Grand Affair.

ADAMSON: Well, while Geoff and Mrs Chambers were slogging it out the full twelve rounds earlier on, I was pondering what I really would do with that fifty pounds.

MRS C: No Brighton?

ADAMSON: No Brighton. I'm off to Essex to stay in a village pub.

GEOFF: In an English October? Very pleasant!

KENNY: I'm lost.

ADAMSON: I thought I might go and look up that someone special. Someone I shared a room with after the war, as a matter of fact ... the first one. Two trainee salesmen we were in a linoleum warehouse down in the city. Both just back from the trenches. We fitted, you see: age, sense of humour and those hellish years in France. We had five years together: cycling in the Cotswolds, Sunday walks in Regent's Park,

and about enough for a half pint each in the evenings.  
Didn't matter, though, we had each other ...

KENNY: And then ...?

ADAMSON: Then he fled to some wretched typist who lurked by the bus stop every night.

KENNY: The old story!

ADAMSON: The old story, as you say. I was their best man, of course. Godfather to the boy as well. Nice of them to have called him Robert. He went at Arnheim. Betty's been dead must be all of six months now. Yes, I'll go down to Essex. Fred's by himself at the cottage, so we could discuss world topics like geraniums and the cost of denture fixative.

MRS C: You don't think, Mr Adamson ...

ADAMSON: No I do not. There's no question of my moving in there so you can put that out of your mind. Anyway, what's he really like now? All we've ever done is send Christmas cards since the boy's funeral, and that's more years than I care to remember. Never mind, it'll be a pleasant interlude, won't it? Something to look back on after you've hauled me kicking and screaming into the Old Folk's Home. I take it I'll be allowed to wear my own clothes there, Mrs Chambers?

MRS C: This is preposterous. No-one is going to haul you into the Thomas Hardy Memorial Workhouse, so you can just stop all that self-pitying nonsense.

GEOFF: Great stuff. So tell us what else this forward-looking land has got up its sleeve for Mr Adamson. Or any of us in three or four decades?

MRS C: Nothing that allows you to have a good wallow, if I have anything to do with it. Now, Mr Adamson, you're not going to tell me you've not heard of sheltered accommodation with central dining and recreation rooms; places where you can chat over old times ... it would be people of similar age and interests.

- ADAMSON: You must be mad. Heaven preserve us from the endless swapping of grandchildren photos and compulsory community singing once a week. What have I got in common with that lot but a few wrinkles and creaking knees?
- MRS C: Right then. Over to you. What would you like me to recommend as a policy for gay people in our borough? Now's your chance. I sit on the co-ordinating committee at County Hall, remember. What's it to be, then? A special residential centre for you all – is that what you want?
- ADAMSON: My dear, well-intentioned Mrs Chambers, come over here. No, a bit closer. I don't whiff of incontinence yet. Now tell me, what's over there?
- MRS C: You mean the War Museum?
- ADAMSON: Precisely. Now a couple of hundred years ago – as you know doubt know already – it was a lunatic asylum. Two hundred years ago they crossed the Thames on Sundays to have the madmen amuse them –
- KENNY: Just like the telly, really.
- ADAMSON: That's what you're suggesting.
- MRS C: Maybe I'm being dense, but I can't see the connec –
- ADAMSON: What kind of a life would it be at an all-gay Centre run by the Borough? The pride and joy of our progressive Social Services, no doubt ... but ... from the inside ... no, no, no, no. It would be an experimental zoo with coachloads of researchers mustering weekly to write essays on the freaks.
- MRS C: There's no pleasing you, then, is there? Maybe some day we'll come up with an idea ...
- ADAMSON: Maybe one day when the world minds its business a man will be able to walk proudly with his friend and mourn him openly when he dies. The day old Bloggs in the next flatlet

accepts that I loved my bloke as he did his missus, I'll go into your Old Folks Home. Until then, I stay here. Right here. Your glass is nearly empty, Geoff.

GEOFF: I'm a bit pissed as it is. Listen, have I got to change for this show you're treating us to, or will they love me for my sweaty crotch?

ADAMSON: Sherry, Mrs Chambers? You'll do well enough, Geoff.

MRS C: No more. Did you have to book far in advance?

GEOFF: I dunno.

MRS C: I see ...

ADAMSON: Kenny, more sherry?

KENNY: Ta. Hey, we haven't talked about our prezzie.

GEOFF: Take her anywhere, can't you?

KENNY: Now what have I done?

GEOFF: Go on then. Tell him.

KENNY: Well, it's like this `ere. Pig and I thought that you might – in certain circumstances – be interested in moving –

GEOFF: Not to a geriatric-home-stinking-of-piss-and-blankets. There, I said it very quickly. We had in mind an unpretentious ground floor flat – not exactly three steps and a portico. Something like this one. With a garden.

KENNY: And a pond.

GEOFF: And you could rent a gnome nearly as attractive as Kenny.

KENNY: Toad.

ADAMSON: I thought I'd made it plain enough. I've no money and, since I've plenty of leisure to read the papers, I've a fair

idea of current prices. No, thank you both, I'll stay put. There's no point in wasting your weekends flat-hunting on my behalf.

KENNY: For heaven's sake, we want you to come.

ADAMSON: I'm sorry? You mean you want me to *go* somewhere or other, surely? I know it's meant kindly enough, but it still entails leaving what has been my home for twenty years.

KENNY: You stubborn, prickly old man, you're as stiff-necked as my Dad and I think I love you nearly as much. We want you to have our flat and we'll move up to Droopy's old place. You can bring all your old things – the whole bloody vintage lot ...

GEOFF: I just happen to have brought a colour chart with me ... wouldn't cost anything ... the emulsion would fall off the back of a lorry.

KENNY: Backside of a lorry driver, more like.

GEOFF: You'd have to knock if you came upstairs.

KENNY: And we'd have to knock too, in case you were grabbing the milk boy by his downy crotch at the time.

GEOFF: We get pissed off with each other at times ... honest, we need you.

KENNY: Robbie, will you come?

ADAMSON: Robbie? No-one's called me that for over forty years. Bob, yes. And Bobbie – couldn't stand that. Sounds like a snub-nosed chorus boy. Damn! – My nose is itching. Sure sign of Autumn, you know. Where's that damned handkerchief?

MRS C: Shall I fetch one from the bedroom?

ADAMSON: No, thank you. I'm not chairbound yet. I'll forget my head one day.

- GEOFF: Do you think he'll come, Mrs C?
- MRS C: Maybe. You've shaken him a bit, you know. His birthday, then your offer ...
- KENNY: Calling him Robbie. Well, it's time we did.
- GEOFF: Sure, but your sense of timing's always bloody awful. How did you know?
- KENNY: Nosey me. Looked on the back of that one photo in his bedroom when we were here last. Must have been from his mate, Fred.
- MRS C: Do you know what you're taking on? Are you sure you can cope?
- GEOFF: We haven't walked out of a textbook, love. We've discussed it ever since they trundled Droopy away.
- KENNY: Look, we've thought it through. OK, so he's fit and on his feet now. Maybe he could stay like that for another ten, even fifteen years. Then let's hope for a quick heart attack and a graceful goodnight. It's what I'd want for myself.
- MRS C: He can be very prickly, you know. I mean, you've seen that for yourselves.
- GEOFF: Now, come on. We've known him some time too. I mean, after all, what's this old bit all about? No-one dishes out a new personality down the Post Office, do they? There's no You Are Now Old vouchers with the first pension book, is there?
- KENNY: I was stuck on a bus in the rush hour the other afternoon. Christ, you could pick out a dozen geriatric teenagers going home to Wimbledon.
- GEOFF: Seems to me, old age is being just what you've always been. But more so.



KENNY: Anyway, Mrs C, I'd a bloody sight rather choose to keep an eye on a pensioner I like, rather than some parent old man Leviticus says I ought to care about.

MRS C: And what happens if you two split up? If either of you finds someone permanent, say? Mister or Miss Right could be possessive. Mr Adamson might become so too, and you'd be torn down the middle.

GEOFF: I run ten miles from possessives.

KENNY: Me too. Robbie's far too independent. You've seen that.

*[The phone rings]*

GEOFF: Who d'you think that'll be?

KENNY: Go on, answer the bloody phone. Robbie's tidying himself up after a quick weep.

MRS C: It's probably Roger.

GEOFF: Hello. It is ... No, he won't be a moment, though ... Oh, I see. You know, there's something familiar about your voice.

KENNY: Here we go again ...

GEOFF: *[To KENNY:]* Piss off. *[To phone]* No, not you. D'you ever get down Clapham way? Up your junction too, darling. No, the bloody common. Well, of course I'm bloody bent. That's why I'm asking ... Pity. I could have sworn I knew your voice.

MRS C: Who is it, Geoff?

GEOFF: *[To phone]* Well, if you're sure it wasn't you wandering round the bandstand last Saturday, I'd better let you talk to your Mum, *[To MRS C]* It's your Roger, Mrs C. Sounds a star.

- MRS C: You'd corrupt a saint, given half a chance. *[To Phone]* Roger? Oh, that was Geoff. Well you might get the chance one day. Yes, I see, Well look, we mustn't keep them, they're on their way to a show, so I'll make my own way home.
- ADAMSON: Mrs Chambers, invite him and his fiancée to my party on New Year's Night.
- MRS C: Did you hear that? Mr Adamson's having a party here on New Year's Night.
- ADAMSON: No, no, no. Not here. In the new flat, In Stockwell.
- MRS C: I'll explain later. Don't forget a loaf. In about an hour, then. Alright.
- GEOFF: So you will take the flat? Great.
- KENNY: Far out.
- ADAMSON: One must adapt, you know. Joining a gay commune at seventy could open a whole new vista.
- MRS C: So I'll be seeing you in thirteen weeks' time, then?
- ADAMSON: The arrangement's on my side now, though, isn't it Geoff? Would you bring my coat through from the bedroom? We're going to have to throw you out, Mrs Chambers ... I was thinking, do I qualify for a disturbance allowance? There'll be curtains and carpets to think of, you know.
- MRS C: I'll do my best. The rules might have to be bent as you're not actually being moved out.
- ADAMSON: It would be a nice touch, that. A few bent rules. Kenny, where are you?
- KENNY: Been having a pee. What are we going to see, by the way?
- MRS C: Something with a gay theme?

ADAMSON: Heaven forbid! We don't make a profession of it, you know,

GEOFF: Here's your coat. Let's move, eh?

ADAMSON: D'you know what Salim in the paper shop said to me this morning? 'Quite a nice October day.' That's what he said.

MRS C: I hope you agreed with him.

ADAMSON: Yes, but I didn't agree with him. Not at the time.

THE END