

DISTRACTIONS

A play for radio

by

David Crystal



RAY

CAROL

OFFICER

SCOTTY

CAROL SINGERS

SOUND EFFECTS

Battle sounds

Coffee being made/poured/drunk

Paper rustling

Door closing



A PLAY IS TAKING PLACE ON THE RADIO. WE HEAR A BATTLE GOING ON. THE SOUND OF A MACHINE GUN, SOLDIERS MOVING ABOUT. TWO SOLDIERS THROW THEMSELVES DOWN, ONE AN OFFICER (UPPER-CLASS ACCENT), THE OTHER A PRIVATE (COCKNEY).

OFFICER: You alright, Scotty?

SCOTTY: Yes, thank you, sir. Bit winded, that's all.

OFFICER: Good man. We'll wait here till dark, then go for that wall, O.K.?

SCOTTY: Right you are, sir.

A SHELL EXPLODES NEARBY.

SCOTTY: Cor, that was close!

OFFICER: Too damn close. We're going to have to get out of here. It's risky, Scotty, but I'm prepared to take that risk, if you are.

SCOTTY: You can count on me, sir.

OFFICER: Good man.

SCOTTY: Sir...

OFFICER: What is it, Scotty?

SCOTTY PAUSES. WE HEAR BATTLE SOUNDS IN THE DISTANCE. DURING THE PAUSE, RAY (LATE 30s, NEUTRAL SOUTH-EAST ACCENT) SPEAKS.

RAY: (MOCK COCKNEY) I don't know how to put this, sir, but if anything should happen to me...

SCOTTY: I ain't sure how to put this, sir, but if anything happens to me...

RAY AND CAROL (EARLY 30s, SAME ACCENT) LAUGH UPROARIOUSLY, WHILE SCOTTY CONTINUES.

SCOTTY (CONTINUING): ... will you take care of these letters, and make sure they get back home?

THE SOLDIERS DIALOGUE CONTINUES IN THE BACKGROUND, WHILE CAROL SAYS:

CAROL: Good try! Well done!

OFFICER: Of course, Scotty. Unless the bastards get me first.

SCOTTY: I never was one for writing, you see, sir, but I did this last night, just before we moved out, and -

THE RADIO IS SWITCHED OFF.

RAY: (MOCK COCKNEY) and - and - if I cop it, sir, I'd like the old lady to know I was thinking of her, at the end, like, you know.

CAROL: (MOCK MALE) Not to worry, Scotty, I'll take care of it. But just one thing, Scotty.

RAY: (MOCK COCKNEY) What's that, sir?



CAROL: (MOCK MALE, BUT STARTING TO GIGGLE) If you're called Scotty, why have you got a Cockney accent?

RAY: (MOCK GERMAN ACCENT) Curses! You have found me out. I admit it. I am Colonel von Fisch of the German Secret Service.

CAROL: (MOCK MALE, VERY POSH) By Jove, Colonel, what brilliant work, to penetrate so far into our organisation.

RAY: (LAUGHING) I think you're moving into a different plot. You can't talk about the army as an organisation. Makes it sound like the Mafia.

CAROL: Oops, sorry! Gosh, but wasn't it awful.

RAY: It started off well enough, I thought - but it did get a bit predictable.

CAROL: A bit! But it's just as well, actually. I've got some work to prepare for school tomorrow, and I didn't want to stay up too late.

RAY: Me too.

CAROL: Want another coffee first?

RAY: Sure.

COFFEE IS Poured INTO A CUP, STIRRING, ETC.

RAY: I wonder if soldiers actually do talk like that?

CAROL: I shouldn't think so - or rather, they might do now, but they probably didn't originally.

RAY: How do you mean?

CAROL: Well, don't you remember reading about that real-life police series on the box?

RAY: The Reading one?

CAROL: Yeah. And everyone was surprised because the police didn't speak like the television serials, so they interviewed one man, and he said he'd have to watch his image from now on - don't you remember? - he said he'd have to start talking like the telly cops or nobody would believe he was a policeman. I bet it's the same with the army.

RAY: It's a funny old world, alright, when you judge real life by what you see on the television.

CAROL: I reckon it happens all the time, now.

RAY: Do you know, in my surgery, a couple of weeks ago, there was a kid, about eight - and I was moving her arm about to check something, and I must have hurt her arm a bit, and she yelled out 'Switch it off, Switch it off'.

CAROL: Switch off what, a machine?

RAY: No, we weren't using any instruments. We didn't know what she meant, at first, and then her mother told us she always said that when something unpleasant happened to her. Apparently, she was used to having the TV switched off whenever there was any blood and guts on it, and she'd begun to think that her own aches and pains could be switched off if she shouted long enough. Crazy.



CAROL: Amazing. Reminds me a bit of a kid I met when I was doing play-group visits once, who didn't know what fires were.

RAY: Fires?

CAROL: Yeah. Real fires. They were doing a project on fire engines and firemen, and he couldn't see the point of it all, of all the water and stuff. He thought that all you had to do to control a fire was switch it on or off. He'd only ever lived in a flat, apparently, with gas fires or radiators or something, and he'd never actually seen a real fire.

RAY: Well.

PAUSE.

CAROL: What are you going to do, while I get on with this?

RAY: Oh, I've still got a bit to do on that paper for the regional conference next month. It's taking a lot longer than I thought.

PAUSE.

CAROL: I sympathise with them, you know.

RAY: Who? My audience?

CAROL: No, dummy! Playwrights, trying to get their characters to talk naturally.

RAY: Natural, you mean.

CAROL: Pardon?

RAY: Talk natural. Nobody would say 'Talk naturally'.

CAROL: I just did!

RAY: Yeah, but you wouldn't say it in a play, I mean.

CAROL: Why on earth not?

RAY: Well, it sounds too correct, too - er - formal. Characters come over better if they're made to sound casual - colloquial.

CAROL: That sounds like a crazy theory to me. That'd mean there'd never be any well-mannered people in plays - just slangy ones.

RAY: No, not at all. You can be well-mannered and colloquial at the same time, you know. Anyway, I'm not saying that you should never have formal speech in a play - just that it comes across better if it's colloquial. It's realler - I mean, more real.

CAROL: Is that what you think it's all about, then? Being real?

RAY: Yeah, 'course. That's what we didn't like about that play this evening. The characters sounded false. You said yourself you didn't think soldiers really talked like that.

CAROL: But hang on a minute. You wouldn't want to write a play about soldiers where they talked like they do in real life. Or about anybody, would you?

RAY: I don't see why not.

CAROL: Well, it'd be boring, that's why not. And it wouldn't be broadcast either, with all the effing and blinding that goes on.



RAY: How do you know it goes on?

CAROL: Well, I've heard 'em - in pubs, and places. Anyway, that's not the point. The point is that if you just write down what people actually said, and left it like that, it'd be deadly - boring. You might just as well leave a tape recorder on under a table, and publish the tape afterwards.

RAY: Been done.

CAROL: Like heck.

RAY: It has. Remember President Nixon? Mind you, I don't think he intended his tape to be such a public success, somehow!

CAROL: Be serious!

RAY: Well, what about some of these modern playwrights, then? Like, er, Harold Pinter. I remember you saying once, someone described him as having a tape-recorder instead of an ear.

CAROL: Oh, they didn't mean it literally. That was just comparing him with the kind of language used in older plays. It's true, there's a lot of realistic language in his plays, he can make conversation sound authentic. But that's his skill. It isn't authentic language really - and it shouldn't be. Real conversations are far bittier than the way people talk in plays. They ramble more... people interrupt each other and talk at the same time -

RAY: (CUTTING IN) No they don't.

CAROL: They do. And most of the time what people talk about just isn't interesting - not to anyone else, anyway. It's just domestic gossip and the like. You could never make a play about the conversation we're having now, for instance.

RAY: Oh I don't know.

CAROL: You couldn't. Or at least, it wouldn't be any good. Everyday conversations don't - dnn't get anywhere. They would have to be given a shape, and all the rubbish cut out. All your ers and ums, for instance.

RAY: I don't er and um!

CAROL: Turn your tape-recorder on sometime! But it's not just you. Everyone does it. Even those people who write in and complain about the fluency of radio announcers. You know, disgusted of Cheam writes in and complains about some poor announcer splitting an infinitive, or hesitating too much.

RAY: Oh yeah, I heard a programme about that yesterday - what was it called? Speak Out, or something - though I must say that the chap who was talking about the listeners' letters wasn't much of an advertisement for good English. He had a funny old accent. Didn't sound real at all.

CAROL: I didn't hear it. But I wouldn't mind betting that those who write the letters commit just as many linguistic sins as the sinners they're criticising. And my point is, you don't get that kind of loose talk in good drama. That's what I meant about Pinter. He doesn't put in half as many ers and ums as actually turn up in real speech. I mean, I don't know who it was who said that about his tape-recorder ear, but if I was Pinter I'd feel insulted. I'd like to think my plays had more to them than that.



RAY: You've never written a play!

CAROL: No, but if I did, I wouldn't just have people talk like we do.

PAUSE.

CAROL: (CONTINUING) Anyway, I did write a play, once, when I was at College.

RAY: Go on! What was it about?

CAROL: Oh, I can't remember much about it, really. It was a sketch more than a play, for a Xmas party. Each student year had to contribute something, and of course everyone was trying in deadly earnest to be satirical. I did a skit on Shakespeare, I think. Went down quite well.

RAY: I imagine everyone was so boozed they'd have laughed at a recitation of the funeral service.

CAROL:(LAUGHING) Maybe. I did enjoy doing it, though, I remember that.

RAY: Why don't you do another one, then?

CAROL: Another what? A play?

RAY: Yes. You're into plays. You deal with them all the time in school, with your spotty sixth formers. Should be a piece of cake, for you.

CAROL: Look, Ray, talking about plays is one thing. Writing them is another. For a start, you've got to have some ideas. Language isn't enough. I've not got time to have ideas. You've got more time than I have. You write one.

RAY: I've got more time, indeed! I'd be no good, anyway. I'm a doctor, not a dreamer. I'm supposed to deal in facts. You're the one for fiction. You're always reading.

CAROL: Oh sure, I'm full of other people's ideas. It's my own I haven't got.

RAY: Rubbish. You just haven't got down to thinking about it, that's all. It's not that you haven't got time - you haven't made time.

CAROL: Well, that's not easy either. Look at these essays, pleading to be looked at. Mark me, they're crying. Can't you hear them?

RAY: Alright, so tonight's a bad night. But you're not snowed under with homeworks to mark every day - and certainly not in the holidays.

CAROL: But you've still got to put aside some time, and that means dropping something else. It's a question of priorities.

RAY: I can't see that's really a problem, if you wanted to enough.

CAROL: But you've got to have a reason for taking up a new line, and I haven't got one.

RAY: I bet you could find a reason, if you thought about it.

CAROL: But why should I think about it? I'd need a reason to find a reason, for heaven's sake! We could go on like that for ever.

RAY: Hang on! I'll give you a reason.

HE RUMMAGES THROUGH SOME NEWSPAPERS.

RAY: (CONTINUING)(MUTTERING) It was in here somewhere. I'm sure it was this week.



PAUSE.

RAY: (CONTINUING) There. How's about that for a reason?

CAROL: (READING) Radio Times Drama Awards.

PAUSE.

CAROL: (CONTINUING) (DISAPPOINTED) A competition!

RAY: Yeah. For a radio or TV play. Right up your street.

CAROL: But that's no reason for writing a play.

RAY: Well, it's an opportunity.

CAROL: Yes, but that's not a reason.

RAY: Well, what counts as a reason, then? You tell me.

CAROL: Oh crumbs, there could be any number of reasons. Money, for one. I can imagine some people having their creative tap turned on by the prize-money, for instance - there's 5,000 reasons straight away. There must be a lot of people - redundant, on the dole - who'd find that a perfectly satisfactory reason for entering. But it's not me. I think the money side of it's embarrassing.

RAY: So what is you, then?

CAROL: Well, I'd go for the usual reasons - oh lor', this is beginning to sound like one of my A-level classes. You don't really want to know, do you?

RAY: (MOCK LISP) Yes please, miss.

CAROL: (MOCK TEACHING VOICE) Are you sitting comfortably, then?

RAY: (MOCK LISP) Yes, miss.

CAROL: (MOCK TEACHING VOICE) Entertainment and education, young man.

RAY: What does that mean, in four-letter words?

CAROL: Tell 'em a story, and give 'em something to think about - and make 'em laugh while you're about it, if you can. All of which requires good ideas, good perception of the world, and good writing ability, none of wot I have not got.

RAY: You must have some ideas. C'mon! Think! Try!

CAROL: It's not like going to the toilet, Ray. You can't just sit and strain and expect a miracle! Now give over. I've got marking to do. You read all about the competition instead.

RAY: Well I jolly well will.

CAROL: And what about your conference paper?

RAY: Oh sod that! I'll do it tomorrow.

FADE OUT

RAY IS SNORING GENTLY.

CAROL: ~~Darlingy~~ darling, wake up. Come on.

RAY: Eh? What time is it?

CAROL: Bed-time. It's 11 o'clock.



RAY: She wakes me up to tell me it's bed-time! I'm not in hospital, am I?

CAROL: Well you can't sleep down here all night. It's getting cold. The heating went off half an hour ago.

RAY: (YAWNS) How've you got on?

CAROL: Oh, I finished it all, thank goodness. Deadly! (PAUSE) How did you?

RAY: Eh? Oh, this?

RUSTLE OF PAPERS.

RAY: (CONTINUING) Well, I did start to plot something, but er -

CAROL: Yes, I noticed the intensity with which you were meditating.

RAY: Well, we creative types, you know, we live a very intense existence. Need all the sleep we can get. (YAWNS)

CAROL: (YAWNS) Ooh, stop it. C'mon, let's put the cat out.

RAY: We haven't got a cat.

CAROL: Well, unplug the television, then. Anything, to get you out of that chair.

RAY: (STRETCHES) I think that competition is a very good idea.

CAROL: Oh Lord, not now, Ray. It's bedtime. We've got to be up in the morning.

RAY: It's only 11. Listen, seriously, I think we ought to go in for it.

CAROL: What do you mean, we?

RAY: We. Us. Both of us.

CAROL: Together? You mean, write one together? That'd never work.

RAY: Why not?

CAROL: It just wouldn't. You might get TV sit-coms written by teams of people, but you don't get serious plays.

RAY: Well, let's do one each, then.

CAROL: Two plays, now. Why not ring up your mother and ask her to do one as well! What's caused all this, anyway? Earlier on, it was me that was supposed to be the budding playwright. How have you got into the act? Did you have a vision while you were snoring your head off? They say some of the best artistic ideas come from dreams. Maybe you had a dream, after all.

RAY: No, 'course not. It's just that, before, I was thinking, which would I rather do, get on with my conference paper or write a play, and I must say the conference paper wasn't winning. In fact, it was probably thinking about the paper that sent me to sleep. Right now, I'd go for the play. I reckon that's more important.

CAROL: Important? You can't mean that.

RAY: Interesting. I said 'more interesting'.

CAROL: No, you didn't. You said 'important'.

RAY: Oh well. Slip of the tongue. I meant 'interesting'.



CAROL: You couldn't think playwriting is more important, surely - not more than the kind of work you do?

RAY: Well, as a matter of fact, I sometimes do wonder about that.

CAROL: Rubbish! Of course it's not. Ask your patients.

RAY: Well I ~~wasn't~~ ~~to~~ ~~think~~ of them so much. I mean, that's just hack work, in a way, looking after a mump here and a measles there. Anybody could do it.

CAROL: But you enjoy it.

RAY: Of ~~ll~~ course. It's always a great satisfaction to be able to give advice, stop pain, and so on. But after that, what is there? So tomorrow I cure a couple of dozen infections. Mrs Brown goes home happy, clutching some pills. Has the world changed?

CAROL: Mrs Brown's world has changed.

RAY: Yes, but if I weren't there, someone else would do the same thing. Dammit, often someone else does do the same thing - to Mrs Brown, anyway. She nearly always comes on my day off. One day, she'll find a computer waiting for her - that'll give her a shock.

CAROL: Raymond! Your rubbish syndrome is taking you over again!

RAY: We-ll! All I was going to say was, that I don't find it particularly satisfying curing Mrs Brown and a few hundred others, when I could be doing something better.

CAROL: Helping more people, you mean?

RAY: Not just that. Doing something of better - more permanent value, you know - something that'll last - oh, I don't know, I can't really explain it. But that's why I thought of working up those ideas for the conference next month. I thought research would be one way of making - well, a real contribution. But I'm having second thoughts about that, now.

CAROL: But why, after all the work you've put in?

RAY: I dunno - maybe I'm not cut out for it. Or maybe it's the wrong line to follow up. I was looking something up in the hospital library the other day, and I found, oh, a couple of dozen references to people who have worked on the same topic as me, and not got anywhere - months of work, years maybe, leading to a dead end. That put me off rather.

CAROL: But someone's got to find the dead ends. I don't know much about it, but nobody knows a dead end until they travel up it - if you see what I mean?

RAY: Yes, but it's different if you're a full-time member of a research team - you can afford a few dead ends, as long as you've got some triumphs to show off as well. But I'm small fry. This is my first project in fifteen years of practice. If it flops, what do I get out of it?

CAROL: But it won't flop.

RAY: Well I don't mean 'flop', exactly - I mean 'get nowhere'. It could, easily. I should have looked at more patients, for instance, but there wasn't time. I'm not even sure the thing is do-able, in our present state of knowledge. I sometimes sit and stare at the piles of cards on my desk, and wait for something to happen. Nothing does. (PAUSE) So anyway, I'm beginning to wonder now whether there aren't more useful



things for a chap to be doing with his spare time - and seeing as you mentioned playwrighting...

CAROL: You did, actually.

RAY: I just thought it might be worth a go - seriously, I mean.

CAROL: Well! This sounds like a severe case of mental middle-age spread to me. You ought to see a doctor!

RAY: No, Carol, I mean it. I really do think it might be worth trying.

CAROL: But - but what would you write about?

RAY: Oh gosh, I don't know. I'll come up with something.

CAROL: I think you ought to sleep on the whole business - again!

RAY: (LAUGHS) Maybe you're right.

PAUSE, AS WE HEAR THEM GET UP.

RAY: (CONTINUING) I know, what about a play about an English teacher who gets married to a doctor?

CAROL: Very original! What would happen?

RAY: Oh, the teacher gets swept off her feet by this dashing young chap of, er, 29.

CAROL: 29?!

RAY: Well, 35...

CAROL: And the rest!

RAY: In his late 30s, then. And then - they have problems with their sex life.

CAROL: Bo-ring!

RAY: No, wait a minute, listen, this is brilliant - she has to give up the pill, you see, so she goes to the doctor and gets a cap fitted, and - and when she gets home, she realises she's left behind the spermicidal cream you're supposed to use with it, you see...

CAROL SNORTS, LAUGHING.

RAY: (CONTINUING) ... Well, she's a bit thick, this teacher -

CAROL: (CUTTING IN) Watch it!

RAY: - so she looks in the bathroom cabinet for something that'll do instead, and finds a jar of her husband's medicated Brylcreem -

CAROL: Oh, no! Raymond, don't be revolting!

RAY: Hang on! Hang on! I haven't got to the, er, climax yet.

CAROL: Oh, come off it.

RAY: No, listen, listen... and then, nine months later, when the baby's born, he has an excellent \*head of hair!

CAROL: (OVERLAPPING) \*head of hair, I know! Boom, boom! Sor-ry, don't ring us, we'll ring you.



RAY: (MOCK IRISH) You mean I don't get the part - I mean, the job?

CAROL: (MOCK AMERICAN) I'm sorry, young man. It just ain't up to the standards of our organisation.

RAY: (MOCK IRISH) But I've got a wife and eleven children to support.

CAROL: (LAUGHING) I'm not surprised, if she uses medicated Brylcreem!

FADE OUT.

CAROL: Good morning, doctor.

RAY: Hello, Mrs Griggs. How've you been keeping?

CAROL: Not too badly, doctor, thank you.

RAY: What can I do for you today?

CAROL: Well, it's my foot playing up, doctor. Just here. It aches a lot.

RAY: I see, and - hell, this is bloody ridiculous.

PAPER IS SCREWED UP AND THROWN IN A BIN.

CAROL: What's up?

RAY: It's not right. It doesn't sound right. I'm sure I don't talk to patients like that.

CAROL: It sounded perfectly alright to me. Don't throw it all away. You've spent days on it.

RAY: Well, I'm not sure it's getting anywhere, anyway. It's rambling too much. I can't get to the point quickly enough. The dialogue keeps getting in the way of the plot.

CAROL: How do you mean?

RAY: It's just - well, look at this -

SCREWED-UP PAPER STRAIGHTENED OUT.

RAY: (CONTINUING) I wanted this woman to raise the problem of her husband with the doctor, didn't I. There isn't really anything wrong with her at all, of course. She's just using the aching foot as an excuse. Well, I start her off talking to the doctor, and look - I spend two pages on aimless chat, and she still hasn't got to the point.

CAROL: But wouldn't it be like that, if she didn't know how to raise the issue?

RAY: Very likely. But it doesn't look at all convincing, when you write it down. (PAUSE) I don't know. I think I should keep off medicine. I thought it would be easy, to set the play in a clinic, seeing as I know that setting so well - but in fact it's quite the opposite. I keep paying attention to details which aren't anything to do with the character - or the plot - or what would be a plot, if I got round to it.

CAROL: Try a different theme, then? A different character?

RAY: That's partly my problem. Now that I've started, I've made a discovery. I'm not really interested in characters at all.

CAROL: But you've got to be, if you want to be a writer. Fiction's all about characters.



RAY: In theory, maybe. But I find myself far more interested in the settings, the situations. For a start, I think it's the only possible way to do something new. I mean, with several hundred years of English lit. behind us, what chance has anybody got to think up a new character, or a new theme, to write about? What is there, after all? Love, jealousy, dishonesty - all the deadly sins, and a few of the virtues. Can't possibly be new. Same with characters. I mean, take a love situation. ~~What~~ What type of character is there that everyone hasn't seen a dozen times in Shakespeare, Dallas, and all the rest?

CAROL: Shakespeare and Dallas! Thus speaks the great critic!

RAY: Yeah, well, the answer is, there isn't one. It's all been done.

CAROL: So where does that leave you - or me?

RAY: There's only the setting left, that's my point. Where everything takes place. And when.

CAROL: Where, and when.

RAY: Yes. The only possible way to be original, as far as I can see, is to take old themes and characters, and have them work things out in new settings. That's what everyone else seems to do. I was looking at some of those prize-winning paperbacks earlier on. The most striking differences are the settings: one's set in India, another in Hong Kong - any number in Nazi concentration camps. The same themes turn up over and over. Boy meets girl. Army meets army. Individual meets government. And now we're in the 1980s. Boys are still meeting girls, armies meeting armies. All that's left to talk about is the 1980s themselves - say, some of the inventions and everything. They present a whole new range of problems for people to sort out. Like silicon chips, or test-tube babies. A whole new ball-game for the old themes and characters to find their way about in.

CAROL: You won't get very far with grammar like that! And don't mix your metaphors.

RAY: Pedant!

CAROL: Alright, so what you're saying is you take a classic plot - an eternal triangle, say - and all you have to do is set it in a silicon chip factory, or somewhere, and you've got an original play.

RAY: Yeah. Like all the new sit-coms and serials on the box. It's the situation that makes it all fresh and appealing, not the characters. You see different things happening to a human being from what you've seen before. It doesn't matter two hoots which human being. That's all you need. And that's what I haven't worked out yet.?

CAROL: A new situation?

RAY: Yeah. I thought the medical field would oblige, but it hasn't come out that way at all. Every line I've written groans under the weight of past cliches. I'd be a great scriptwriter for Dr. Kildare.

CAROL: Careful! You're showing your age. Who was Dr. Kildare?

RAY: You damn well know! (LAUGHS) Anyway, enough of me. How are you getting on? I haven't seen you do any scribbling yet.

CAROL: Oh, I'm still thinking.

RAY: Of whether to do it?



CAROL: No - I think I will have a go. At least it won't be worse than yours, by all accounts. But I want to see how it all works out first, before telling you.

RAY: Aw, spoilsport. But you'll give us a hint, at least.

CAROL: Certainly not. I don't want another playwright pinching my ideas - especially one who's having a rough time.

RAY: I wouldn't pinch your ideas - not unless they were good ones!

CAROL: I don't think they'll be that. But I'll tell you what, I'll give you a clue, just to keep you on your toes. I'm thinking it'll have a religious theme.

RAY: (WEAKLY) Eh?

CAROL: You heard. A religious theme.

RAY: (PAUSE) But - you can't possibly do that!

CAROL: Why on earth not?

RAY: Well - 'cos - As soon as you even mention the word 'religion', you'll be finished. The BBC judges will just think of all the little clicking noises all over the country as people switch off - like a plague of electronic death watch beetles.

CAROL: Oh but, darling, listen -

RAY: (CONTINUING) and if they don't switch off physically, they will mentally. People won't listen, love. It's not a religious age. They don't want religious ideas shoved down their throats. Even believers don't. I mean, heck, look at us. We go to Mass each week, but we never listen to any religious programmes on the radio - or on TV. And when Thought for the Day turns up each morning, you flee into the bathroom.

CAROL: Well that proves I'm sane, doesn't it. Just because I don't like the way religion is usually packaged on the air doesn't mean to say there's no scope for it at all.

RAY: But people want to make up their own minds about things, these days - ~~that's~~ that's what everyone says now. Conversion is definitely out.

CAROL: But you don't have to be trying to convert people, if you write a play about religion. You just want to make them, well, think about things - or make yourself, think about things, come to that. I'm all for people making up their own minds, but they've got to be informed about the alternatives first. That's only common sense. I reckon the whole business of making up your mind about religion is as good a topic for a play as any other.

RAY: But there must have been dozens of plays about religion.

CAROL: Maybe, but as you said yourself, not in the 1980s. And anyway, the ones I've heard haven't impressed me, with people stating theological positions, at great length. The characters weren't people - they were walking Aquinases. The only people who listen to that sort of thing are those who believe in the stuff already. I'd try and do it differently.

RAY: How?

CAROL: I'm glad you asked that question, 'cos I haven't the foggiest idea. But I'm working on it. Three times a day, after meals.

RAY: And four times on Sundays, I hope.

CAROL: Naturally! (PAUSE) Mind you, there have been some jolly interesting



experiments over the years, in putting religious ideas across. Do you remember when we went to Israel, for instance - that second-hand book on the Bible, done like a modern newspaper? What was it called, now...? Chronicles, I think - or Bible Chronicles, or something.

RAY: Oh yes, that was a great idea. Have we still got it?

CAROL: I think so, somewhere.

RAY: Yes, I remember some of the headlines. Do you remember that one: 'Sodom and Gomorrah Wiped Out in Worst Disaster Since Flood'?

CAROL: (LAUGHS) Yes. And the special edition, edged in black, that was done for the death of Moses. 'Moses Dead'.

RAY: 'Ends Glorious Career on Threshold of Holy Land'. (LAUGHS) Very nice.

CAROL: I liked the small ads best.

RAY: I don't remember them.

CAROL: Oh, you must do. The Want Ads, like, you know, 'Handmaidens wanted for work in temple', or 'Second-hand Seal-makers Kit for Sale'.

RAY: Oh yes, I remember. 'Ox for Hire, one shekel a day'.

CAROL: That's it. And the public announcements, about when the <sup>a</sup>cravans would arrive in from Ur, or Babylon.

RAY: Who did that book, do you remember?

CAROL: No. Some educational foundation in Israel, I think. I forget.

RAY: It was good. We must hunt it out.

CAROL: Well, there's my point, you see. Nothing could be more boring than parts of the Old Testament - and you can make even those bits interesting, if you handle them in the right way. I reckon you could do the same, these days, using the radio or TV.

RAY: That's it! A sort of spiritual Blankety Blank! (MOCK WOGAN) Now here we have 'God the Blank'. What will it be? Father, Son, or Holy Ghost?

CAROL: (LAUGHS) Not quite. Though as a matter of fact, I did read somewhere that there are several TV stations in the USA these days which are run by religious groups, and they churn out the whole range of programmes - quizzes, chat shows, soap dramas, and the like - all from a particular, religious point of view. I wouldn't be surprised if there was a religious equivalent to Blankety Blank.

RAY: (LAUGHING) Or - or - 'God'll Fix It' -

CAROL: (LAUGHING) Oh, stop it!

RAY: (LAUGHING) Or - a 'Eurovision Prayer Contest'.

CAROL: Raymond! Control yourself!

RAY: (CONTROLLING HIMSELF) Oh dear! I agree, it sounds awful.

CAROL: Well, awful or not, apparently these stations attract large audiences. They're all privately financed, for a start. And they'll be in this country, one day, you'll see - especially when cable TV arrives. You wait. Religious soap will make Coronation Street seem like Shakespeare.

RAY: (MOCK POSH) Gad! It's just not British!

CAROL: (MOCK POSH) Quite so, quite so. (NORMAL) Anyway, don't get worried.



I'm not thinking of going in for that kind of thing. As a matter of fact, as you ask, I'm not thinking of writing about religion, in the usual sense, at all. I mean, I agree with you, that 'religion' is a dirty word, to a lot of people - but they're thinking of churches and services and public prayers, and all that sort of thing - and especially when the religion gets too far away from their everyday lives and problems to be of any use to them. It doesn't mean to say that these same people aren't religious, in a deeper sense - that they don't think, from time to time, about themselves, or God, or - or what it's all about.

RAY: Oh, no, 'course not. But that's what that chap was saying, that monk, in the church hall last month - d'you remember? - the one who told us about the survey he did into what people meant by the word 'God'.

CAROL: I wasn't there. I was sick, remember? Your pills didn't work!

RAY: Oh, yes - ahem!

CAROL: But I do remember you going on about how great it was.

RAY: Oh sure, it was one of the best talks we'd had this year. What he'd done, you see, was interview people, dozens of them. He hadn't fallen into the old trap of asking them whether they believed in God, or not, 'cos then people just fall back on fixed positions - yes, no, don't know, and so on. Rather, he asked them whether the word 'God' had any meaning for them at all, and whether they ever used the word themselves, in any way at all. He got a remarkable range of answers, he was saying. Some people gave a fairly orthodox answer - you know, God is a Supreme Being, and the like - but most gave highly personal answers, not intellectual ones. Oh, gosh, I can't remember them all now - things like 'God is the happiness I feel when I see a beautiful sunrise', or 'the sense of rightness I feel when I see justice being done'.

CAROL: Reminds me a bit of that poem we did in school - do you remember it, the one we had to learn off by heart for open day?

RAY: Which one was that?

CAROL: The Litany for the Ghetto - the one where the writer finds God in the cities and the slums. Remember it? 'O God, who hangs on street corners, who tastes the grace of cheap wine and the sting of the needle, Help us to touch you... O God, who lives in tenements, who goes to segregated schools, who is beaten in precincts, who is unemployed, Help us to know you...' And so on. It was very effective.

RAY: Yes, well this was the same sort of thing, only on a far larger scale. I mean, one person interviewed even brought in 'Close Encounters'.

CAROL: Close Encounters? You mean, the film?

RAY: Yeah. Lots of people mentioned the pangs and tears and shivers they'd experienced in watching films, or going to the theatre, or listening to music - and one person apparently thought of the feelings he'd had at the end of Close Encounters, where you meet the space people, and said that if he had to call anything God, it would be whatever it was that gave him such feelings.

CAROL: But such things are a long way from the kind of personal God, that you and I believe in, aren't they?

RAY: Well, not necessarily, that was his point - the monk's, I mean.



Or rather, his argument was, that belief in a God with a personality - a loving God - is a very sophisticated kind of belief - a sort of spiritual climax, that you only achieve when you've read the life of Christ, and so on. You have to start with something more basic, he was saying - with the feelings of mystery and uncertainty about the world that everyone has from time to time. And it doesn't matter whether you get these feelings from the bible, a film, your lover, or what. So long as you recognise them for what they are, and do something useful with them - what did he call them? he used some phrase - indications? intimations? - from some poet - Wordsworth, I think -

CAROL: Oh, hang on - intimations - intimations of immortality.

RAY: Yeah, that was it. Intimations of immortality. (PAUSE) I must say I was very impressed. I hadn't thought about it quite that way before.

CAROL: You must have been impressed, to remember so much about it.

RAY: Well, it wasn't so much 'remembering'. Some of his points struck home so well that I didn't have to consciously remember them. Sign of a good talk, I suppose.

CAROL: Mm.

RAY: I remember in particular the three things he said were part of the deepest consciousness of every man. A desire for permanence - to live for ever. That's your immortality point, I imagine.

CAROL: Mm.

RAY: (CONTINUING) Then there was the desire to preserve your identity - to be you, and no-one else. He kept asking us questions like, Would any of us like to change identities with the person next to us? Even with the person we admired or loved most in the world? Nobody spoke up. And then there was his third point - I forget exactly how he put it - a desire to grow, to develop, be perfect - oh yes, I remember one of his questions: Would any of us like to live over again yesterday, every second of it, with no changes? Even if it had been a good day, he said, wouldn't it be boring if it had to be exactly re-lived? No-one disputed that, either.

CAROL: I can understand that. It reminds me in some ways of a story I read once about the nature of purgatory. Some cultures apparently believe that there's an invisible cord attached to a person, as he leaves heaven, gets born and goes through life. Then when he dies, he has to retrace his steps, gathering up his cord as he goes, and passing through every situation in his life. The purgatory is partly the boredom, and partly the frustration of seeing heaven so far ahead and being unable to get there, and of course mainly the shame of knowing that all the other souls are watching every step he takes.

RAY: That sounds like a good idea for a play!

CAROL: Keep off! This is my theme, remember.

RAY: Sorry! Anyway, that was it, really. Once you reflect on these deep-seated desires in yourself, he was arguing, you'd find yourself moving outside of yourself, moving in the direction of others and their needs, and in the end towards God.

CAROL: That last bit's a bit slick, isn't it?

RAY: The way I've said it, yes, but he gave a lot of time to that last jump. I mean, he spent a lot of time on the point that the only true happiness comes from looking after the needs of others, for instance. You don't find happiness by feeding your own face, but by feeding others. That sort



of thing. He was particularly hot on that, 'cos I think he'd been a missionary out in Africa, or somewhere. And he hit out a lot against modern selfishness, too - the heresy of self-fulfilment, he called it - (MOCK AMERICAN) I must fulfil myself - I gotta do what I gotta do - I want to be a well-rounded person - (NORMAL) It's not self-fulfilment that leads to happiness, he said - it's other-fulfilment.

CAROL: Very neat. But what about the very last jump, when you get to God?

RAY: It was well done, I thought. If everyone has these desires for perfection, permanence, and so on, he was arguing, it's like a set of signposts pointing in a single direction. He said the word 'God' was a convenient label for identifying the goal of these feelings.

CAROL: But that doesn't prove God exists - does it?

RAY: Of course not. But his point was, you don't have to prove he exists, anymore than scientists don't prove scientific theories. All you have to do is marshal the evidence and counter-evidence, and make up your mind on the basis of the facts. And the big fact is that every human being has these feelings leading us out of ourselves towards something or other. Everything else is trivial by comparison.

CAROL: \*And that was \*what he--

RAY: (CUTTING IN) \*No, darling, I've just remembered another way he put it. He said that religious believers - Christians, anyway - have always fallen into the conversion trap. Because Christ told his followers to go out and convert the whole world, the general assumption is that the job involves proving the existence of God to everybody first, and proceeding from there. Now we know this doesn't work. None of the logical proofs for the existence of God satisfy anyone intelligent, unless they believe in God already for other reasons. I mean, if they were really logical, there'd be no room for argument, would there! But instead of recognising the obvious, believers have gone on trying to make these old proofs work, tinkering with their logic, and getting absolutely nowhere. Now this chap was arguing that this ~~whole way~~ of thinking has to be reversed. You don't start by proving the existence of God to others. You start by proving it to yourself, by reflecting on the implications of these feelings about identity, perfection, and so on. And then you tell other people about what you've done, and invite them - dare them, if you like - to do the same. In other words, you're trying to show others that they have the same opportunity as you to work out the same conclusions for themselves. You don't convert them. They convert themselves. That's the idea.

CAROL: Sounds all too simple.

RAY: Yeah, well of course, it isn't - it's horribly complicated, in fact. To make it work, there has to be a process of reflection, and that isn't easy. For a start, you've got to find time to do it. And where do you get the time from? Then, if you find ~~the~~ time, you've got to train yourself to do it. You can't just sit down and 'think'. Anyone who's tried that knows the problems.

CAROL: Yeah, it's like trying to pray. You try to fix your mind on one thing, and everything trivial suddenly clamours for your attention - an itchy arm, a fly buzzing round, something you forgot to get in the shops... It's as if we have a built-in safety mechanism to stop us praying. A distraction generator.



RAY: Anyway, he ended up saying that if you do make time, and practice a bit at focussing your thoughts on these personal qualities, it'll work. He said you're bound to develop a heightened sense of the existence of God, after a while. But you've got to be on your own, in quiet, no facade, no thinking of your public face. It won't work if you're always looking over your shoulder.

CAROL: And presumably it won't work if your physical state isn't up to it. I mean, I can't see your starving millions in Africa taking kindly to a programme of refined meditation. Or your starving millions in Liverpool, come to that.

RAY: No, 'course not. He didn't talk about that, but I'm sure he'd take the line of fill their stomachs first, and leave the rest till later. I think he was only making his talk suit his audience. He could see we were all fairly well-off, middle-class churchgoers - complacent, lazy, and so on. He knew we had the time to think, if we'd only get round to it. And I reckon he saw us as potential missionaries too. In our own land. Try it, he said. Just try it, and see what happens. He was daring us, really.

CAROL: Hmm. I can see the point of the personal reflection side of things - but how does that tie in with the conversion point, again? There's still a job to be done there, you're saying.

RAY: Oh yes. It doesn't let the believer off his responsibilities for making God known, at all - it just alters the way he goes about it. The attraction of the idea is that it sidesteps the problems we were talking about before - you don't have to thrust a view down anyone's throat. And you don't have to justify yourself first.

CAROL: Justify yourself?

RAY: Yeah, that was another good point he made. Believers have to stop being on the defensive, he said. For too long we've had to put up with the jeers of the crowd. 'Prove God exists. Go on, prove it to us. Let's see if you can. Bet you can't'. And we've put up with it! We sit there, and hum and ha, and try to put into words things that are beyond words, and then are surprised when the crowd walks away laughing. Worse, some people even begin to doubt their own faith, as a result of that experience. What we all have to realise is that this kind of confrontation doesn't solve anything. We mustn't rise to the bait, and trot out the superficial old arguments. They won't cut any ice. A lifetime of not believing in God isn't going to change overnight, as a result of a couple of off-the-cuff arguments. It makes more sense to be on the attack ourselves. 'You prove he doesn't', sort of thing. 'Are you really happy, the way you are - really? Does the belief that everything stops at death really satisfy you?' The monk summed it up like this: in order to want belief, he said, you must first of all be dissatisfied with unbelief. That's our job, he said. Make people dissatisfied with their unbelief.

CAROL: (THOUGHTFULLY) Cliff Richard should have a word with him.

RAY: Eh? What's he got to do with it?

CAROL: Oh, it's just - I heard a programme the other day, with Cliff Richard on it. You know he's become a born-again Christian, or something.

RAY: Mm.

CAROL: (CONTINUING) Well they got a load of teenagers into a studio, and invited Cliff in to talk about his beliefs to these kids. It was absolutely awful. It was just like you said. You got some yob saying



'I don't believe in God, and I bet Cliff can't change my mind', and things like that.

RAY: In a half-hour programme.

CAROL: Quite. Or some of the others, who would say, 'What about all the evil in the world, Cliff. What have you got to say about that?' And all the usual sort of complaints that people use to distract themselves from the real issues.

RAY: And what did Cliff do?

CAROL: Well, he took it, for the most part. I dunno. I couldn't stand it, after a while, and turned off. But the bit I heard, he was trying to defend himself.

RAY: Typical! But we're all the same. We don't fight back enough, with the main weapon we've got - our feelings of certainty, our sense of security, the sort of confidence that comes from a belief in God. Heck, I know there's no real, logical reason for my belief in God, and I'm not even sure where I got it from, but I'm glad I've got it. It makes so much more sense of things than anything else. Of course there are problems - like evil, and that - but these are tiny compared with the problems facing people who don't have any belief, and who have to try to make sense of the world in its own terms.

CAROL: Well, now, there's a play for you. Why don't you write about those problems - the despair that a godless view of the universe leads to?

RAY: I don't think I've got the insight, to be honest. After all, none of what I've been saying are my own ideas. I've pinched them from that monk. He should be writing the play. (LAUGHS) Maybe he is!

CAROL: I doubt it. But anyway, it doesn't matter if they're not your ideas. It's the setting that counts. You said that yourself.

RAY: True. It might be possible. I certainly do find the state of mind of an atheist a really fascinating object. Especially in my profession. I often wonder what they're thinking, when they're dying, and on their own. Do they really still say no? And then the watchers, the relatives. How are they affected? How does an atheist come to accept the awful finality of death, when it comes to someone he loves? I mean, imagine it. Someone you've loved all your life - say, your child, or your husband. He dies. I can't conceive of what it's like to believe that that's it - there's no way of encountering that person again. All that love, and optimism, and sense of future - useless, pointless? It's a philosophy of despair. It would be great to be able to think such a belief through. But it's so far away from my own world view, I doubt I'd be able to handle it. I'd end up drawing stereotypes. Perhaps you could handle it, but I'm not sure I could.

CAROL: I don't think I'd be any better. (PAUSE) Oh, grief! Look at the time. Are you going to do any more tonight?

RAY: I don't think so. I'm flaked, just trying to remember all that talk! And now I don't know what to work on at all. The religious theme is certainly a fascinating one, but it's bloody complicated.

CAROL: And it was my idea, too, don't forget that. If you pinch it, what'll I do?

FADE OUT.



DOOR OPENING AND CLOSING, AS RAY ARRIVES HOME.

RAY: (CALLING) Hello, darling!

CAROL: <sup>1</sup>/<sub>3</sub> (DISTANT) Just coming.

SHE COMES DOWN STAIRS.

CAROL: Hi.

THEY KISS.

CAROL: All well?

RAY: Yeah, all right. Got delayed a bit at the Health Centre, but nothing serious. You?

CAROL: Not so bad. There's a row brewing about lunch-time duties again, but I'm not really involved. Fancy a cuppa - or something stronger?

RAY: No, tea'll be fine, thanks. I want to keep a clear head for this evening - get some more writing done.

CAROL: Oh. You may have a problem there. I just took a phone message for you. Arthur was wondering whether you'd chair the training seminar this evening.

RAY: Oh Lord. Is it this evening? I'd forgotten.

CAROL: Apparently Jim Ryan's sick, and - what did he say? -

RUSTLE OF PAPER, AS CAROL READS.

- oh yes, as it's on research methods, you are the obvious person to take over.

RAY: But I don't want to do that. I wasn't even intending to go to the flaming seminar this time. I've got more important things to do. I want to get on with my writing. I don't want to be distracted by a GPs training seminar.

CAROL: Well, I'd hardly call it a distraction. I mean, it's your job.

RAY: Yeah, well, at the moment I'm finding things the other way round. Since we started this writing business, it's getting more and more difficult to pay attention in the surgery to what I should be doing. I keep thinking of plots when patients come to see me. The other day, I had to ask someone to repeat almost the whole of a consultation, 'cos I hadn't been listening. Something the patient said triggered off a line of thought, and I was off after it like a shot.

CAROL: Have any of the others noticed?

RAY: Well, I don't know. Nobody's said anything, but then they wouldn't. And I'm not walking around the place like an absent-minded academic - at least, I don't think I am.

CAROL: Indeed you're not. You've got a long way to go before you reach Uncle Charlie's level.

RAY: Though even he's mild, by comparison with some. Do you know, when I saw him last, he was telling me this extraordinary story about the absent-mindedness of this university type. I didn't tell you, did I?

CAROL: No, I don't think so.



RAY: American professor, I forget his name - something like Halloran - say it's Halloran. Well this chap was reputed to be one of the most absent-minded professors of all time, you see.

CAROL: Mm.

RAY: And one day his family were due to move house. But Halloran had to go to work, so his wife said to 'remember, Robert, not to come back to this house this evening, as we'll have moved'. So he said OK and off he went to work. Anyway, in the afternoon, of course he forgot all about this, and came back to his usual address, to find the house empty, you see.

CAROL: Mm.

RAY: So he looks around, and sees a little girl playing at the side of the road. So he goes over to her and says, 'Excuse me, little girl, can you tell me where the Hallorans live now, please'. And the little girl looks up at him and says 'It's alright, daddy - mummy said I was to wait here for you!'

RAY AND CAROL LAUGH.

RAY: (CONTINUING) So I reckon I've got some way to go yet.

CAROL: Oh dear! Lovely! I might pinch that for my play.

RAY: Be my guest.

CAROL: Well I've got to do something. Since you swiped my religious idea, I've been at a dead end. An absent-minded professor's a bit cliched, though. What about an absent-minded surgeon?

RAY: No such thing - I hope!

CAROL: I bet there is. C'mon, I'll put the kettle on.

CROCKERY BEING MADE READY FOR TEA.

CAROL: Seriously, though, are you worried about the writing getting in the way of your work?

RAY: Well, not worried, exactly - but I certainly feel torn. I thought I'd be able to keep a balance - work during the day, write in the evenings. Instead, I'm finding myself writing during the day - mentally, at any rate - and now look what happens - work crops up in the evenings. I'd love to just drop everything and stay at home, and get on with it.

CAROL: But you don't have to go, this evening, I mean?

RAY: Well, if I don't I'll be letting people down, won't I. I don't like doing that. Makes a bit of a nonsense, if I decide not to help people out, because I'm writing a play about the importance of people helping each other out!

CAROL: I see what you mean. But it's not a very important occasion - and there are others there who could do the job just as well. I mean, if you were ill, they'd have to. Why don't I ring Arthur up, and say you're not well?

RAY: You can't do that! I don't want to start lying about things.

CAROL: Well I'll tell him the truth, then. Say that you're up to your eyes in a project. He'll understand. He'll think it's the conference deadline looming.



RAY: Hmm. That's another thing I'm concerned about. I've not done a stroke on that paper since last week. (PAUSE) I'm going to have to withdraw it, you know. I can't see myself settling down to it now. Oh grief! There are so many things to be done. Where do I get all these responsibilities from?

CAROL: Well, it's your own fault, you know. I've often told you you do too much - the training programme, church meetings, public lectures... It's your own past that's caught up with you, no-one else's. If people rely on you to do things, it's only because you've let them.

RAY: I'm stuck with it, aren't I? (PAUSE) I feel like - like a duck trapped in a frozen pond.

CAROL: Oh, very literary! Have a cup of tea. It'll help melt the ice.

TEA POURED OUT, ETC.

RAY: Ta. (PAUSE, WHILE DRINKS) I don't know. Dare I pack in some of these other commitments? Is it the right thing to do?

CAROL: I don't see why not.

RAY: But is it a responsible thing to do? I mean, am I justified in stopping work on my research project, and opting out of the training programme, and all these other things, in order to write plays about - about life, the universe and everything? Especially, plays that may not be any good at all? I mean, I might be wasting my time completely at the moment.

CAROL: But you don't have to give up everything you do.

RAY: No, but even giving up one thing is a big decision. And would it be worth it? Say I finish this play, and send it in, and it's rubbish - what then?

CAROL: You've wasted a few hours, that's all.

RAY: But not if I've given up various things as well. That's more serious.

CAROL: But you won't be able to finish your play unless you pack something in.

RAY: That's precisely my point about this evening. I need to get on with my writing now, while ~~the~~ idea's fresh in my mind, and to do so I've got to give up going out this evening. But am I right to avoid going to the meeting for the sake of a play that probably isn't worth writing in the first place? Just for a whim?

CAROL: Oh, darling, that's going a bit far. I know you hit on the idea a bit casually, but the idea's grown on you since, and you have thought up something worth saying - at least, we think it is. I mean, I know the play might not be any good - nor might mine be, come to that, when I get round to it - but you won't know until you try.

RAY: Do you think it's any good, the bit you've seen so far?

CAROL: Oh, crumbs, I've no idea. I mean, I'm biased. I want it to be good, you see. You'll have to show it to someone else, when it's finished, if you want a real opinion. You've got to have the thing sponsored, anyway, if you send it in to the BBC competition, so you'll get some idea that way.



RAY: I suppose so.

CAROL: And if it isn't rubbish, then you won't have to worry about giving up your other activities.

RAY: I wish I knew that now. I wish I knew whether what I'm doing is worthwhile. Time is too precious to be messed about with. You do realise there are only about 15,000 working days in an average lifetime?

CAROL: Well, no I didn't, as a matter of fact! Where did you get that figure from?

RAY: Oh, someone was working it out in the office. Then someone turned it into hours. Sounded even worse.

CAROL: Honestly!

RAY: Oh, things got even sillier. John got his pocket calculator out, and tried to work out how many pills you could take after meals, assuming three meals a day, between 21 and 65. It took Arthur to remind us all that the time we'd spent working out how much time we'd got left to do something useful would have been better spent doing something useful. Apparently, we'd used up .002 percent of our remaining working lives worrying about it!

CAROL: And add on another .002 per cent for the last five minutes!

RAY: So, I don't know. (PAUSE, WHILE DRINKS)

CAROL: Well, I think you do know, deep down.

RAY: How do you mean?

CAROL: I think the feeling you had, which made you take up the idea in the first place, is enough to justify what you're doing. I mean, you've just got to accept it, haven't you? There must be a part of you that's searching for a way to express itself, and I don't see that you've got any choice in the matter. You've got to come out with these thoughts of yours, whether they're rubbish or not. My feeling is that what makes you uncertain is whether you've found the right medium to express them in. You've picked on a radio play, but you might find that what you want to say is best expressed through television - or not in play form at all. There's always poetry, for instance -

RAY: No thanks.

CAROL: Well, you never know. Or novels. You'll just have to keep on trying until you find the medium that suits you. But you can't stop now, not just as you're beginning. You'll regret it if you do.

RAY: Maybe, maybe...

CAROL: (DRINKS) Right. There endeth the first lesson. Drink your tea. I'll ring up Arthur, and tell him you're busy this evening.

RAY: No, I'll do it. I'll do my own dirty work.

FADE OUT.

END OF A CAROL. SOUND OF CAROL SINGERS LEAVING.

CAROL SINGERS: Merry Xmas! Thank you! Merry Xmas!

CAROL: Merry Xmas!

DOOR CLOSES.



CAROL: Brrr! It's cold out there.

RAY: Yeah. I'd rather be in here.

CAROL: Brrr!

PULLS UP CHAIR.

CAROL: Onwards! Another hour's work, say? And then a drink and watch the News?

RAY: Fine.

CAROL: How much more have you got to do, do you think?

RAY: Difficult to say. I've got about 10 minutes to fill. It's not to be longer than an hour. (PAUSE) Actually, if you don't mind breaking from your thing, for a minute, I'd like to hear your thoughts about the ending.

CAROL: Sure.

RAY: My problem is, I've got too many endings.

CAROL: You should be so lucky. Remind me where you're up to.

RAY: Well, you remember I hit on the idea of putting George in my position, and having him worry about what he should be doing with his life?

CAROL: Yes.

RAY: Well, I took that a stage further, and had him enter a competition, like I'm doing. I've made it a poetry competition, not plays, though. Now, I've done most of the dialogue he has with his wife, about whether he's right or wrong to go in for it - in fact, I used some of the conversation we had ourselves a few weeks ago.

CAROL: Hey! I want royalties for that! Or an acknowledgement, at least.

RAY: I'll pay you later. Well, anyway, he's sent in his poem, and now I'm wondering whether to have a final scene in which we hear the judges discuss the merits of the thing. Trouble is, I don't know what decision they should come to, I can't let his poem win, can I? That seems naive and arrogant, somehow. On the other hand, I don't want him to lose, otherwise he'll have to face up to the fears he has about wasting his time, and I've no idea how to get him out of that problem.

CAROL: Well, what would you do, if no-one shows any interest in yours?

RAY: I don't know. Carry on. Try again, I suppose.

CAROL: So why not let George do the same?

RAY: I'm not sure George would do the same. I've made him more of a depressive than I am.

CAROL: Hmm. Anyway, I'd keep off characterising judges in the play. Judges are very sensitive people. You don't want to upset them. I wouldn't even mention them, if I were you.

RAY: Perhaps you're right. Maybe I'll cut them out altogether. They're probably fed up with plays within plays within plays, anyway.

CAROL: Yes, I think you ought to simplify it. My idea's going to be much more straightforward.

RAY: Your idea? You don't mean to say you've actually decided to start?



CAROL: Surely have. Now that the holidays are here. I think I've got time enough. Anyway, I couldn't start mine until now.

RAY: So what are you going to write it on? Religion, as well?

CAROL: In a way. It's curious, really. I've got the title clearly in my mind, and I think I know how to start it, but so far that's about all.

RAY: What's the title?

CAROL: I'm going to call it 'Distractions'.

RAY: Oh yes?

CAROL: Yes. And it'll start with - two people listening to a radio play. I'll probably use that army play we were listening to months ago. Do you remember?

RAY: Vaguely.

CAROL: The one about Scotty, and the battle scene with the officer...

FADE HER VOICE UNDER THE SAME BATTLE SOUNDS AS WERE USED AT THE BEGINNING. INCLUDE THE OPENING TWO LINES OF DIALOGUE BETWEEN SCOTTY AND OFFICER, THEN FADE.