

JAPES

SIMON
GRAY



N
H
B

Simon Gray

JAPES

N

H

B

NICK HERN BOOKS

London

www.nickhernbooks.co.uk

Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Original Production](#)

[Characters](#)

[Act One](#)

[Act Two](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Copyright and Performing Rights Information](#)

Piers

26 May 1947–28 June 1996

Japes was first presented at the Mercury Theatre, Colchester, on 23 November 2000, and subsequently transferred to the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, opening on 7 February 2001. The cast was as follows:

JASON	Toby Stephens
MICHAEL	Jasper Britton
ANITA/WENDY	Clare Swinburne

<i>Director</i>	Peter Hall
<i>Designer</i>	John Gunter
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	Neil Austin

Characters

MICHAEL

JASON

WENDY

ANITA

ACT ONE

Scene One

Early seventies. Sitting room of family house in Hampstead. The house belongs to MICHAEL and JASON CARTTS, brothers. MICHAEL is in his mid-twenties, JASON a year or so younger.

Upstage left, door leading off sitting room to other rooms. Kitchen also off stage left.

Sound of typewriter from upstairs.

JASON is sprawled on sofa in sitting room. He has a bottle of wine beside him, a glass in his hand.

Sound of typing stops. Footsteps on stairs. MICHAEL enters sitting room, walks irritably about, ignored by JASON, goes out again. Footsteps on stairs. A pause. MICHAEL comes back into sitting room, collapses onto chair tensely.

JASON (*after a pause, mumbles*). Hi.

MICHAEL. Hi. (*Glances at JASON.*) Are you asleep?

JASON. No. I'm trying to remember.

MICHAEL. Remember what?

JASON. 'Sunday Morning'. The last bit. The deer.

MICHAEL. And can you?

JASON. Mmm –

Deer walk upon our mountains, and the quail
Whistles about us their spontaneous cries;
Sweet berries ripen in the wilderness;
And, in the isolation of the sky,
At evening, casual flocks of pigeons make
Ambiguous undulations as they sink,
Downward to darkness, on intended wings.

MICHAEL. 'Extended wings'.

JASON. Yes.

MICHAEL. You said 'intended'. 'Intended wings' – casual flocks of pigeons make /
Ambiguous undulations as they sink / Downward to darkness on extended wings.
'Downward to darkness, on intended wings' was your version.

JASON. Are you sure?

MICHAEL. Yes.

JASON. 'Intended wings.' How depressing.

MICHAEL. Yes. Makes them into suicides, really, the pigeons.

JASON. No – no, it doesn't. It could mean the wings were *intended* to carry them upwards, out of the darkness, but they were defective in some way, these wings, probably made in Britain, so the pigeons aren't suicidal, not at all, just badly equipped for flying. Like the rest of us.

MICHAEL. But still, the way he wrote it the wings are O.K. They extend. They extend but the pigeons sink – sink on extended – (*Gestures.*) is the point. 'Ambiguously undulating' is the point.

JASON *pours himself another glass, is aware of MICHAEL watching him.*

JASON. What's up?

MICHAEL. Nothing. Nothing's up. Why?

JASON. Oh, just – just – but you look as if something's up. Are you expecting old Neets, is that it?

MICHAEL. What?

JASON. Old Neets, are you expecting her?

MICHAEL. I wish you'd stop referring to her as old Neets. It makes her sound unhygienic.

JASON. I got it from you. That's what you call her.

MICHAEL. No, I don't. Not any more. I've made a point of calling her Anita.

JASON. So you have. As if it were two words. An Eeta. An Eeta. Like a measurement. Don't you move an eeta or I shoot –

MICHAEL. I'm on my ninth bloody draft, do you realise that? I've been around the track eight times, over two – what is it? – nearly two and a half years, and I'm not making it better, I'm just making more drafts. I feel completely untalented.

JASON. Well, you're not. At least three of the six or seven drafts I've read are good enough to be published. Not all three of them, I don't mean, but any one of them. With a bit of redrafting. (*Laughs.*) That one you sent to – that chap, that agent, Weeble –

MICHAEL. Weedon. His name is Weedon.

JASON. Weedon. Sorry. Anyway, Weedon wanted to take you on and he should know, shouldn't he? Why don't you trust him?

MICHAEL. Because at the moment I don't trust anybody, least of all myself. I don't even believe in the title any more.

JASON. 'Some Fitful Fevers', it's good.

MICHAEL. What?

JASON. 'Some Fitful Fevers'. It's O.K.

MICHAEL. That's not the title. That was never a title. It was just a way of identifying it, at the beginning. The very beginning. Instead of 'work in progress'.

JASON. Well, what's the title now?

MICHAEL. 'Antelopes in Antibes'.

There is a pause.

JASON. Why?

MICHAEL. It has a meaning.

JASON. It must be in the ninth draft. There weren't any antelopes in the ones I read.
And nobody went to Antibes.

MICHAEL. Do you like her?

JASON. Who? Oh. An Eeta. Yes, I do. Yes, she seems very – very – from what I've seen. Why?

MICHAEL. Well, I think I need to know what you think of her. How you see her.

JASON. Oh. (*Takes out joint, begins to roll it.*) Well, as – um, a bit of a waif, I suppose.

MICHAEL. A waif? Well, yes – of course she is, with her background, those parents, she's bound to be a waif, isn't she, no choice – in fact, what's amazing about her, truly amazing, is not that she's a waif, 'a bit of a waif' as you put it, but that she's a – a strong and individual sort of – sort of waif. Don't you think?

JASON *nods.*

MICHAEL. So – so you don't mind her staying here sometimes, spending the night?

JASON. Not at all. Well, sometimes a bit but never seriously.

MICHAEL. What times do you mind?

JASON. Well, when she – oh, the obvious things. You know.

MICHAEL. No, I don't know. What things?

JASON. It gets crowded in the kitchen when I'm hungover in the morning.

MICHAEL. Well then, that makes a lot of times. As you're hungover most mornings.
God, I hate the smell of those.

JASON. Neets – An-Eeta doesn't. She smokes them too. Haven't you noticed?

MICHAEL. Yes, well – I don't like the smell when she does it, either.

JASON. But you haven't said anything to her, have you?

MICHAEL. The point is she's not – she hasn't – well, she's still a guest. So of course I haven't said anything. But I might. Soon. That's the point. But what worries me is – is that I've started worrying about her. I mean, when I should be working I start thinking, thinking, well, she ought to be bloody here by now, and where is she, and then a sort of worry grows, just a little one, never specific, not about her being run over or assaulted or – meeting somebody else, for God's sakes, least of all that – it's more – a worry over the mystery of her – of who she is. That's what worries me about her absence, her lateness – not where or what or why – but who. Who is she?

Perhaps the point is – the real point is – that I'm in love with her. Never felt like that about any of the others. Have you ever known me feel like that?

JASON. You used to get very excited about Ingrid.

MICHAEL. Ingrid! But that was just the sex. She was an addiction. A brief addiction.

JASON. And a bloody noisy one. You know, there's a funny echo that starts in your bedroom and ends up in mine. Seems to run around in the walls –

MICHAEL. You can hear us?

JASON. You and Ingrid, she used to honk, or by the time it went around in the walls it was a honk, like an angry goose.

MICHAEL. And what do you hear these days?

JASON. Not much. It's all right.

MICHAEL. She's very careful, when you're around. Gets embarrassed. But our sex – is – as if – as if we both –

JASON. Yeah, Mychy, I don't think you should, I really don't think you should – leave it to my imagination, and then leave it to me not to imagine it – I mean, with your 'oops-a-daisy' – one-two and oops-a-daisy –

MICHAEL. What? What did you say?

JASON. Well – you know, when you go oops-a-daisy, one-two and oops-a-daisy –

MICHAEL. Are you – are you suggesting it's obscene or something?

JASON. No, no, just a bit – a bit public, that's all. Bit difficult to look at when it's going on in front of one. Some – some North country custom, is it?

MICHAEL. It's a game. An affectionate expression of – of a kind of joie de vivre. I'm sorry if it offends you.

JASON. No, no, it doesn't offend me –

MICHAEL. Then why mention it?

JASON. Sorry – sorry, but as you were asking –

MICHAEL. I wasn't asking anything. I was explaining. Trying to explain my need to have her here, in here, living with me, officially. That's really what I'm trying to do. Take it into account, from your point of view.

JASON. You sure you don't want to get married and have done with it?

MICHAEL. No.

JASON. Well, that's all right then.

MICHAEL. What is?

JASON. That you're sure you don't want to get married.

MICHAEL. No, what I said is that I'm not sure I don't want to get married. I am, in fact, very far from not sure. But you clearly took me to mean the opposite. Which must mean that you're the one that's not sure I should marry her.

JASON. It was a misunderstanding – a rather complicated double negative that doesn't come out as a positive – muddled semantics, that's all, Mychy. 'Sure' is one of those words that – that –

MICHAEL. Christ, I'm trying to have one of the most serious conversations of my life, the most serious –

JASON. But I'm being serious. I'm doing the most serious listening of my life, Mychy. I'm being – being – Look. (*Stubs out joint, drains off glass, puts it away from him.*) You're in a state. You see.

MICHAEL. Yes, well. Sorry.

JASON. I'm only trying to say –

MICHAEL. Yeah, I know. It's just that – you always have such a casual attitude with your own – (*Gestures.*) things – with women. So I assume you're being rather casual with me. About mine.

JASON. I don't feel at all casual about yours. There's a lot at stake. For both of us.

MICHAEL. For both of us?

JASON. Well, all three of us, come to that. But for you and old – her.

MICHAEL. And for you, you're saying.

JASON. If you're married then it's all different. Obviously. Completely different from the present set-up.

MICHAEL. Is it really, when it comes down to it? After all, she's already got a key.

JASON. She's borrowed a key. No, I mean – you've lent her a key. But she only uses it when you – allow her to, really. She understands the implications – that's why she always rings the bell before she lets herself in.

MICHAEL. Still, you don't like her having it at all, do you?

JASON *says nothing.*

MICHAEL. You don't.

JASON. Well, actually I suppose I do find it a bit odd, awkward, actually when I come back sometimes and she's let herself in without either of us being here. (*Little pause.*) I mean, as you ask, Mychy.

MICHAEL. Odd, awkward – to be alone with my girlfriend?

JASON. Wrong words. Not odd, awkward – it's just, well, finding somebody else in the house, somebody I scarcely know coming and going, when I'm not expecting it. That's all. But now I'm beginning to expect it so I'm getting used to it, I really am. I mean, to hell with the bloody key, it's completely beside the point.

MICHAEL. But the point it's beside is you. You don't want me to marry her. You think I'm making a mistake. That's the truth, isn't it?

JASON. Look – aren't we rather forgetting old – Anita in all this? We're rather taking it for granted – I mean, have you discussed it with her?

MICHAEL. No. I've only just begun to discuss it with myself. Now I'm discussing it with you. Do you think she might refuse me, then? It hadn't occurred to me. Why should she? Do you think she would? (*Looks at watch.*) Now she's really late. Why should she? She loves me.

JASON. Oh, she's said so, has she?

MICHAEL. Yes, yes, she has – I think she has, I'm sure she has, anyway she behaves as if she has.

JASON. And you, what have you said?

MICHAEL. I haven't had to say anything. She knows. She's very instinctual.

JASON. Yes.

MICHAEL. What does that mean?

JASON. Well, nothing, it means yes. You tell me she's very instinctual and I say yes – Jesus, Mychy!

MICHAEL. Have you heard something?

JASON. Like what?

MICHAEL. About her instincts – instinctuality?

JASON. No, of course not. (*Laughs.*) Who would I hear it from – except you. Things you've reported. That she's said to you.

MICHAEL. What sort of things?

JASON (*rolling another joint*). That you're not the first and only. There have been others before you.

MICHAEL (*sarcastically*). Before me, yes, well, she wouldn't be telling me about the ones she's having at the same time. Or after me. Yet. I trust.

JASON *lets out a strange eruption of laughter.*

MICHAEL. What?

JASON. Jesus, Mychy, I keep telling you I don't know anything about her really except what you tell me. I've scarcely even had a conversation with her.

MICHAEL. Well, hardly surprising as from your own account you're either hungover or irritated by her turning up. Perhaps if you tried talking to her some time, made a bit of an effort – you know, for my sake.

JASON. Yes, yes, I will, I will – but what we're talking about at the moment, what we're discussing at the moment is – is not me and her but you and her – and your sexual jealousy, isn't that it?

MICHAEL. My what? Don't be – don't be so bloody – sexual jealousy!

JASON. Ah. So it's not that that's made you worried and blocked and suddenly desperate to get married.

MICHAEL. Desperate? Desperate! I'm not at all desperate! Just considering.

JASON. Just considering – oh well, that’s O.K. then. That’s fine.

MICHAEL. But what is quite clear, absolutely clear, is that you’re against my marrying her, aren’t you?

JASON. No, no, of course I’m not – but – well, what about the house?

MICHAEL. The house?

JASON. Yes. Our house. If you set up together, I mean really set up together – permanently – whether married or not – well, I’d have to move out, wouldn’t I?

MICHAEL. Would you?

JASON. Well, yes, obviously.

MICHAEL. But this is a – is a – you’re virtually making me choose. It’s like some Spanish, Spanish – mediaeval Spanish – it’s a kind of blackmail. I mean, where would you go, I’d feel guilty. Treacherous.

JASON. Why should you, it would be my decision and – and perhaps I need to get away anyway – and there’s that job, I’ve been thinking about it a lot, it’s probably still open.

MICHAEL. Job, what job?

JASON. The British Council job. In New Guinea.

MICHAEL. What? Oh, that job! It isn’t even in New Guinea. It’s in Guyana.

JASON. Yes, Guyana, the West Indies. One of the islands. And they play cricket. Test matches, now I come to think of it.

MICHAEL. No, they don’t. It’s the place it always rains, so they’re always cancelled, and it’s not even an island, it’s a tip of somewhere South American and it’s hot, steamy, jungly.

JASON. Are you sure? Still, it’s a place to start, it’s a university job, that’s what matters, and who knows, I might end up as a professor, Professor Cartts of the South American jungle.

MICHAEL. No, you wouldn’t, with your – your (*Gestures.*) health, you’d end up as plain Mr Cartts – Mr Cartts he dead. And you know it. And that’s what I mean by blackmail. Because you know I’d never let you – never –

JASON. And how the fuck – how the fuck – do you think you can stop me? (*Little pause.*) I’m going to go, whether you marry – marry – (*Gestures.*) or not.

MICHAEL. Then I’m fucking well not going to marry her, whether you go or not! So you can fuck off anywhere you want to, Japes, just as long as you fuck off! (*Going off.*)

JASON. I thought people like us weren’t supposed to end arguments with language – language –

Sound of MICHAEL going upstairs.

JASON (*suddenly bellowing*). – of such fucking – fucking – ! (*Stops, forces himself to*

settle down with joint. Takes a swig of wine.) ‘Complacencies of the peignoir, and late / Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair’ –

Sound of MICHAEL starting up furious typing, above.

JASON *looks up, makes a gesture of derision, concentrates.*

JASON.

‘And the green freedom of a cockatoo
Upon a rug mingle to dissipate
The holy hush of ancient sacrifice
She dreams a little’ –

Sound of front door opening, closing.

ANITA (*enters*). Hi.

JASON. Hi. You didn’t ring the bell so it can’t be you, can it?

ANITA. Well, it is.

JASON. Then why didn’t you ring the bell – I mean, that’s the convention, isn’t it, and we have to stick to our conventions at times like these.

ANITA goes over, takes joint from him, sucks in, inhales.

ANITA. Well, actually, I hoped you’d be here on your own. Because I wanted to see you, you see. (*Looks up at ceiling.*)

JASON. Yes, that’s him all right. And here’s me. Here I am, Neets. (*Lifts a finger.*) An-eeta.

ANITA. How stoned are you?

JASON. Quite. Quite stoned.

ANITA. But you can think.

JASON. Don’t know. Hang on. (*Stumbles to his feet, lurches.*)

ANITA catches him.

JASON. Christ! All a bit of a strain really. (*Fumbles in his pocket, takes out a tube, shakes out a pill.*) Pass me – pass me the –

ANITA. What’s that?

JASON. It’s a pill.

ANITA. But what’s it do?

JASON. Cleans me up. You’ll see. Go on. Pass it to me.

ANITA hands him the glass.

JASON. Well, needs something in it.

ANITA (*pours some wine into the glass*). Does big brother know you take these?

JASON. Oh, yes. I tell him they’re pain-killers. For my leg. That shuts him up. (*Laughs.*)

ANITA. Oh, Japes – I wish you wouldn't get like this. Not just this minute.

JASON. Well, give me another minute and I won't be like this. (*Stumbles to sofa, sits down.*) Now. Now. How can I help you, An-eeta? (*Gives a little laugh.*)

ANITA *looks at him, also laughs.*

ANITA. Oh, Japes. I just want to talk a little, that's all.

JASON. Good. Because that's what I'm here for these days. To listen. Already done a lot with him. He's in a state. All because of you. You're late, you see. Where have you been?

ANITA. Oh, I just stopped off at that church, the one on the corner by the heath, I wanted to – to, well, think, you see, and it's such a nice church and quiet –

JASON. Oh, St Mark's, Mummy was very, very fond of it, you know, she was a friend, a friend of St Mark's official, sat on committees, helped to raise money, probably wanted to be buried there, wonder why we didn't – oh yes, there was a lawyer, bloody lawyer kept going on about which of them had died last – anyway, they decided it was Daddy by a nose, so that's right, it was his will that counted and there was something in it about wanting to be buried at sea – why, why at sea, we never understood that, nothing of the old salt about Daddy, not the slightest bit an old sea dog but anyway, there it was, stuck in his will, so in he went, poor Mummy beside him, right in the middle of the Channel, she'd have been much happier in St Mark's – and so would he, probably, but anyway there they are, the two of them, and those are pearls that were their eyes, poor souls, poor souls.

ANITA. What were those you took, those pills?

JASON. Don't know exactly, called Screamers or Screechers, something like that, good, aren't they?

ANITA. He wasn't really, was he? In a state? Because of me, my being late? I mean mostly he never notices whether I'm there or not.

JASON. Well, you see, he's only just noticed that he's in love with you.

ANITA. There, I knew it. I told you so.

JASON. Well, you were right, weren't you? That's why you're in trouble. Being in love with you is blocking his writing. Stops for minutes on end. To pester me about you. Then he's back up there and off again. And it's all – all circular. Like a lavatory roll that never unrolls to the end, just keeps renewing itself. Probably just as well as it's crap, really. Just crap.

ANITA. Crap? Is it really?

JASON. Delicately thought, finely wrought, maturely paced, ironically poised crap. Well, you've read some of it.

ANITA. Yes, but I wouldn't know, it's all above my head – but – but poor Mychy – (*Looking up.*)

JASON (*also looking up*). Terrifying, isn't it? And moving too, in its way. But the thing is, Neets, it doesn't matter. Not really. Because he'll be a success, you'll see.

He inherited the success gene from Daddy. And just as Daddy put up houses that everybody bought and nobody wanted to live in, old Mychy will put out novels that – that –

ANITA. And what gene did you inherit, Japes?

JASON. I think – I think Mummy's driving gene. Yes.

ANITA. That's not funny.

JASON. Mummy was a very good driver. Ace. Lots of panache. Zipping up and down the motorways, made even old Daddy look pretty glamorous, sitting there beside her as she shimmied and jived through the traffic at speeds of up to and beyond – only made one mistake in her life, apart from me (*Laughs.*) – and if she'd come out of the skid or swerve or whatever it was, he'd have been so proud of her, Daddy would, patted her knee – 'That's it, Debs, darling, well driven, well driven' – so you see. No disgrace in that gene. I think I'll start taking lessons soon. Yup. (*Smiles at her.*) What do you think?

ANITA. I think I hope you never pass the test. What does he mean he's in love with me? Or is he just saying things?

JASON. No, no, he means – he means – well, the fact is, Neets, (*Little pause.*) he wants to marry you. I think he's going to, you know, pop – pop it at you. The question.

ANITA. Oh, Christ! He can't, can he, I mean, can't you tell him?

JASON (*after a pause*). Tell him what?

ANITA. Well – that there's nothing to me really – not the sort of things he needs – the darks, depths and troubled turmoils and –

JASON. You've got a gift.

ANITA. Gift? What gift – he can't mean my drawing – he doesn't think I'm some sort of artist –

JASON. No, no, of course he doesn't.

ANITA. What, then?

JASON. Well, just sort of, you know, being. Being Neets. Old Neets. Very, very desirable old Neets.

ANITA. You mean he loves me for myself alone!

JASON. Well, (*Little pause.*) and the sex, he says. I stopped the details.

ANITA (*after a little pause*). Yes, well.

JASON. The question I ask – very seriously, Neets – is – what do you want from him? Eh? What do you want from my big brother?

ANITA (*after a pause*). You know what I want. I want the little brother, you see, Japes.

JASON. But you already have the little brother. Sometimes on the same day as you have the big one.

ANITA. Don't!

JASON. Sorry. I'm sorry, Neets.

They both look up at the ceiling.

JASON. Anyway, we're going to stop that. You're just going to be my little – my little sister, possibly even sister-in-law – isn't that the way it's got to work? Because of Mychy and – everything.

ANITA. It won't work for me. I've been thinking about it, Japes, I've never thought about anything so hard – and this is the thing, the difference – when I'm with you and I think about him, even when I try not to – well, even then I'm not ashamed about him. But when I'm with him and I think about you, it's – it's all right – and so that's why it's wrong, you see – oh, I don't know what I mean but you know what I mean, don't you, Japes?

JASON (*thinks*). Yes. Mmm. One's natural, one isn't. Is that it?

ANITA. But don't you at least get jealous? Tell me!

JASON. Yes. But I don't like it. After all, it's only sex. Nothing to get jealous about, really, these days, when there's so much of it around. (*Laughs.*) The only thing I mind, really mind – (*Imitating her.*) one – two – and oops-a-daisy, one – two and oops-a-daisy, that's disgusting, you're both disgusting when you do that. Pass me my stuff.

ANITA passes his joint stuff, pours herself a glass of wine.

JASON starts on joint, passes it to ANITA, who passes him glass of wine. They interchange thus during the following.

ANITA. So what you're saying is, marry him, as far as you're concerned. Right, Japes?

JASON. No, I'm not. I'm bloody not. What I'm saying is – do what you want – but do it with your (*Gestures extravagantly.*) whole self. Existentially, see.

ANITA. I don't want to marry him.

JASON. Good. Because you shouldn't. Nor should he. He shouldn't marry you. So stop fretting and enjoy your fucking.

ANITA. And what about you?

JASON. Oh, never mind me, I'm out of it anyway, exactly as we agreed. As a matter of fact I'm going to sort myself out, it's time – (*Nods.*) might even go away, far away to – to the tropics, set myself up as a university prof. Write my own novel. And it won't be draft after draft after draft, it'll be like Mummy's driving – zoom! I'll zoom over the finishing line. Believe me?

ANITA (*shakes her head, kisses him*). You're bloody useless, that's what you are, Japes.

JASON. I've had my uses, though, haven't I? (*Strokes her breast.*)

ANITA (*shudders*). Ooh, don't, don't, Japes.

JASON. You're such a – such a kitten, you are. That's why we love you really. Because we love kittens. And you're the only one we've got. Purr. Go on. Purr for me.

ANITA *makes slight purring noises, rubbing her breast against his hand.*

JASON. Oh – oh, shit, Neets. *(Takes her in his arms.)*

They kiss passionately.

JASON. Come on then, come on, we can do it –

ANITA. We can't! Of course we can't!

JASON. If he stops, we'll stop –

ANITA *shakes her head.*

JASON. Why not? You haven't lost your nerve –

ANITA. Listen, Japes – now listen. *(Stares at him intensely.)* What if I get pregnant?

JASON. What! What do you mean, you're on the pill.

ANITA. Still – it happens. It really does. So what if I get pregnant, Japes?

JASON. Well – well, don't worry, we'll pay for it – one of us. Or both of us, come to that.

ANITA. No, you wouldn't, neither of you. Because I'd never have an abortion, never.

JASON. Oh, well then, if it's a girl I'll have it. If it's a boy, Mychy gets it. *(Takes her in his arms again.)*

ANITA. The thing is, Japes – I'm late.

JASON. What? Late?

ANITA. Yes, late. Quite a bit late, as a matter of fact. You see.

JASON. Oh. Well, what the hell –

They begin to make frantic love. Typing above stops. They continue. Sound of footsteps upstairs. They become suddenly aware.

ANITA. Oh, Christ! *(Leaps up, dashes out through front door.)*

Sound of MICHAEL coming downstairs. JASON trying to assume dopey position. Sound of ANITA closing front door as:

MICHAEL *enters.*

MICHAEL. Hi.

JASON. Oh, hi. *(Stirring himself.)* You look – what do you look? Transformed. Fulfilled.

MICHAEL. Yes, well, suddenly – floodgates – floodgates again – sorry about all that stuff – *(Little laugh.)* – don't know what got into me – but Christ, *(Sniffing.)* you've been going at it, Japes – actually I had some idea she was here, seemed to hear the bell at some point.

JASON. No. Absolutely no bell. I'd have heard it.

There is a ring at the door.

JASON. How's that for timing?

MICHAEL *goes towards door as sound of door, off, opening.*

MICHAEL (*off*). Hi, Anita, hi, hi, hi!

ANITA. Hi.

Little pause, then off.

MICHAEL *and* ANITA. One – two – and oops-a-daisy! One – two – and oops-a –

JASON *flinches.*

Scene Two

Five years later.

ANITA *is lying rumped on the sofa. JASON is straightening out his clothes. There are pages of a student's essay scattered about.*

ANITA. Are you all right?

JASON. Yes, yes, thanks, Neets. A bit jet-lagged still, I expect. (*Looks at her.*) Sorry.

ANITA. That's all right. It was great to have you back where you belong.

JASON. Mmm? (*Picking up pages.*)

ANITA. We always say. You always say.

JASON. Are there some over there? Some of these?

ANITA *picks up pages from sofa, hands them to him.*

JASON. Thanks.

ANITA. It isn't then?

JASON. What?

ANITA. Great to be back – it's been nearly a year. Actually yes, a year.

JASON. I know. A difficult year. A long and difficult year.

ANITA. Because you've missed being here? (*Has been straightening herself out, feeling about beneath her uncomfortably.*)

JASON. Well, that too, of course. But everything. The faculty politics, island politics –

ANITA. All that stuff you were telling Mychy about last night?

JASON. Yes, that stuff.

ANITA (*fishing out page from under her bottom*). There's this.

JASON. Oh. Thanks. There's still a page missing –

ANITA. Oh. Well, it's not here. (*Looking around sofa.*) It's very precious then? I mean you seem very worried about it.

JASON. Well, it's a student's essay. One of my best students. That's why I wanted to show it to you. As I'd been talking about it. I thought you – you were showing an interest.

ANITA. Yes, well – I thought you were trying to tell me something.

JASON. What sort of something?

ANITA. Well, not about Wordsworth. I've never even read Wordsworth, to my knowledge.

JASON. No, I'm sorry, but then what else, what sort of something else – ?

ANITA. About her?

JASON. Her? Oh, her. Sajit. Yes, well, I suppose I was – because you were asking, you and Mychy keep asking why I went on doing it, teaching English in what Mychy calls the educational arsehole of the world –

ANITA. I've never heard him call it that.

JASON. Well, that's how he thinks of it, I know he does – and you obviously can't see the point either –

ANITA. Well, for different reasons, probably. Or no, perhaps the same reason – well, we both wish you were back here, don't we, obviously? That's all.

JASON. Yes, well, I sort of hoped Sajit would explain – this would explain – why I go on doing it, that's all. I mean, look, she's bright, and quick and has a feeling for language, our language –

ANITA has begun to roll a joint.

JASON. – and the only literature she's got is our literature, an accidental literature, here's all this poetry, Wordsworth's – I mean, just think of it – even if you haven't read him you'd know his – his countryside, his world – but Sajit, however hard she tries to imagine it, any of it – glades, bowers, willows, bending willows – they're not in her blood, she probably has to look them up – bowers and – and meadows, even – in a dictionary. But I can help, you see, that's the point for me. I can help her to imagine.

ANITA. Are you in love with her?

JASON. What! Oh, Neets! She's a student.

ANITA. Oh, Japes! (*Imitating him.*) So was I, remember?

JASON. Yes, well – you weren't my student.

ANITA. Wasn't I? Sometimes I feel as if I was. But left half-done. Anyway – anyway, Japes, you're different. Not the way you're usually different when you come back – and it's not just not boozing. It's as if something happened. I mean – are you in love with somebody, well, you're bound to be some day, but I think I've a right to know, honestly, Japes, don't you?