

know. I suppose because he'd never come across one with two 'u's together before.

ALAN [*savouring it*]: *Equus!*

DORA: I always wanted the boy to ride himself. He'd have so enjoyed it.

DYSART: But surely he did?

DORA: No.

DYSART: Never?

DORA: He didn't care for it. He was most definite about not wanting to.

DYSART: But he must have had to at the stables? I mean, it would be part of the job.

DORA: You'd have thought so, but no. He absolutely wouldn't, would he, dear?

FRANK [*dryly*]: It seems he was perfectly happy raking out manure.

DYSART: Did he ever give a reason for this?

DORA: No. I must say we both thought it most peculiar, but he wouldn't discuss it. I mean, you'd have thought he'd be longing to get out in the air after being cooped up all week in that dreadful shop. Electrical and kitchenware! Isn't that an environment for a sensitive boy, Doctor? . . .

FRANK: Dear, have you offered the doctor a cup of tea?

DORA: Oh dear, no, I haven't! . . . And you must be dying for one.

DYSART: That would be nice.

DORA: Of course it would . . . Excuse me . . .

[*She goes out—but lingers on the circle, eavesdropping near the right door. ALAN stretches out under his blanket and sleeps.*

FRANK *gets up.*]

FRANK: My wife has romantic ideas, if you receive my meaning.

DYSART: About her family?

FRANK: She thinks she married beneath her. I daresay she did. I don't understand these things myself.

DYSART: Mr Strang, I'm fascinated by the fact that Alan wouldn't ride.

FRANK: Yes, well that's him. He's always been a weird lad, I have to be honest. Can you imagine spending your weekends like that—just cleaning out stalls—with all the things that he could have been doing in the way of Further Education?

DYSART: Except he's hardly a scholar.

FRANK: How do we know? He's never really tried. His mother indulged him. She doesn't care if he can hardly write his own name, and she a school teacher that was. Just as long as he's happy, she says . . .

[*DORA wrings her hands in anguish.*

FRANK *sits again.*]

DYSART: Would you say she was closer to him than you are?

FRANK: They've always been thick as thieves. I can't say I entirely approve—especially when I hear her whispering that Bible to him hour after hour, up there in his room.

DYSART: Your wife is religious?

FRANK: Some might say excessively so. Mind you, that's her business. But when it comes to dosing it down the boy's throat—well, frankly, he's my son as well as hers. She doesn't see that. Of course, that's the funny thing about religious people. They always think their susceptibilities are more important than non-religious.

DYSART: And you're non-religious, I take it?

FRANK: I'm an atheist, and I don't mind admitting it. If you want my opinion, it's the Bible that's responsible for all this.

DYSART: Why?

FRANK: Well, look at it yourself. A boy spends night after night having this stuff read into him; an innocent man tor-

STOP

tured to death—thorns driven into his head—nails into his hands—a spear jammed through his ribs. It can mark anyone for life, that kind of thing. I'm not joking. The boy was absolutely fascinated by all that. He was always mooning over religious pictures. I mean real kinky ones, if you receive my meaning. I had to put a stop to it once or twice! . . . [Pause.] Bloody religion—it's our only real problem in this house, but it's insuperable; I don't mind admitting it.

[Unable to stand any more, DORA comes in again.]

DORA [pleasantly]: You must excuse my husband, Doctor. This one subject is something of an obsession with him, isn't it, dear? You must admit.

FRANK: Call it what you like. All that stuff to me is just bad sex.

DORA: And what has that got to do with Alan?

FRANK: Everything! . . . [Seriously.] Everything, Dora!

DORA: I don't understand. What are you saying?

[He turns away from her.]

DYSART [calmly]: Mr Strang, exactly how informed do you judge your son to be about sex?

FRANK: [tight]: I don't know.

DYSART: You didn't actually instruct him yourself?

FRANK: Not in so many words, no.

DYSART: Did you, Mrs Strang?

DORA: Well, I spoke a little, yes. I had to. I've been a teacher, Doctor, and I know what happens if you don't. They find out through magazines and dirty books.

DYSART: What sort of thing did you tell him? I'm sorry if this is embarrassing.

DORA: I told him the biological facts. But I also told him what I believed. That sex is not just a biological matter, but spiritual as well. That if God willed, he would fall in love one day. That his task was to prepare himself for the most

important happening of his life. And after that, if he was lucky, he might come to know a higher love still . . . I simply . . . don't understand . . . Alan! . . .

[She breaks down in sobs.]

[Her husband gets up and goes to her.]

FRANK [embarrassed]: There now. There now, Dora. Come on!

DORA: [with sudden desperation]: All right—laugh! Laugh, as usual!

FRANK [kindly]: No one's laughing, Dora.

[She glares at him. He puts his arms round her shoulders.]

No one's laughing, are they Doctor?

[Tenderly, he leads his wife out of the square, and they resume their places on the bench.]

[Lights grow much dimmer.]

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[A strange noise begins. ALAN begins to murmur from his bed. He is having a bad nightmare, moving his hands and body as if frantically straining to tug something back.]

DYSART leaves the square as the boy's cries increase.]

ALAN: Ek! . . . Ek! . . . Ek! . . .

[Cries of Ek! on tape fill the theatre, from all around.]

DYSART reaches the foot of ALAN's bed as the boy gives a terrible cry—EK!

—and wakes up. The sounds snap off. ALAN and the Doctor stare at each other. Then abruptly DYSART leaves the area and re-enters the square.]