

Pleasure and Grief

(a play for radio)

by

Colin Pink

SIMON [STRING QUARTET MUSIC. INTROSPECTIVE VOICE OVER, CLOSE, SUGGESTING THOUGHTS IN SIMON'S HEAD RATHER THAN SPOKEN WORDS.]

I can hear it now. I can't get it out of my head. I keep hearing it over and over again. I say I hear it now, but I don't, not really. [MUSIC ABRUPTLY STOPS.] I just imagine it. It's all in the head. [Pause.] Why did she do that to me? Was it some kind of game? That's what I keep asking myself. But I never come up with any answers.

JESSICA [CALLING FROM A DISTANCE.] Simon! Lunch is ready. Simon, are you up there? [Pause.] Simon! I said lunch is ready. Are you coming down?

SIMON Er, yes, dear.

JESSICA You're not in the middle of anything, are you?

SIMON No. No, coming. [GETS UP AND GOES DOWN STAIRS. SOUND MERGES WITH SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS CRUNCHING ON A GRAVEL PATH AS WE TRAVEL WITH SIMON INTO THE PAST. CROAK OF BELL THAT DOESN'T WORK PROPERLY. PAUSE. CROAK AGAIN. PAUSE. NOW SIMON'S VOICE BUT YOUNGER SOUNDING.] Hmm. [RAP OF DOOR KNOCKER. DOOR OPENS.]

POLLY Yes.

SIMON Oh, good afternoon. I hope I'm not disturbing you?

POLLY It depends what you want.

SIMON I'm collecting. For the church tower restoration fund.

POLLY How much do you want?

SIMON Fifty thousand pounds.

POLLY I haven't got it.

SIMON [Laughs.] Oh, I didn't mean that . . . I don't want money. I want things. Jumble. For the jumble sale in the village hall. I've been told to go and collect people's contributions.

POLLY That's a bit different. Come in. I'll see if I can find something. [AS SHE WALKS DOWN THE HALL.] I'm not sure if I've got anything to give you. I've only just moved in and I didn't bring many things with me.

SIMON [FOLLOWING HER.] I thought you were new, to the village.

POLLY Yes. I've rented the cottage for the summer. I wanted to get away from things.

SIMON Well, you've picked a good spot for that. It's very sleepy around here. Not much going on.

POLLY [AS THEY TALK POLLY RUMMAGES AROUND IN A PACKING CASE.]
Good. I could do with some peace and quiet.

SIMON What do you do?

POLLY I'm a composer.

SIMON Really! A composer.

POLLY Yes. But don't tell anyone. I don't want them coming round expecting me to play the church organ or something like that.

SIMON They've already got an organist.

POLLY I'm glad to hear it.

SIMON I've never met a composer before.

POLLY Don't get over excited. We're not very interesting.

SIMON Are you working on something at the moment?

POLLY A string quartet. It's a commission. [Pause.] It must be very dull round here, for a young man like you.

SIMON Not really.

POLLY Don't you find it boring?

SIMON [Hesitantly.] No . . . not really. [Brightly.] Anyway, I'm going to university in October so there'll be plenty to do then.

POLLY I'm sure there will. Are you looking forward to it?

SIMON Yes. Mostly, yes I am.

POLLY Where are you going?

SIMON Durham.

POLLY Getting away from home.

SIMON Yes.

POLLY Same as me.

SIMON Yes . . . same as you. I thought I'd just take it easy this summer. A bit of a rest after doing all those A levels, you know.

POLLY Yes. I expect you deserve a rest. [Pause.] Here we are. You can have these.

SIMON Candlesticks. I couldn't take these.

POLLY It's all I can find. Aren't they good enough? I had no idea jumble sales were so fussy.

SIMON No, it's not that. They're too good. We'll never be able to charge what they're worth.

POLLY Then charge what you can get.

SIMON They're too good. It'd be a waste.

POLLY It's all there is. If you like them why don't you keep them?

SIMON I couldn't do that.

POLLY Why not?

SIMON I don't know.

POLLY You have them. They're mine. I can give them to whomever I like. I'm sure they'll look very fetching in your student digs.

SIMON Thanks. [Pause.] Thanks. I'd better be going. [SWITCH TO OLDER SIMON INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] I have them still. They sit on the mantelpiece. From the way I look after them my wife, Jessica, thinks they're a family heirloom. That was the first time I met Polly. [Pause.] There was something about her, you see, something strange and mysterious, something that made me want to know her better. I wonder what it was? Perhaps it was just the way she held herself: still, confident. I used to look out for her after that. Occasionally I'd glimpse her, walking down the lane, but she wasn't very sociable; she kept herself to herself. I used to pass the cottage regularly, hoping she would be there and invite me in again; but she didn't appear. There was never any music coming from the cottage. It was always very very quiet. [AMBIENT SOUND OF THE SEA, WAVES RATTLING ON A PEBBLY BEACH, GULLS CALLING, IN THE BACKGROUND.] She used to take long walks on the beach, combing the shore, examining the things the tide had brought in. I used to watch her, from a distance, from the cliffs. One day I plucked up the courage to walk on the shore at a time I thought she would be there. But

there was no sign of her. Disappointed I stood and watched the waves and the gulls and the distant ships. I was mesmerised by it all and suddenly –

POLLY Hello.

SIMON [YOUNGER VOICE.] Oh!

POLLY Sorry.

SIMON That . . . that's all right.

POLLY I startled you, I'm sorry.

SIMON I was miles away.

POLLY Watching the sea can be very hypnotic

SIMON Yes.

POLLY Very restful.

SIMON I was just day-dreaming.

POLLY I like looking at the sea; all that . . . all that . . . emptiness.

SIMON Yes, I've seen you.

POLLY Have you? I haven't seen you.

SIMON I usually walk along the cliff path - I've seen you from up there.

POLLY Oh, I see. [Pause.] I love to walk by the shore.

SIMON Me too.

POLLY It's very beautiful.

SIMON Yes, you are. Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say that, / it just slipped out.

POLLY Don't take it back. It was a lovely thing to say.

SIMON You don't mind?

POLLY No.

SIMON It just popped into my head. [Pause.] I was wondering . . .

POLLY Yes.

SIMON I was wondering . . . if you'd like to go for a picnic.

POLLY A picnic?

SIMON Yes. I know a good spot. I'd provide the food.

POLLY Why not.

SIMON Really!

POLLY Yes, really.

JESSICA [ABRUPT CHANGE TO INTERIOR ACOUSTIC.] Simon. Are you coming or not? The food will get cold.

SIMON [Older voice.] Coming. [FOOTSTEPS HURRYING DOWN STAIRS.]

JESSICA There you are. I don't know what took you so long.

SIMON Sorry.

JESSICA You seem to walk around in a daze half the time these days. [Pause.] Is anything wrong?

SIMON No. Of course not. Whatever makes you think –

JESSICA Nothing, nothing. I just thought I'd ask. You've been so distracted since the concert.

SIMON I have a lot of things on my mind.

JESSICA Obviously. You should give yourself a break. Take some time off. You'll exhaust yourself worrying about everything.

SIMON [SWITCH TO YOUNG SIMON VOICE. SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS, WIND IN THE GRASS, OUTSIDE ACOUSTIC.] Not much further. It's just along here.

POLLY That's good, I'm starving, it must be all this walking.

SIMON Almost there.

POLLY Good.

SIMON Just around this headland.

POLLY What a lovely view.

SIMON It is good, isn't it.

POLLY I don't know why I haven't been up here before.

SIMON Not many people come up here. That's why it's so nice.

POLLY It's lovely. You certainly know how to pick a picnic spot.

SIMON On my walks I always love to stop here. The view over the sea is so wonderful. And further along there's a path that leads down to a little cove. Good for swimming.

POLLY Do you take lots of women here?

SIMON No. Never. You're the first one.

POLLY Really?

SIMON Really.

POLLY How sweet. [Pause.] Let's unpack. I'm starving. [BRINGING OUT THINGS AND UNWRAPPING THEM.]

SIMON I brought some wine.

POLLY Lovely.

SIMON Chardonnay. I hope you like Chardonnay.

POLLY It's a perfect day for Chardonnay.

SIMON Only, not everyone does. [CORK POPPING.]

POLLY It suits me. [WINE SPLASHING INTO GLASS.] It'll be refreshing on a day like this. Cheers!

SIMON Cheers.

POLLY Hmm. Just right. Not too warm, not too cold. What have we here?

[UNWRAPPING FOOD.] Chicken . . . salad . . . new potatoes . . . bread.

SIMON I hope you like it.

POLLY It looks wonderful. You make a good picnic.

SIMON Thanks.

POLLY Let's eat.

JESSICA [ABRUPT CHANGE TO INTERIOR ACOUSTIC.] Pass the potatoes,
Simon.

SIMON [OLDER VOICE.] What?

JESSICA I said would you please pass the potatoes.

SIMON Sorry.

JESSICA I don't know how many times I have to ask for a simple thing to be done
these days.

SIMON Sorry.

JESSICA You were miles away again.

SIMON Sorry.

JESSICA Stop saying sorry!

SIMON Sorry. [JESSICA SIGHS.] I think I've had enough.

JESSICA You've hardly eaten a thing.

SIMON I don't feel hungry.

JESSICA I hope you're not sickening for something.

SIMON I'm all right.

JESSICA You do look peaky.

SIMON Nothing to worry about. I think I'll see if I can fix that dripping tap in the
kitchen.

JESSICA Do you have to do that now?

SIMON It won't take long. [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] I watched her eat. I loved to watch her eat. She had a very sensual way of putting the food in her mouth.

POLLY [EXTERIOR ACOUSTIC.] Mmmm, this is really good.

SIMON [YOUNGER VOICE.] Do you mean it?

POLLY Of course I mean it. It's delicious. Aren't you going to have some?

SIMON Yes. Yes . . . of course. [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] As we sat there, eating and drinking, the sun bathing us in its warmth, the sea breeze cooling us, I kept thinking, I don't believe this is happening. She looked so beautiful, sitting there, in the open, the wind blowing her hair across her cheek, I couldn't stop looking.

POLLY You're a bit slow.

SIMON [YOUNGER VOICE.] Sorry, am I holding you up?

POLLY No, don't worry, I'll just carry on. What's for afters?

SIMON I'm afraid I didn't bring any.

POLLY Never mind, I'm full anyway. That was lovely.

SIMON I'm glad you liked it.

POLLY Tell me, what are you going to do at university?

SIMON I'm going to study Philosophy, Politics and Economics.

POLLY That little lot'll keep you busy.

SIMON Yes, I suppose it will.

POLLY I suppose you want to rule the world.

SIMON What?

POLLY Most people who study PPE harbour dreams of world domination.

SIMON Not me. [Laughs.] They just, sort of, go together.

POLLY Yes. I suppose they do. [Pause] Tell you what!

SIMON What?

POLLY Let's go for a swim.

SIMON A swim?

POLLY Yes. It's so hot. I could do with cooling off. You said there's a good place to swim nearby. You do swim, don't you?

SIMON Yes. It's just . . . I didn't bring a costume.

POLLY Neither did I. Don't worry, there's nobody about.

SIMON I suppose not. It's just –

POLLY Come on. I won't look if you won't. [SHE JUMPS UP AND RUNS TOWARDS THE SEA.]

SIMON Polly!

POLLY Come on, Simon.

JESSICA [INTERIOR ACOUSTIC.] Come on, Simon.

SIMON [OLDER VOICE.] What?

JESSICA Haven't you finished mending the tap yet?

SIMON Tricky things, washers.

JESSICA We have to get going. I promised we'd visit mother this afternoon. You haven't forgotten, have you?

SIMON No . . . of course not.

JESSICA Well, get a move on then. We haven't got all day.

SIMON Okay. [SWITCH TO INTROSPECTIVE VOICE OVER WATERY SOUNDS OF SWIMMING.] She was a strong swimmer. She pushed the water away with firm, graceful strokes. After a while she rolled over onto her back and just floated on the water.

POLLY I love to float – don't you?

SIMON [YOUNGER VOICE.] Yes, yes I do. [INTROSPECTIVE AGAIN.] She just lay there, in the water. Her hair fanned out like seaweed. And I watched as the sea moved her body gently up and down and from side to side. I could see her breasts, flattened against her body, half submerged, the sea lapping them, as if it wanted to taste them. After a while we headed back to the shore.

POLLY Don't you love swimming naked.

SIMON Yes, it's very . . . very . . . free.

POLLY Swimwear is so uncomfortable. Don't you think?

SIMON Yes.

POLLY It gets all soggy.

SIMON Yes. [SOUND OF THEM WADING TO THE SHORE. THEY STOP AND KISS. THE SEA LAPS THEIR BODIES.]

POLLY What have we here! Some unusual fish seems to be knocking against my thigh.

SIMON Sorry.

POLLY Nothing to be sorry about there. [She strokes his penis.]

SIMON Hmm.

POLLY Nice fish.

SIMON Hmm.

POLLY Very nice fish.

SIMON I love you.

POLLY Don't say that.

SIMON Why not?

POLLY It isn't true.

SIMON But it is.

POLLY You're in lust not love.

SIMON Both.

POLLY Lust is safer; with lust you know what you've got.

SIMON I want you.

POLLY You've got me.

SIMON Always.

POLLY For now.

JESSICA [DRIPPING TAP.] I suppose that'll have to do for now.

SIMON [OLDER VOICE.] That should have fixed it.

JESSICA It's still dripping.

SIMON I know. There must be something wrong with the actual tap.

JESSICA You'll have to leave it or we'll be late. I promised mother we'd take her shopping; her hip's playing her up again. [CAR ENGINE STARTING. PULLING OUT INTO TRAFFIC.] D'you think we've got time to stop in at the garden centre on the way?

SIMON Probably.

JESSICA They had some nice ornamental pots on special offer. [SOUND OF TRAFFIC, TOOTING HORNS ETC, GRADUALLY MERGES INTO SOUND OF GULLS.] I thought they'd look good on the patio.

SIMON [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE OVER SOUND OF LOVE MAKING.] We made love. Just the sky and the gulls looking down at us. The wind on my back; the breeze caressed us as we did it. The grass was our bed, the sky our canopy. I couldn't believe we were doing it. [KISSING AND PANTING.]

YOUNGER VOICE.] Ahh.

POLLY Mmm, that was good.

SIMON Was it?

POLLY Yes.

SIMON Really!

POLLY Really.

SIMON [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] The sun warmed my back as I lay with her. I didn't want the afternoon to end. I wanted time to stand still and for us to stay forever like that; entwined together. It was an enchanted moment. It all happened so quickly I could hardly believe it. We saw a lot of each other after that. My solitary lazy summer had turned into a summer of exploration. I was obsessed with her. We used to do everything together, walk the beach or lounge around her cottage. She used to make sculptures out of driftwood, shells, stones, even plastic bottles.

[YOUNGER VOICE.] I love this arrangement.

POLLY Do you?

SIMON Yes.

POLLY I found all that stuff on the beach. Washed up. It was all washed up.

SIMON They look like they belong together.

POLLY I like to marry things up. Connect. I want to make connections.

SIMON I feel like we have a connection. [Pause.] Don't you?

POLLY Oh, of course we do, Simon, a lovely connection. . . but –

SIMON What?

POLLY But, I won't be here forever.

SIMON Neither will I.

POLLY True.

SIMON But for now –

POLLY Yes, for now.

SIMON Let's go out!

POLLY Where?

SIMON I know a place.

POLLY Where?

SIMON You'll love it. Come one.

JESSICA [AT THE GARDEN CENTRE.] What do you think of that one?

SIMON [OLDER VOICE.] What?

JESSICA Do pay attention, Simon.

SIMON Sorry.

JESSICA You were miles away.

SIMON Sorry, what was it?

JESSICA I said do you prefer the terracotta or the stone look pots?

SIMON They're both nice.

JESSICA Oh, you're hopeless! Absolutely hopeless. You're no use at all.

SIMON Well . . . how about the terracotta?

JESSICA I thought the stone would go more with the patio.

SIMON Fine. The stone it is.

JESSICA But the terracotta would look warmer – give it that Mediterranean feel.

SIMON Exactly what I had in mind.

JESSICA I can't decide.

SIMON Does it matter?

JESSICA Does it matter! Is that what you said?

SIMON Yes, I –

JESSICA Of course it matters, really, you're getting worse. You don't seem to take an interest in anything these days. I don't know what's come over you.

SIMON [OUTSIDE ACOUSTIC, BIRDSONG. YOUNGER VOICE. THEY TALK AS THEY WALK ALONG.] Here we are! Dudbury Rings.

POLLY It's very beautiful. What is it?

SIMON It's an old Iron Age fort, lots of that kind of thing around here.

POLLY It doesn't look much like a fort.

SIMON Well, all the ramparts would have been made of wood so, of course, it's all rotted long ago, just the earth works left; that's what these ridges are. Come on. Let's go into the centre.

POLLY Hang on! Let me catch you up.

SIMON Take my hand. [PANTING AS THEY STRUGGLE UP A STEEP INCLINE.] There!

POLLY It's beautiful. What a lovely place.

SIMON I thought you'd like it. It's special here. Can you feel it?

POLLY Yes, it does feel different; a bit eerie.

SIMON That's just because it's wild.

POLLY I don't know.

SIMON Perhaps it's the ghosts of all those distant ancestors; all the people who ever lived here hundreds of years ago.

POLLY Are you trying to spook me?

SIMON No. I used to come here lots. I'd cycle over with some friends. It's a great place to play when you're a kid. We used to imagine ourselves as ancient Britons fighting the Romans.

POLLY You're right, it is a special place. It feels different; magical. It's a place of secrets. Can you feel it?

SIMON It's special all right.

POLLY Secrets under the soil. All that history. Bubbling up. All those lives.

SIMON I bet it's seen a lot, this old hill.

POLLY It knows. The soil knows.

SIMON Like a recorder, a tape, recording all the things that happened. It's like that for archaeologists; they can tell by looking at the soil, all the strata, the lives.

POLLY It has a pagan feel. Like a different world. Come here. [THEY EMBRACE.] I want a sacrifice.

SIMON I'm always at your service.

POLLY [Laughs.] I wish you'd stop talking.

SIMON Whatever you –

POLLY Shhh. No – talking – just – doing.

SIMON Yes.

POLLY Yes.

SIMON What would you like me to do?

POLLY Well, you could do this . . . [GIGGLING.] and this . . .

SIMON And this.

POLLY Yes . . . and this. [SIGHS OF ENJOYMENT.]

JESSICA It's no good. I simply can't decide if I prefer the terracotta or the stone finish. We'll have to come back another day.

SIMON [OLDER VOICE.] Hmm.

JESSICA I'll just check how long the sale lasts for.

SIMON Okay. [YOUNGER VOICE. OUTSIDE ACOUSTIC, POLLY AND SIMON MAKING LOVE, THEY CLIMAX CONTENTEDLY. THEN ROLL OVER AND STARE UP AT THE SKY.]

POLLY Look at that sky!

SIMON So blue.

POLLY And the clouds are moving so fast.

SIMON It's beautiful.

POLLY The world spins, and we spin with it. Lying on your back, looking up at the sky, it's easy to feel we're moving, travelling through space.

SIMON It makes me dizzy.

POLLY Yes! That's it, going nowhere but it makes you dizzy.

SIMON I feel like I'm floating, hovering above the ground.

POLLY There's no reference point. Nothing to tell us what's up and what's down. Just the sky.

SIMON Oh, I have to get up. I feel so peculiar.

POLLY It's disorientating, isn't it.

SIMON Yeah. It really does make you dizzy.

POLLY Are you okay?

SIMON Yeah, I'll . . . I'll be all right in a minute.

POLLY You can feel the power of the earth. The earth knows. It bears the scars of a thousand tribulations. The past is always present, written under the surface of things. There, if only we could see it.

SIMON That's a bit deep.

POLLY Eh?

SIMON Deep.

POLLY Oh.

SIMON Are you okay?

POLLY Yes . . . yes.

SIMON You're sad.

POLLY I'm just thinking.

SIMON Thinking makes you sad.

POLLY You can't stop thinking, even if it does make you sad.

SIMON I can think of a way of stopping you thinking.

POLLY Oh you can, can you.

SIMON Yes.

POLLY Simon! Stop that.

SIMON Go on.

POLLY Simon . . . Simon . . . Mmm.

[INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] I'd come to the village of Ambourne to get away from things. Get away from my life, from Martin, from me, from the me he made me be. It sounds crazy. Maybe it was, but it worked, for a while, then I met Simon. He was all the things that Martin wasn't, gentle, kind; charmingly unsure of himself. It made him very attractive. I couldn't resist. So I found myself making love to a young man, almost, but not quite, a boy; wasting away those summer days in sex, pleasure, tasting the honey of life. But as we made love I always had, half in the back of my mind, the thought that this must end. It made me sad to think of it; that having started it I would have to end it; I normally relied on other people to do that kind of thing.

SIMON What are you thinking?

POLLY Nothing.

SIMON Nothing?

POLLY That's right.

SIMON You must be thinking of something.

POLLY Nothing important. Nothing to worry about.

SIMON I love lying in the sun, with you. Do you love it too?

POLLY I love everything we do. Everything.

SIMON [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] Mother became curious about me and Polly. I don't think she approved, probably the age difference bothered her, but she didn't come right out and say it.

MOTHER [CHOPPING VEGETABLES IN THE KITCHEN.] What's she like?

SIMON [YOUNGER VOICE.] Who?

MOTHER That woman you keep seeing, what's her name?

SIMON Polly.

MOTHER You're seeing a lot of her. Always out, these days.

SIMON We're friends; I find her very interesting.

MOTHER What does she do?

SIMON She's a composer.

MOTHER Really! I don't think we've ever had a composer in the village. I wonder what she's doing here.

SIMON Don't know. I expect she wants some peace and quiet.

MOTHER She's not getting much with you hanging around all the time.

SIMON I don't hang around.

MOTHER What sort of composer is she?

SIMON What do you mean?

MOTHER You know, what sort of thing does she write? Would I know anything by her?

SIMON I don't think so.

MOTHER Has she done anything on T.V.?

SIMON No.

MOTHER Jingles; theme tunes.

SIMON I don't think she writes that kind of music.

MOTHER Highbrow is she? [Pause.] I always thought she was odd, artistic, you know.

SIMON What?

MOTHER She dresses funny.

SIMON I wouldn't say that.

MOTHER You can always tell by the way they dress. I don't know what you see in her.

SIMON I like her.

MOTHER She's a bit old for you.

SIMON No she isn't.

MOTHER You should find a girl your age.

SIMON There are no girls my age.

MOTHER Hmm. Just don't get too involved.

SIMON I know what I'm doing.

MOTHER Everybody always thinks they know what they're doing, until it's too late.

SIMON [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] I spent a lot of time hanging around her cottage or lying in the garden reading while she worked on her music. I liked to watch her work, poised over the music paper, making sudden

precise little pencil marks on the staves, like a bird pecking at the soil.

[YOUNGER VOICE.] Why don't you tell me about your music?

POLLY There isn't much to tell, and anyway, it's hard to talk about music.

SIMON Have a go.

POLLY If I could put it into words I wouldn't need to make it into sound.

SIMON How's the String Quartet coming along?

POLLY Okay. It's my first stab at a quartet. It's a demanding form, any little mistakes show up instantly.

SIMON Do you ever write music about anything?

POLLY No.

SIMON Never?

POLLY It depends what you mean. Feelings. I suppose, sometimes, feelings, they get into the music.

SIMON Why don't you write something for me?

POLLY You couldn't afford it.

SIMON You're so mercenary; only writing for money.

POLLY Only joking. What do you want?

SIMON Do me a sonata.

POLLY Why?

SIMON Don't know. It's the only musical term that sprang to mind.

POLLY You're stupid.

SIMON Want another drink?

POLLY Yes, thanks.

SIMON [WALKING TO THE KITCHEN.] You can get started on my sonata.

POLLY I have to finish my commission.

SIMON After the quartet then.

POLLY Hmm.

SIMON [SLAMS KITCHEN DOOR AS HE RETURNS WITH THE DRINKS.] I suppose I'll have to wait my turn.

POLLY [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] It was when he slammed the kitchen door that it happened. It sounded exactly the same as when Martin used to come home late and slam the front door behind him. And I knew he was back, knew what to expect, and I realised how much I had hoped that this time, this time, he wouldn't come back. And the tears filled my eyes; I couldn't stop crying.

SIMON [SOUND OF SOBBING RUNS BEHIND THE FOLLOWING LINES.] Polly, what's the matter?

POLLY [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] And I couldn't explain why.

SIMON Is something wrong?

POLLY [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] I couldn't tell anyone.

SIMON Tell me, Polly, what is it?

POLLY [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] How it all went echoing down my mind.

SIMON Come on. Sit with me. You'll feel better soon.

POLLY It's nothing.

SIMON It must be something.

POLLY Nothing.

SIMON You don't just go breaking down for no reason.

POLLY I do. I do.

SIMON Poor thing. Let me hold you.

POLLY No!

SIMON Polly.

POLLY No! I can't bear it. You'll have to go.

SIMON What?

POLLY I'm not feeling well.

SIMON Can I / get you anything?

POLLY Just leave me alone.

SIMON Polly.

POLLY I'll be all right.

SIMON But I –

POLLY Just leave me. I need to be by myself.

SIMON Okay.

POLLY That's what I / came here for.

SIMON If that's what you want.

POLLY Yes.

SIMON See you later.

POLLY Okay.

SIMON See you

POLLY Bye. [DOOR CLOSSES BEHIND SIMON. INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.]
Alone. Alone again. But we're never alone, not really, we always have
our memories. Crowding in, popping up, clamouring for attention. [THE
DOOR SLAMS AGAIN IN FLASHBACK.]

MARTIN Polly!

POLLY What?

MARTIN Are you awake?

POLLY I am now.

MARTIN What's that supposed to mean?

POLLY Nothing.

MARTIN Sarky bitch!

POLLY Martin.

MARTIN I knew you'd start.

POLLY Martin I –

MARTIN As soon as I got in.

POLLY I don't want to –

MARTIN I had to work late.

POLLY Okay.

MARTIN Paul insisted on going for a drink. You know what Paul's like.

POLLY Hmm.

MARTIN I couldn't let him down.

POLLY Such a loyal friend.

MARTIN What's that supposed to mean?

POLLY Nothing.

MARTIN Want to make something of it?

POLLY No.

MARTIN Christ! If a man can't have a drink.

POLLY Or two.

MARTIN After a hard day's work. [POLLY GETS OUT OF BED.] Where are you going?

POLLY Out.

MARTIN You can't go out. Not at this time of night.

POLLY I'll be all right.

MARTIN Nowhere's open.

POLLY I'll drive around.

MARTIN Stay here.

POLLY No. I'm going [THEY STRUGGLE] out!

MARTIN No you don't . Christ! I've only just got in. You should be pleased to see me.

POLLY Let go of me!

MARTIN Come back to bed.

POLLY No!

MARTIN Come one.

POLLY Let go!

MARTIN No! [SLAPS POLLY'S FACE.] Do what I say.

POLLY Martin!

MARTIN Act sensible for once.

POLLY Martin.

MARTIN I love you, Polly.

POLLY Get off!

MARTIN You know I do.

POLLY I'm not in the mood.

MARTIN You're never in the mood.

POLLY Martin.

MARTIN Frigid bitch! [SLAPS POLLY AGAIN, HARDER.]

POLLY I'd've thought you'd had enough sex for one night.

MARTIN What's that s'posed to mean?

POLLY D'you really expect me to believe you were with Paul?

MARTIN Yeah.

POLLY Oh yeah, sure.

MARTIN Are you calling me a liar?

POLLY It's written all over your – [MARTIN SLAPS POLLY AGAIN.] Ah! Martin..
[ECHOING. SLAPS AGAIN. SOUND OF STRUGGLE, THINGS BEING KNOCKED OVER, CRIES, BLOWS, BUT HEARD INDISTINCTLY IN THE BACK GROUND OF: INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.]

You have plenty of time to observe a bruise. It blossoms, gradually like a flower of the flesh. A bruise is always changing, maturing, growing back into normal flesh; into you. I can cope with bruises; I know how they work; I've had plenty of time to observe them, absorb them, be them. [Pause.] But a psychological bruise, a psychological bruise isn't like that. It goes deeper, deeper, deeper than a bruise on the bone. It's a bruise on the soul. It's colours never grow and change and merge into the normal hue of healthy flesh, oh no. It stays. And who can bruise our soul better than the one we love, whose blows can find their mark, deep inside us.

SIMON [AMBIENT SOUND OF PUB INTERIOR.] Why don't you tell me about yourself?

POLLY I have.

SIMON Not much.

POLLY I'm not very interesting.

SIMON You are to me.

POLLY If I think of anything I'll let you know.

SIMON You're married, aren't you.

POLLY [Pause.] How did you guess?

SIMON It's why you're so cagey. What's he like?

POLLY He's not like you.

SIMON Oh.

POLLY Believe me, Simon. That's a compliment.

SIMON Oh.

POLLY Martin.

SIMON Is that his name?

POLLY Martin teaches English literature at the University of Sussex. He thinks he's a poet.

SIMON Is he?

POLLY No. He thinks he is. I once thought he was too. Appearances can be very deceptive.

SIMON Don't you like him any more?

POLLY [Laughs.] You could say that. I had to get away from him. I couldn't take any more.

SIMON What was he like?

POLLY Oh, he was handsome, in a way, he looked the part. He looked like a poet, he acted like a poet, he just couldn't get his poems to work. He was a bad poet, and he knew it, and it made him moody.

SIMON Did he hurt you?

POLLY And he had affairs. He was always bedding his students. He couldn't keep his hands off them and, since he was better at posing as a poet than actually getting down to the tedious task of being one, they couldn't keep their hands off him either.

SIMON Is that why you left him?

POLLY Yes . . . No . . . Partly.

SIMON He sounds horrible.

POLLY At first I ignored it. I ignored a lot of things in those days; mostly my own feelings.

SIMON I hate him.

POLLY Aren't you glad you're not like him?

SIMON He must be mad to treat you like that.

POLLY In the end I couldn't take any more. I had to get away.

JESSICA [ABRUPT SWITCH TO DOMESTIC INTERIOR ACOUSTIC.] You're not having an affair, are you?

SIMON [OLDER VOICE.] What!

JESSICA I said, Are you having an affair?

SIMON Of course not. Whatever gave you that idea?

JESSICA It's just you've been so preoccupied lately.

SIMON I'm sorry.

JESSICA I was trying to think what would cause it.

SIMON And you thought –

JESSICA I thought it might be an affair.

SIMON It isn't.

JESSICA Good. What is it?

SIMON Nothing.

JESSICA You don't want to tell me.

SIMON What?

JESSICA Is that it?

SIMON It's just . . . things . . . in general . . . I can't just sum it up.

JESSICA Perhaps it's your mid-life crisis.

SIMON What!

JESSICA It's very common. Apparently lots of men your age have it.

SIMON Can't a man go quiet and think for a bit without being accused of cracking up.

JESSICA I'm only trying to help . . . to understand.

SIMON Mid-life crisis!

JESSICA It's very common. Men your age . . . they feel they've missed out, haven't done enough . . . haven't done the things they should have done.

SIMON I've done all right.

JESSICA Of course you have, dear. I didn't mean that. I don't think it has to do with actual achievements, it's psychological.

SIMON I knew it'd cause trouble, doing that psychology evening class.

JESSICA I don't know why you have to dismiss everything! This isn't to do with me, Simon, this is to do with you!

SIMON Just give me a bit of peace.

JESSICA Very well, I can see you don't want to talk about it.

SIMON Good.

JESSICA You might like to think about it, though. [EXITS SLAMMING DOOR.]

SIMON [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] We never argued, Polly and I. We didn't have enough time to argue. Just one brief summer, a few months. There was never any conflict. I always wanted to do whatever she wanted to do; I followed her around like a puppy; perhaps that was why she tired of me.

SIMON [OPENS DOOR AND WALKS DOWN THE PASSAGE, CALLING OUT. YOUNGER VOICE.] Polly! Polly!

POLLY Hmm.

SIMON [OPENS DOOR AND ENTERS SITTING ROOM OF THE COTTAGE.]
Are you coming into town today? [POLLY SIGHS.] Oh, you're reading,
did I interrupt?

POLLY That's okay.

SIMON What is it? [HE FLIPS OVER THE BOOK AND READS THE TITLE
PAGE.] G.E. Moore, 'Philosophical Papers'. I didn't know you read
philosophy.

POLLY Sometimes.

SIMON You never cease to amaze me.

POLLY You needn't sound so surprised.

SIMON It's just . . . you never mentioned it.

POLLY No need to sound betrayed.

SIMON Difficult stuff, this.

POLLY I read it for the style.

SIMON The style?

POLLY Yes, the style. The tone of voice. It calms me. This kind of philosophy; it
seems to say, in its style, that everything is okay. All we have to do is look
at things, calmly and quietly, and think carefully and everything will be all
right.

SIMON I'd never thought of it like that. I'm always busy concentrating on the
problems.

POLLY Ah, the problems.

SIMON Trying to find solutions.

POLLY Ah well, that's where we differ. I've given up looking for solutions. I want

reassurance instead. I want to be persuaded the world isn't as random and callous as I think. It lasts for a while. But, of course, they're wrong. The world isn't as neat and cosy as the inside of a philosophy book. You can't solve all the problems by sitting down and thinking about them.

[SILENCE.] Don't look so disappointed.

SIMON You sound so sad.

POLLY I'm open to persuasion. And you're one of the best proofs I've seen so far. [THEY KISS.] Here. Take the book.

SIMON What?

POLLY Take it. You'll need it, when you go to college. It's bound to be one of the set books. Save you getting it.

SIMON But you're reading it.

POLLY Not any more. [THEY GET UP.] You're taking me out. You are taking me out, aren't you?

SIMON [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] She could always surprise me. The moment I thought I knew her she would do something different. Always changing, as if she was trying to dodge something. I must have seemed so naïve. No wonder she smiled a lot in my presence. I sometimes wonder, was she laughing at me? Without me knowing? At the time I just thought she was happy.

POLLY [CAR INTERIOR ACOUSTIC AS THEY DRIVE ALONG.] When are you going to university?

SIMON [YOUNGER VOICE.] Tuesday week.

POLLY Not long now.

SIMON No. I can't say I'm looking forward to it.

POLLY Don't be silly, you'll have a wonderful time.

SIMON I don't know.

POLLY I'm sure of it; wonderful.

SIMON I'll miss you.

POLLY No you won't. There'll be so much to do at university. Lots of distractions, all those girls.

SIMON But I want to be with you.

POLLY And so you are.

SIMON For always.

POLLY Always is a big word.

SIMON I do. That's why I don't want to go. I don't want to be away from you.

POLLY Don't be silly, you have to go.

SIMON I know.

POLLY It'll be all right.

SIMON I'll write as soon as I get there. Why don't you get a phone?

POLLY I don't like phones.

SIMON It's not natural, being without a phone, in this day and age.

POLLY I can survive without one.

SIMON But it's so convenient.

POLLY Too convenient. You never know who's on the other end.

SIMON We could talk while I'm at university, if you had a phone.

POLLY I'm not getting one. I don't like being interrupted. A phone interrupts.

SIMON It'll be awful, not being able to speak to you.

POLLY A term will pass in no time. You'll be back here, we'll see one another.

SIMON Like old times.

POLLY I'd hardly call this, old times.

SIMON It'll seem like ages. When you're waiting for something time slows down, doesn't it.

POLLY Not at university it won't. Time speeds up at university; the whole thing'll be over before you know it. You should enjoy it while it lasts.

SIMON I won't enjoy it without you.

POLLY Yes you will.

SIMON I don't know.

POLLY Promise me you'll try.

SIMON Okay. But it won't be easy.

POLLY I'm sure you'll manage.

SIMON It's not fair; the summer's over too quickly.

POLLY Try and enjoy what's left.

SIMON I'll write every week.

POLLY Good.

SIMON You will write back, won't you?

POLLY We'll see.

SIMON You must, you must write back.

POLLY I should warn you I'm not a very good correspondent. The age of letter writing is dead.

SIMON I'll tell you everything in my letters.

POLLY Spare my blushes.

SIMON Don't mock.

POLLY Sorry.

SIMON I mean it.

POLLY I know you do. You tell me. Tell me whatever you like.

POLLY [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] Happy. I suppose I was happy. But I knew it wouldn't last. It never does, does it. When Simon went off to university I did miss him; but all the same I was glad he was gone. I felt . . . vulnerable. He wrote to me, frequently, telling me how much he missed me. It was a mistake, that leitmotif of longing, it made me feel responsible. I didn't want to be responsible for anyone's happiness but my own. It made me feel angry. How dare he inflict his needs on me! I was getting away from that kind of thing. We had run our course. It had been nice but things could only get worse from now on. Too much happiness is not allowed; there is always a penalty to pay. A hidden cost. A legacy of sorrow. I started to feel restless. I had to go. I could feel it was right. Time I went. It wasn't wise to get too attached to places, or people. It was then I got the letter from the States. They were offering me a residency at the Tanglewood Music Festival. It would be good for my career. I'd get recognised, and get away. Solve all my problems in one go. I was never very good at saying goodbye.

SIMON [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] At the end of the first term, when I came back home, the first thing I did, after dropping off my bags, was to go round to Polly's cottage. I felt sure she'd be waiting for me. I'd missed her so much. I couldn't wait to hold her in my arms; feel the heat of her body.

[HURRIED FOOTSTEPS ON GRAVEL PATH. YOUNGER VOICE.]

Polly! [KNOCKS ON THE DOOR.] Polly! I'm back! [KNOCKS LOUDLY AGAIN. UNDER HIS BREATH.] Come on. Don't say she's out, surely.

[CRUNCHING FOOTSTEPS AS HE WALKS ROUND TO THE BACK OF

THE COTTAGE.] Just my luck if she's gone out. Hello! Anyone in?
[INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] It was only when I went round to the back of
the cottage that I noticed the deserted air. I looked through the kitchen
window. It was empty. No plates out, no utensils on the side, no bread
board or dirty mug on the table; nothing. [RATTLING DOOR HANDLE.
YOUNGER VOICE.] Polly! Polly! [RATTLING DOOR HANDLE.
INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] It was locked. I looked up at the windows. At
the bedroom window; *the* room, the room we had inhabited with such
freedom and joy, and then I realised there were no curtains at the window.
No nets. Just blank glass. Staring back at me. [FEET ON GRAVEL AS
SIMON TURNS AND RUNS OUT OF THE COTTAGE GARDEN.
PANTING AS HE RUNS HOME. HE BURSTS THROUGH THE DOOR
TO THE KITCHEN OF HIS HOME. YOUNGER VOICE.] She's gone!

MOTHER Oh you did startle me.

SIMON She's gone!

MOTHER What?

SIMON Polly. She's gone. She isn't there.

MOTHER I know.

SIMON You know! And you didn't tell me.

MOTHER I thought you knew already.

SIMON How would I know?

MOTHER I thought she'd've told you, of all people.

SIMON Where did she go?

MOTHER I don't know.

SIMON When?

MOTHER A few weeks ago, I think.

SIMON Weeks ago!

MOTHER I think so. She didn't exactly advertise she was going. She just upped and left, as suddenly as she arrived.

SIMON Gone.

MOTHER I must say I'm surprised she didn't tell you. You were the only person in the village she was ever friendly with.

SIMON I don't believe it!

MOTHER I always thought she was strange.

SIMON She can't have –

MOTHER Very odd, that one. Not normal, if you ask me. [SIMON SLAMS THE DOOR BEHIND HIM AS HE HURRIES OUT.]

SIMON [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE OVER SLOW FOOTSTEPS ON THE SHINGLE AND THE WAVES RATTLING ON THE SHORE.] I didn't know what to do; so I went to the beach. I walked along the shore, our shore, where we had walked so often. But there was no trace of us, just the sea. The shifting edge of the land and sea, forever changing, re-inventing itself, throwing things up and sucking them back again. I thought by walking there I could ravel back the past, like a skein of wool, and bring her back to me. But nothing happened. The past is never there when you need it. And then it began to rain; the weather mocked me, speckling the pebbles at my feet with cold indifferent drops.

JESSICA [AMBIENT SOUND OF FOYER OF CROWDED CONCERT HALL. HUBBUB OF PEOPLE GATHERING, GREETING EACH OTHER, CHATTERING.] You're late.

SIMON Sorry, darling, got held up at the office.

JESSICA You always get held up. I don't know why I bother booking tickets.

SIMON Sorry, it's hard to get away. You know what it's like. I don't do it on purpose.

JESSICA It makes it very nerve wracking for me, hanging around, not knowing if you're going to make it in time or not.

SIMON I'm sorry. Still, made it, eh. Would you like a drink?

JESSICA We haven't time.

SIMON Have you got a programme?

JESSICA Yes, here.

SIMON [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE OVER HUBBUB WHICH FADES BACK.] It was then I saw it. The programme, the recital. Starting with Shostakovich's 3rd quartet, ending with Beethoven's Grosse Fugue, and there, in the middle, it said, 3rd String Quartet by Polly Watkins. [HUBBUB BACK UP.] Oh my God.

JESSICA What?

SIMON Nothing.

JESSICA What's the matter now?

SIMON There's a modern piece in the middle.

JESSICA Yes, can't be helped. Hopefully it won't be too bad. Some of them can be quite melodious these days.

SIMON It's dreadfully hot in here.

JESSICA Do you think so?

SIMON Yes.

JESSICA We could always go in. It'll be starting in a minute anyway.

SIMON [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE. BACKGROUND SOUNDS OF MUSICIANS TUNING UP.] Like everyone else I shuffled into the concert hall. I wasn't sure if I wanted to go in or not and hear the music of my first lost love. But I went; I knew I wouldn't be able to explain if I didn't go in. [OPENING BARS OF SHOSTAKOVICH'S 3RD QUARTET.] But then they began to play. And hearing the Shostakovich, so jaunty and vibrant soothed away my anxiety. As long as I could concentrate on the music I could control my apprehension.

JESSICA [LAST BARS OF THE SHOSTAKOVICH FOLLOWED BY ENTHUSIASTIC APPLAUSE.] They're very good, aren't they.

SIMON Yes, very good.

JESSICA Most enjoyable. They played that very well. What's next?

SIMON It's that new piece. 3rd Quartet by Polly Watkins.

JESSICA Never heard of her, have you?

SIMON [PAUSE AS SIMON HESITATES TO ANSWER.] Oh, I . . . er.

JESSICA No, I didn't think you would.

SIMON . . . er.

JESSICA Still, I suppose she must be good or they wouldn't have included her in the programme. [APPLAUSE AS THE QUARTET COMES BACK ON STAGE. SCRAPING OF SEATS AS THEY ADJUST THEIR POSITIONS: A FEW QUICK TUNING UP NOTES, THEN THEY START TO PLAY POLLY'S QUARTET.]

SIMON [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE OVER QUARTET MUSIC.] As I listened to the piece my mind was cast back all those years, back to when I knew her. And as I listened I realised the music was about us. The rise and fall of

the notes; the staccato rasp of passion; the thrumming heart beat of the rhythm was ours; lyrical, the instruments merging together then wrenching apart. And as the musicians played on, consummately, passionately, I could see myself, not as I am now but as I was then, younger, with more energy and charm but less experience than the self who sat and listened. She had rendered me, more vividly than a portrait, in sound. The past was filling the space around us, animating the air with lost passion. I was rooted to my seat by the music, pinned like a butterfly for the inspection of any casual passer-by. The music was by turns tender and abrasive, playful and serious. And as I listened I couldn't help but mourn the self I had lost; a self cruelly laid before me in sound; a self I hadn't even known I'd lost – until now. [GRADUALLY SIMON BEGINS TO CRY, HIS SOBS GROWING AS THE MUSIC REACHES A CLIMAX AND FADES AWAY. THE PIECE ENDS, THE APPLAUSE STARTS UP BUT SIMON'S SOBBING CONTINUES.]

JESSICA Are you all right, Simon? I had no idea music moved you so deeply. It was good, wasn't it. Still, I didn't think it was that moving. Are you all right?

SIMON [TRYING TO PULL HIMSELF TOGETHER.] I'm all right.

JESSICA Has it been a tough day?

SIMON Yes . . . yes.

JESSICA You work too hard. Oh, look, there's the composer!

SIMON [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE OVER APPLAUSE.] As she spoke I saw her; she was making her way to the stage. The musicians beckoned her towards them, their arms out, as if greeting a long lost relative. She

embraced them and then turned to the audience. She still looked beautiful to me. She smiled, I recognised that smile, it was a smile I had basked in many times myself, long ago, but it was a smile that now I saw masked a thousand tribulations.

JESSICA Let's get a drink.

SIMON What?

JESSICA A drink, Simon. Let's get one. It'll make you feel better. We've got twenty minutes before the second half.

SIMON Yes . . . yes okay.

SIMON [INTROSPECTIVE VOICE.] Polly bowed again and then walked carefully down the steps from the stage and back into the audience; back to her seat; my eyes followed her; and I couldn't help wondering, when she got there, would she be with anyone?