

**I**

*Interior. The big out-patients hall of an old London hospital. Day.*

*Here the patient out-patients wait and wait before going off into one of the little rooms along one side of the hall.*

*It is a big, barrack-like place with grey radiators, grey faces, red 'No Smoking' notices, black and white tiles one-third the way up the wall.*

*Tubular-steel chairs are arranged in clusters, presumably according to the disease.*

*Music from beginning: A lush exuberantly schmaltzy orchestration of 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow'.*

*After unhurried, coldly lingering establishing shots to set the tone and mood, settle on 35-year-old Jack Black, alone in his small group of chairs.*

*Two or three yards from him on the end of her particular group of chairs is an old lady—working-class Londoner.*

*Watch them a moment as 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' fades.*

*Superimpose opening titles.*

*Titles fade. But still no dialogue, no movement.*

*Then as though overcome by the same irritation the viewers are no doubt on the point of feeling, Jack Black unlocks himself, shifts almost violently in his tubular-steel chair, glares across at the dead-faced old lady, sighs heavily and folds his hands.*

*JACK (Snarl): Not much action, is there? Not much bleed'n action!*

*(The old lady surfaces slowly, comically, out of blank reverie.)*

OLD LADY: Beg pardon?

*(Jack snorts and shuffles his feet, inwardly fuming.)*

JACK: Hardly any dialogue at all. Just background noises.

*(A trolley squeaks by, jiggling its bright biochemicals. Silence.)*

*The old lady is a bit uncomfortable.)*

God Almighty.

OLD LADY: You talking to me?

*(He turns and examines her.)*

Sorry. I thought you was talking to—

JACK: Waiting!

OLD LADY *(Relieved)*: All day. They don't care.

JACK: They certainly believe in keeping you waiting. Eh?

OLD LADY *(Relieved)*: All day. They don't care.

JACK *(Disgruntled)*: Holds up the action. People will switch over. Or switch off.

*(But she has not registered his weird, aggressive intensity. She is merely glad to make her own complaint.)*

OLD LADY: It's no skin off their nose. They get their money just the same.

*(He fidgets, aggressively, pulls out his hospital appointment card and examines it.)*

JACK: Eleven o'clock. That's what it says on my card. Eleven o'clock!

OLD LADY: Gone half past now.

*(He flicks at his card, nastily.)*

JACK: Eleven p.m. it'll be at this rate. *(Urgently.) What is going to happen to us?*

OLD LADY: They don't take no notice of the time it says on them cards.

*(He fidgets. Looks at his watch. Fidgets. Looks at his watch again.)*

JACK: Must be over-running.

OLD LADY: Pardon?

JACK *(Angrily)*: The programmes must be running late. *(She looks at him anxiously.)*

*Jack looks at his watch. He cannot keep still.)*

Wimbledon, is it? Or a Test Match. Make everything else late. Bloody sport.

OLD LADY: I—don't hear so well as I—

JACK *(Interrupting)*: Doesn't matter so much to you. You've only got a small part.

OLD LADY *(Bewildered)*: Pardon?

JACK: You aren't very important. You haven't got many lines. *(He looks contemptuously all around the hall.)* Shoddy, this set. Some tuppenny-ha'penny designer. Look at it—!

OLD LADY *(Cautiously)*: Not very comfortable. Not for waiting. No.

JACK: Battleship grey radiators. Red 'No Smoking' notices. Squeaking medicine trolleys. *(Snort.)* The only colour here is in the biochemicals.

*(Pause.)*

*Old lady watching him carefully.)*

*(Snigger.)* Let bards sing now of barbiturates as bright as violets.

OLD LADY: I have to take red ones.

*(He turns and looks at her, steadily.)*

*(Embarrassed.)* Tablets. I have to take little red ones. Butozolodin.

JACK: Oh? It's in the script, is it? The colour of the tablets.

OLD LADY: Pardon?

JACK: You don't get very interesting lines, do you?

OLD LADY: What are you on about, then?

JACK: Boring, your part. All you keep saying is *(Mimics.)* 'Pardon'? like that. 'Pardon'?—with your mouth sagging open.

OLD LADY: Bleed'n sauce!

JACK: That's better. *(Sniff.)* Predictable—but better.

*(She glares at him.)*

*But his face has changed. He is staring fixedly at the camera.)*

*(Soft hiss.)* Stop looking at me.

*(Camera moves in, steadily.)*

*(Louder.)* Stay still!

*(Camera stops.)*

*He stares out at us belligerently.*

*Then, the camera not moving, he visibly relaxes.*

*Fast zoom into big close-up. He flaps at it as though beating away a venomous wasp buzzing at his head.)*

*(Panic.)* Get off! Off!

*(Camera retreats, fast.)*

*He stares out at us.*

*Pause.*

*Then bullet-fast zoom right into his eyes.)*

*(Shout.)* Get away! Get away!

*(Pull out slowly, taking in the wider scene.)*

OLD LADY *(Anxious)*: Here—are you all right? What's up with you?

*(He wipes his forehead with the back of his hand, experiencing the genuine terror of paranoia.)*

JACK *(Mutter)*: Watching me . . . all the time . . . all the bloody time . . .

OLD LADY: Pardon?

*(He turns to her almost imploring.)*

JACK: I hate it.

OLD LADY: Well—nobody likes waiting here that's for sure.

JACK: No! The cameras. The plot.

OLD LADY *(Fidget)*: Plot?

JACK: Load of old tat. *Dirty*, too. Ob-scene.

*(She looks at him cautiously.)*

*He fidgets, unable to keep still, anxiety pulsing through him like a nerve.)*

I don't want to be in this play.

*(Register old lady, mouth sagging with incredulity.)*

*He looks at his watch again, sucking in his breath.)*

Eleven o'clock. That's what it says on my card. Eleven o'clock. *(Suddenly turns to old lady.)* I used to think it was God. Watching me . . .

OLD LADY *(Faintly)*: Pardon?

JACK: Don't you get any better lines than that!

OLD LADY: Look—I don't know what you are going on about—!

JACK *(Blank)*: Television.

*(Fractional pause.)*

OLD LADY: The telly?

JACK: Yeh. *(His lip curls.)* The telly.

*(The old lady's face slowly changes from anxious hostility to a delighted glow: she has recognized him.)*

*Close-up old lady beaming voraciously.)*

OLD LADY: Here! I know you—I've *seen* you on the . . .

*(Sharp cut in mid-sentence.)*

## 2

*Interior. Stairs. Night.*

*(TV commercial: thriller-type music crashes in exactly as we jump into the new scene which starts with close-up of bare feet creeping down a darkened stair.)*

*Thrilling trill of 'B' movie music as we swing up to face of Jack Black, lit from underneath to increase the impression of stealth, of camp 'menace'.*

*The music slowly fades as he creeps ultra-cautiously in his pyjamas down the stairs.*

*A stair creaks.*

*He stiffens. No sounds so, expelling his breath in relief, he continues down the stair.)*

WEIRD WHISPER (out of vision): *What does he want? What is he after in the Dead of Night—?*

*(Close-up Jack Black, licking his lips.)*

## 3

*Interior. Hallway. Night.*

*(TV commercial continued.)*

*Music trills out mock menace again as he creeps along dark hallway to dark kitchen.)*

WHISPER (out of vision): *What does he want? What? What is he doing?*

## 4

*Interior. Larder. Night.*

*(Close-up of his hand groping claw-like for switch inside larder.)*

*Light comes on with crash music and his face registers total consternation.*

*Cut back into 'real life'.)*

## 5

*Interior. The big out-patients hall of an old London hospital. Day.*

*(The cut comes in the middle of the old lady's sentence.)*

OLD LADY (*Eagerly*): . . . and you find that your wife is already there eating them biscuits. Laugh!

*(He is rolling his head from side to side in distress.)*

JACK: Biscuits. God . . . biscuits.

OLD LADY: I like the commercials. Better than the programmes, some of them. What was them biscuits called?

*(Pause.)*

JACK (*Solemn deliberation*): Krispy Krunch. *(Sniff.)* With two K's.

OLD LADY (*Pleased*): That's the ones. Bleed'n horrible they are, and all.

JACK (*Hiss*): Please . . .!

OLD LADY: Is she really your wife?

(*Pause.*)

JACK: What?

OLD LADY: The woman eating them biscuits. Is she *really* your wife—or is that only on the telly?

JACK (*Hollow*): My wife?

OLD LADY: Yeh. The one in the nightgown. *You* know. With the packet in her hand . . . when you put the light on you catch her crunching up the biscuits—(*Laughs, delighted.*)—what a carry on, eh?

JACK: I caught her all right.

OLD LADY: Eating the biscuits, eh?

JACK: I caught her. I caught her. (*He is beginning to rock to and fro in his tubular-steel chair.*)

OLD LADY (*Cackle*): She'd got there before you did—eh?

JACK (*Moan*): I caught her. . . I caught her . . .

(*As he sucks in his breath in anguish—*

*Slow, as it were reluctant, mix with same music on mix as in the mock commercial.*)

## 6

*Interior. Bedroom in London flat. Night.*

(*Door opens in front of us, as in a thriller.*

*Judy Black, naked, is on top of a young man in the tumbled big bed. Slowly, fearfully, she looks up and turns to face the door.*)

JUDY (*Horried*): Jack—!

(*Silence.*

*Nobody moves.*)

*Cut harshly back to close-up Jack in—*

## 7

*Interior. Out-patients hall. Day.*

JACK (*Near whisper*): Krispy Krunch.

(*Pull out slowly.*)

OLD LADY: Had her mouth full, didn't she? Really enjoying it and all . . .

(*He makes a tiny choking noise.*)

(*Stupidly.*) Krispy Krunch. That's the ones. Got little patterns on them.

(*He wipes at his eyes with the back of his hand.*

*Momentarily out of vision a nurse calls his name:)*

NURSE (*Out of vision*): Mr Black, please.

OLD LADY: Fancy *you* having to wait—!

JACK: What?

NURSE (*Out of vision*): Mr Black—?

OLD LADY: Somebody on the telly nearly every night, having to wait. *That's* not right.

JACK: We're on the telly now!

NURSE (*In vision*): Mr Black?

JACK (*Confused*): What?

NURSE: Doctor Whitman is ready for you now—it is Mr Black?

JACK (*Dully*): Yes.

OLD LADY: What do you mean, we're on now?

NURSE (*Impatient*): Come along then, sir. We haven't got all day.

JACK: Been here since ten to eleven . . .

OLD LADY: Now? Are we on *now*?

NURSE: That door over there, please.

*(Like a man in a sick dream he shuffles away towards the door she has indicated.)*

*The old lady has been looking all around, gobbling like a turkey.)*

OLD LADY: Where are the cameras and that, then?

NURSE (*Astounded*): What?

*(The old lady points at Jack, about to go through the door.)*

OLD LADY: That man—look, nurse—*him*. He's on the telly . . .

*(About to scuttle off in the opposite direction, she turns to look.)*

*Jack momentarily looks back before going through the door.)*

NURSE: Oh, yes! So he is! The dog food man.

OLD LADY: Biscuits.

NURSE: Is it?

OLD LADY: Yeh. (*Chuckle.*) He catches his missis at the biscuits.

NURSE: No—I think he's the man who is knocked into the garden pond by the Great Dane.

OLD LADY (*Tetchily*): Biscuits!

NURSE: All the same in the end, isn't it?

OLD LADY: Are they taking our pictures, then?

NURSE: Who?

OLD LADY: The telly people.

NURSE: I—what?—No, I don't think so. (*But she puts her hand to her hair.*)

## 8

*Interior. Doctor Whitman's room off the out-patients hall. Day.*

*(Whitman, a psychiatrist, with a heavy work-load, is reading a letter or notes from Jack's G.P. as Jack comes in.)*

*Sitting with him, at one side of the desk, discreetly apart, is a young doctor, Bilson.)*

WHITMAN: Ah. Mr Black. Good morning.

*(Jack does not respond. He stands dead still, body stiff with hostility and fear.)*

Yes. (*Gently.*) Do come in, please, and sit down.

JACK: I'd rather stand.

WHITMAN: You'll be more comfortable, I think, if you—

JACK: I'll stand!

*(Whitman looks at him with interest.)*

WHITMAN (*Amiable*): That's up to you, of course. It doesn't really matter. If you'd *rather* stand . . .

JACK: I'll sit. Don't make a meal of it. I'll bloody well sit. (*He sits, limbs atwilt.*)

WHITMAN: I'm very sorry you were kept waiting. The appointments system gets snarled up . . .

JACK: I won't delay you. Just give me the tablets and I'll be away.

WHITMAN: Tablets?

JACK: That's what you are for, isn't it? That's what you *dole out*.

WHITMAN: Sometimes.

JACK: Well, then!

WHITMAN: But I'd rather listen to you for a while. What sort of tablets do you think you need?

(Pause.)

*Jack works his face.*

JACK: Tablets to—to—*(He can't finish.)*

WHITMAN: Do you have a headache?

JACK: Yes—*no*—not that sort of ache . . .

WHITMAN: What sort of ache is it? Can you tell me?

*(No response.)*

*Whitman purses his lips.*

JACK *(Eventually)*: I feel . . . I—*(Suddenly angry)*. Look, you're supposed to bloody well diagnose these things. If I came in here with a broken leg you'd ask me what was wrong.

WHITMAN *(Smile)*: Yes—in a way. I'd ask you why you broke it.

JACK: Bloody fool.

WHITMAN: All too often, I'm afraid. But you *haven't* got a broken leg, fortunately. You can run and jump and skip. But you don't want to. Do you.

JACK: Why the hell should I want to run and jump and skip?

WHITMAN: To express pleasure. Joy. Exuberance.

*(Pause.)*

JACK *(Flat)*: Joy.

WHITMAN: You don't feel it?

JACK: I'm not a child. And I'm not *blind*.

WHITMAN: Yet the world is dark.

*(Jack twists his head away. To deflect the observation he settles on young doctor Bilson.)*

JACK *(Sneer)*: Who's this? Your *understudy*?

*(Bilson smiles nervously.)*

WHITMAN: This is Doctor Bilson.

BILSON: Understudy is a good word.

WHITMAN: You are an actor. That is so, isn't it?

JACK *(Sniff)*: Yes.

WHITMAN: On the television.

JACK *(Reluctantly)*: Yes. Commercials, mostly.

WHITMAN *(Pleased)*: I *thought* I had seen you *some-where* before . . . you do the one where this man is creeping on tiptoe down the . . .

JACK *(Violently)*: Yes! Yes!

WHITMAN: Mmm. No doubt you *do* get sick of being—um—yes, but that is not why you are here, is it?

JACK: The commercials are all right. I quite like the commercials. There's nothing wrong with the commercials.

WHITMAN: Not very satisfying for an actor though, surely?

JACK: Better than the plays.

WHITMAN *(Surprised)*: Oh? I would have thought that . . .

JACK *(Interrupting)*: You don't know anything about it, do you!

*(Pause.)*

WHITMAN *(Mildly)*: No. I suppose I don't.

JACK: The commercials are *clean*.

WHITMAN: Clean?

JACK (*Not listening*): They have happy families in the commercials. Husbands and wives who *love* each other . . .

WHITMAN: But not *real* husbands and *real* wives, surely? You can't expect—you don't really think that love is so simple or—

JACK (*Interrupting*): There's laughter and, and, and sunshine and kids playing in the meadows. Nobody mocks the finest human aspirations. There's no deliberate wallowing in vice and evil and and—(*Breaks off*.) No. There's nothing wrong with the commercials. Nothing at all!

WHITMAN (*Gently*): They offer a processed or edited prototype of a certain kind of contentment. But—look, you know and I know that the real world is not so easy to live in. We can't actually buy a ring of confidence—can we? Not you. Not me.

(*Pause*.)

JACK (*Half plea*): But there are *tablets* . . .

WHITMAN: Yes. They can help. I *will* be able to help in that way. But listen to me, I—

JACK (*Swift*): Nothing wrong! Nothing! It's the *plays* that do all the damage. The plays.

WHITMAN: I'm not sure I understand what you mean . . .

JACK (*Hiss*): The plays nowadays—they—(*He looks round furtively*.)

WHITMAN: Go on.

JACK: I have to be very careful what I say.

WHITMAN: Everything you say here stays here. You can say exactly what you want to say.

JACK: Why do you wear a *red tie*?

WHITMAN: Oh. Is it red? I just put on the nearest one at hand.

(*Pause*.)

*Jack examines him.*

JACK: They are all *socialists*, you see. Trotskyites to be more precise.

WHITMAN: Who are?

JACK (*Cunning*): Never you mind. But I know what I'm talking about. I've been in a good many of these plays.

WHITMAN: And you don't like acting any more?

JACK: I've been given scripts that—(*He stops, reluctant*.)

WHITMAN: Please go on.

JACK: They are dirty and corrupt! I've been given parts which would make Satan himself throw up. You have *no idea* the sort of things that go on nowadays. Talk about paddling in the sewers! Ach!

WHITMAN: Do you want to stop acting?

JACK: Do *you*?

WHITMAN: If I can. But we all act a bit—we have to.

JACK (*Aggressive*): You mustn't think you know it all, you know.

WHITMAN: No.

JACK: Be quiet then!

WHITMAN (*Sigh*): Yes.

(*Pause*.)

JACK: I have no wish to be rude.

(*Pause*.)

*Whitman waits patiently.)*

Paddling in sewers.

WHITMAN: Sewers?

JACK: Yes! Switch on the set and you'll see! Despair. Violence. Filth. Sadism. Adultery.

WHITMAN: And party political broadcasts.

JACK: These writers and directors—they are not content with driving themselves mad. They want to drive *us* mad as well.

WHITMAN: Possibly so.

JACK: Filth—that's what *oozes* out of these plays. Filth of all kinds to mock virtue and to encourage doubt. They turn gold into hay, these people. Angels into whores. Love into a s-s-sticky slime—and Jesus Christ into an imbecile bleeding and screaming on a cross. God! I hate them. I bloody hate them, and their rotten, festering, suppurating scabs of ideas!

WHITMAN (*Mildly*): Steady up, there.

JACK: Whatsoever things are false, whatsoever things are debased, whatsoever things are evil, whatsoever things are impure, adulterated, perverse, grossly s-s-sensual—ugly—bizarre—kinky—(*He sucks in his breath.*) Wallow in all that, wash your hands and face in shit, and you'll get *plenty* of work. Oh, yes! The director will mince his way down from the gallery in his beard and his brown suede boots and say 'Mar-vellous ducky'. I know all about it. The dirty sods.

(*Silence.*)

WHITMAN: Mmm.

JACK (*Aggressive*): What?

WHITMAN: I—ah—well, I can't say I have time to watch all that much tel . . .

JACK (*Interrupting*): The truly amazing thing is that

these people keep crapping on about 'Integrity'. They trot it out of their dirty mouths almost every other word. Integrity! Like a raddled old whore talking about chastity.

WHITMAN: 'They'?

JACK (*Blink*): What?

WHITMAN: 'They'—who are they, Mr Black?

JACK (*Suspicious*): Don't you *know*?

WHITMAN: The word tends to—ah—mean different things at different times in different places. I think I know what you mean, but I want to be quite sure I understand you.

(*Pause.*)

*Jack, suddenly cautious, works his mouth.)*

JACK: I could give you a list as long as my arm.

WHITMAN: A list of what?

JACK: Names.

(*Deadlock.*)

*They examine each other.)*

WHITMAN (*Quietly*): The conspiracy?

(*Jack's eyes shift round the room.*)

JACK: I—(*He stops.*)

WHITMAN: Yes?

JACK (*Embarrassed*): I don't want to sound paranoid or anything like that . . . (*Again he stops, as furtive as a petty crook.*)

WHITMAN: But as *you* see it . . .?

JACK (*Rising tone*): As I see it if there is a conspiracy there's no point in calling it something else. Is there?

WHITMAN: No. Not if there is one.

JACK: Oh man, there *is* one all right!

WHITMAN: To what end? A conspiracy for what?

JACK: A conspiracy to corrupt and degrade and confuse people.

WHITMAN: I see.

JACK: They all know each other, these people. They go to Trotskyite meetings. They sleep with the same women. They pass on the clap to each other like it was a relay baton. They talk about alienation and worker's control and the pill and—and—ach, they make me sick to my stomach. If they have an affair with some equally promiscuous woman that lasts *all of three weeks* they get worried about it feeling so (*Jeers.*) perm-a-nent.

(*Whitman is amused despite himself. He straightens his face.*)

WHITMAN: Would you say they were—obsessed—with—um—(*He offers the word like a lump of sugar.*)—sex?

JACK (*Eagerly*): Obsessed? I'll say they are bloody obsessed. They see it everywhere. They interpret it in every gesture, every aside, every silence. The whole world can be reduced to a hairy lump between a woman's legs. (*Hiss.*) That stinking hole! All of them are obsessed with somebody else's loins. They all ought to live in Rutland.

WHITMAN (*Confused*): Rutland?

JACK (*Sweeping on*): They talk about sex over their cornflakes. They discuss it over their coffee. They snigger about in the corridors. They chew it over the bar. And they all end up in each other's beds and . . . (*He falters.*) Looking at . . . looking at dirty pictures and . . . (*He closes his eyes.*)

WHITMAN: So you don't get on with your—what is the right word—your colleagues . . .

JACK (*Derisive*): Colleagues!

WHITMAN: I mean the people you work with, or used to work with. Am I right in assuming that recently you have not been able to get work?

(*Jack fidgets and shuffles.*)

JACK: I did biscuits.

WHITMAN: Yes. That's the one. Where you—um—creep down the stairs . . .

JACK: And I did Waggytail Din-Din.

WHITMAN: Pardon?

JACK: Dog food. All heart and kidney.

WHITMAN: Oh.

JACK: I did it with a Great Dane. He was called Peregrine.

WHITMAN: Didn't see that one. But of course there are so many . . .

JACK (*Helplessly*): A nice dog, Peregrine. Upstaged me something cruel. But he was a n . . . nice d . . . d—

(*He covers his face with his hands, in extreme distress.*)

(*Young Bilson seems about to speak, but Whitman motions him to silence.*)

WHITMAN: Great Danes can be very lovable, I know. Particularly when they are called Peregrine. Did it really eat (*Pulls a face.*) Waggytail Din-Din?

JACK (*Recovering*): No. It was given—(*Starts to laugh.*)—it was . . .

WHITMAN (*Smiling*): Yes?

JACK: Half a sheep. Half a bloody sheep.

(*They both laugh. It lowers the emotional pressure. Whitman sits back.*)

WHITMAN: Well, it's very pleasant to chat about dog food and biscuits but I fear the clock is against us. You

didn't really come to talk about these things, did you?  
Mmm?

JACK (*Hollow*): No.

WHITMAN: What did you come to talk about?

(*Silence.*)

It is quite possible that I can be of some real help to you. But you must go some way to meeting me. . . . What?

(*He breaks off in astonishment.*)

*Close up Jack.*

*Camera pans slowly round the room and Jack, eyes fixed on the lens, swivels his head round with it.*

*Pull out. It looks ludicrous.*

(*Sharp.*) Mr Black. What precisely are you doing?

(*Close up Jack again.*)

JACK (*Hiss*): Stop *looking* at me all the time.

(*Fast zoom at Jack.*)

(*Desperate.*) Get out! Get out!

(*Pull back fast.*)

WHITMAN: Mr Black.

JACK: I'm sick of it.

(*Pause.*)

WHITMAN: What on earth were you—

JACK: The camera!

(*Pause.*)

WHITMAN (*Gathering himself*): I am afraid I'm not with you. . . .

JACK: I don't like this play. I don't like the things that go on in it. Dirty things. Things best forgotten.

WHITMAN (*Anxious*): Play?

JACK (*Incredulous*): Are you trying to tell me you don't know we are in a play?

(*Silence.*)

WHITMAN: Mr Black, now listen to me. . . .

JACK (*Snort*): The one thing that is true about this play is that we are *in it*. That is *demonstrably* the case.

(*Silence.*)

WHITMAN: If you could explain a bit more clearly for me. . . .?

(*Jack peers at him, cautiously.*)

JACK (*Patiently*): The play I am in. The play you are in. (*Indicates Bilson.*) The play that deaf mute there is in.

BILSON: Thank you.

JACK: The play Judy is in.

WHITMAN: Judy?

(*Jack nods, dumb with pain.*)

(*Floundering.*) Who is Judy?

JACK (*Whisper*): She. . . she. . .

WHITMAN (*Rising tone*): Yes?

JACK: She's my wife. In the play, that is. Only in the play, of course.

WHITMAN: I see.

JACK: Do you?

WHITMAN (*Sadly*): I think so.

JACK (*With relief*): Not many people do, you know. They are totally unable to discern the true nature of their predicament. They are locked up in the lines of a script and they do not even know it. That's why they feel so *helpless*.

WHITMAN: Who is the—The Author then?

(*Silence.*)

If there is a script—well, then, somebody wrote it. Yes?

JACK (*Defensive*): I—well, I haven't worked all this out yet. Not to my own satisfaction.

WHITMAN (*Gently*): Listen—I follow what you say. All of us at some time or another feel that we are being manipulated. And indeed we *are*.

(*Jack interrupts savagely.*)

JACK: Do you deny that you are an actor in a play? Do you?

WHITMAN: Well, in a sense we all are . . .

JACK (*Quietly*): I used to think it was God who—*arranged* things.

WHITMAN: Yes. A lot of people think God writes the script—(*Sigh.*) to use *your* language.

(*Jack is not listening to him. He has too much of his own to get out.*)

JACK: When I was a boy I—When I was little. I thought God was watching me all the time, every minute of the day. I could never ever escape his attention, not in the lavatory, not on the football field, not eating my dinner. He was there all the time—

WHITMAN (*Quickly*): Malevolently?

JACK (*Angry*): God I said! Not the Devil.

WHITMAN (*Apologetically*): Yes, there is a difference. I'm sorry I interrupted.

JACK: You couldn't help it.

WHITMAN: No.

JACK: It was in the script. It was all set out beforehand.

WHITMAN: I'm sorry I interrupted you. God, you said.

(*Jack looks at him aggressively, then decides to continue.*)

JACK: I remember once—when I was—oh, seven, eight years old, not more—I was riding this tricycle down a hill near where we used to live—riding it in the middle of the road, jingling the bell—it had a nice, hard sound, that bell—when I—The clouds massed up in great banks over the valley down below took on this—this—(*Searches for the word.*) *radiance*.

(*Silence, neither of them moves, nor the camera.*)

I got off my trike as quickly as I could. I ran to the grass bank at the side of the road. I ran and I stood there, trembling. Trembling like a leaf. I left my trike in the middle of the road.

(*Silence.*)

WHITMAN: Now why did you do that?

JACK (*Simply*): Because God was *too near*.

WHITMAN: So—all your life you've felt—watched. Observed.

(*Jack nods, dumbly.*)

And do you still believe in God?

(*Silence.*)

*The word is, as it were, dragged out of him. It sounds strangled, or peculiarly reluctant.*)

JACK: No.

WHITMAN: I think perhaps you do. I think you *want* to . . .

JACK (*Shout*): *He isn't there!*

WHITMAN (*Sadly*): No.

JACK (*Distressed*): For years and years I hadn't thought about it, hadn't considered it. I just—assumed—somehow—that he—it—was—there, still there, still

watching, still *present*—Then—then . . . (*He stops. And rocks gently. It seems a long time before he tries again.*) Then one morning—daybreak—I—well, I'd been up all night. Couldn't think. Couldn't sleep. Couldn't sit. Couldn't stand. She—(*Abrupt change.*) I was alone. I could see light in a chink through the curtains. First light. Half-past four in the morning and—Oh, birds. They were singing. Mad chatter of them. A dog was barking, somewhere across acres of concrete. Empty yearning. First light. First sounds of the day. (*Bitter laugh.*) New Every Morning. I thought—I stopped in the middle of the room—I thought it's been *like this* since the world began. Light pushing back dark. Birds jabbering. New day starting. What for? What *for*? So—so I tried to—for the first time in years and years I—it seemed—(*Rush.*) I got down on my knees and I closed my eyes and I put my hands together and I said to myself I won't ask for anything, won't ask, *won't ask*, not even for . . . (*Stop.*) I'll just let *you* come. I'll just see if you are there if you are still there still there—I'll wait. I'll wait for—(*Gets it out.*)—*the word.*

(*Silence. He works his face, remembering, reliving it.*)

*Whitman purses his lips.*)

I waited. I waited and waited. I just wanted the word to drop into my mind. I was open for it. *Ready* for it. In my mind I got off my tricycle again and ran to the side, ran to the grass bank—(*He stops.*)

WHITMAN (*Quietly*): You mustn't expect childhood exp—

(*Jack interrupts with a near shout.*)

JACK: Slime!

WHITMAN (*Blink*): What?

JACK: That was the word! Slime. That was the message I got. No God. On my knees with my eyes shut I got this one word or feeling or impression or—I don't

know—but there it was, long slippery strands of it—slime—nothing else but slime. (*Chokes.*) And dirt and—stinking slime contaminating everything. All over my hands. All over my face. In my mouth. In my eyes.

(*He is shuddering now in revulsion.*)

WHITMAN (*Alarmed*): Hey! Stop! Come on, stop it!

(*But Jack's whole body is contorting in disgust. He looks as though he is going to retch. He speaks as though at any moment his stomach is going to boil up into his mouth.*)

JACK: I was kneeling in a s—a s—in a s—in a sewer—yuk—lumps of—yuk—swirling all over all over all over every—yuk—everything—(*He puts his hand to his mouth, retching.*)

WHITMAN (*To Bilson*): Quickly! Get the staff nurse!

(*Bilson rushes anxiously from the room.*)

JACK (*Choke*): Help me. Hel . . .

(*Jack lurches to his feet hand over his mouth. Whitman scurries round the desk to grip him by the arm.*)

WHITMAN: Hold on! There's a good chap . . .

JACK (*Shout*): Slime!

(*He shakes himself free and bolts from the room, spewing into his hands. Whitman is left standing, helpless. He sighs heavily and then sits down on the edge of the desk.*)

WHITMAN (*Moved*): Dear God. Why do we suffer so?

*Telecine 1: Exterior. Outside Hospital. Day.*

(*Judy Black sits waiting in an open sports car, hands on the steering wheel, eyes fixed on the hospital gates. She stiffens as Jack comes running out.*)