

SCENE 1: Arriving in Lorne – sounds of seagulls and waves in distance.

AUDIO **Sound of interior of car pulling up and engine stopping.**

Bernadette: Well that was a nightmare trip. Just as well you had your wits about you, Jack, when that crazy driver started weaving all over the road.

Jack: Bloody overseas tourists.

They fall off the plane at Tullamarine, jet lagged to the eyeballs, hop in a hire car, off to the Great Ocean Road, driving on the wrong side of the road.

Bernadette: Well, never mind, we're here now. I always feel better once I see our place.

Jack: (*mutters*) My house you mean.

Bernadette: But don't you think it's time we got rid of the old caravan?

Parked there, in the carport under the house, it looks awful.

Jack: (*louder*) Look if I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times, my boys like to be able to put up their friends in the caravan for the Pier to Pub race.

Bernadette: (*quietly*) I wish they would clean up their mess when they leave.

I think I'll give it a thorough clean this weekend.

Jack: (*angrily*) Leave that van alone, woman. If I've told you a thousand times.....(*pause*)

(*shouts*) LEAVE MY VAN ALONE!!!

Bernadette (*placatingly*) Alright, alright, don't upset yourself again.

You're so angry these days.

(*sighs*) It's so unlike you.

AUDIO **Sound of car door opening**

Bernadette I'll open up and make a nice cup of tea while you unpack the car.

(*alarmed voice*) Ja-aa-ck, the caravan door is open. I thought you locked it securely before we left last time.

Jack: It's ok, woman, stop stressing.

Paul, an old friend of mine is staying in it for a few days

SCENE 2: Inside the house

AUDIO **Sound of another car door slamming outside**

Bernadette: Oh Lovely! Sounds like Verna's here.

Quick! Jack, go downstairs and help her carry her things up.

Jack: **(exasperated)** I wish you hadn't invited that Verna again!

She always makes trouble when she stays.

Never has anything worthwhile to say, except the latest gossip.

Bernadette: **(defensively)** Verna's my oldest friend.

I tell her everything!

Besides, you should try to be nice to her, she's very lonely and still shocked that her husband died so suddenly.

It must have been awful to discover that he had lost all their money in that dreadful company.

(Voice rising) Thieves, that's what they were.

Jack: Oh, for goodness sake.....

Bernadette: **(voice rising)** Every last penny Verna and Joe had and only one of those rogues got caught and sent to goal.

Poor Verna, Joe's dead and there's no money.....

Jack: (loudly) Don't start up about that again.

What's done is done.

Audio. Sound of stomping down the timber stairs.

Bernadette: (singing out).

Don't forget to introduce her to your friend Paul.

It's time she met up with someone nice.

AUDIO: MUSIC. FADE OUT

SCENE 3: Inside the House - Later

AUDIO **Sound of kettle whistling**

Verna: Goodness me, that Paul is a delicious looking man. Is he available?

Bernadette: I don't know, Verna.

In fact, all I know is he's a friend of Jack's and they served in Vietnam together.

I didn't even know he was staying in the van until we got here.

Verna: A mystery man. *(pause)*

I love a little mystery.

Perhaps I can find out over dinner tonight.

Bernadette: Please Verna, don't pry.

Jack hates inquisitive women.

Verna: *(laughing)* We'll see.

But whilst we're on the subject of Jack my dear, have you found out where he disappears to every month?

Bernadette: No, but it's a funny thing, he hasn't been away for a while now.

Verna: Oh, do you think his little affair is over?

Bernadette: *(slightly miffed tone).*

No-one has ever been able to prove to me he's having an affair.

He always says he won't ever get divorced again.

He's still trying to make up for all the money he had to pay HER out!

Verna: Perhaps I should have divorced Joe before he invested all our money and died.

Bernadette: *(raising her voice)* He's even sold our other holiday homes and the farm.

Every month, I'd watch him go into his office and transfer money.

Verna: *(incredulously)* He's still paying her?

Bernadette: He was always complaining and carrying on about it.

I don't think he would be silly enough to have another affair.

Verna: *(Smug voice)* But, don't they always say the wife is the last to know?

AUDIO: MUSIC. FADE OUT

SCENE 4: Inside the house (LATER - at dinner)

AUDIO: Sounds of dinner party - glasses clinking and murmuring conversation growing stronger.

Verna: Now Paul, tell me about yourself. (*Laughs*)

Paul: Nothing to tell, Verna. These days I lead a very quiet life.

Verna: But what about before these days, Paul?

A handsome man like you must have had plenty of adventures.

Paul: No, nothing exciting about my life.

Deadly boring, I am.

Verna: I doubt it. (*laughs*).

Well what about family.

Children?

Paul: Nothing to report, M'am.

Verna: Well, how do you know Jack?

Paul: Vietnam. We served together in Vietnam.

Do you mind if we change the subject?

Verna: Vietnam, oh, I just love Vietnam, the people are so trusting.

Especially the little children in the orphanages.

Paul: (*strained voice*) The orphaned children....?

Verna: I've been going to Hanoi ever since the war ended and used to support one orphanage financially. (*sighs*) Used to.....

So many sad children.

All their family gone..... all killed in the war.

Jack: (*Interjecting loudly*) For God's sake woman, stop carrying on!

Let's talk about something interesting.

Bernadette: (*sharply*) Jack! That's very rude!

Let Verna tell Paul about what she does.

Verna: I wonder if the soldiers who did all the killing ever think about the children.

Jack: (*angrily*) He doesn't want to hear about it. Do I make myself clear?

More wine, Paul?

AUDIO: Dinner party noise/ **MUSIC FADE OUT**

SCENE 5: Inside the house - next morning

AUDIO: Birds singing, sound of kettle boiling

Jack: (*crossly*) Morning. Paul and I are off to get the paper. Anything you need down the street, Bernadette?

Bernadette: No, thank you dear, Verna and I will just clean up and have a quiet morning. Bye.

Jack: (*Voice fading off*) We might be gone a while. Got a lot to catch up on.

AUDIO: (Sound of feet going down wooden stairs)

Verna: What's up with Jack? He's not usually so tetchy.

Bernadette: Oh, he got cross with me yesterday because I said I wanted to clean out the old van. He is so stressed these days. Not like him at all.

Verna: Well at least, it won't be money worries. You were very smart to find a rich fellow this time.

Bernadette: Aunt Ida always said to marry for love. Love of money, that is. (*laughs*)

Verna: Very clever, your Aunt Ida.

AUDIO: (clinking of crockery)

Bernadette: I don't even know if the sheets were changed from the boy's friends staying here. I'm sure it's filthy, knowing their friends.

Verna: Easily fixed, my dear. Whilst the men are away, we can sneak in, check things out and if clean sheets are needed, we can do it all in a whizz.

They won't even notice.

You know what men are like.

Bernadette: (*hesitatingly*) Well, I don't know..... but I am a bit embarrassed that Paul might be sleeping on dirty sheets.

Verna: C'm on then, let's do it.

AUDIO: Sound of feet descending stairs – seagulls calling in distance

SCENE 6: Entering the van. AUDIO: Sound of jiggling and shaking of door.

Bernadette: Oh, the van door is locked.

(nervously) Perhaps we shouldn't clean it today.

Verna: *(impatiently)* Don't you have a spare key, Berny?

Bernadette: Probably, but who knows where it is. I rarely go into to it.

It's usually so full of junk.

AUDIO: Sound of jiggling and shaking of door. Door creaking

Verna: *(laughing)* Don't worry, dear, I've managed to get it opened.

AUDIO: sound of women entering van

Verna: God, what a mess!

Bernadette: *(nervously)* I don't know, Verna.

(pause) Perhaps we should leave well alone.

Verna: Rubbish, Berny, you can't let Jack's friend sleep in this pigsty!

We'll just change the sheets and give the van the once over.

Licketty split, we'll be done in no time.

Bernadette: B-u-u-tt, Jack won't like it.

He hates anyone going into the van other than he or his boy's friends and they are under strict orders to not touch anything.

Verna: But look at all these bits of paper, everywhere.

They need tidying up.

Bernadette: *(sharp intake of breath)* I don't know if we should touch them.

Verna: A little peek won't hurt.

You know how I love to know what's going on.

Bernadette: *(slightly exasperated)* Oh Verna, you never change, do you?

One day your sticky nose will get you into trouble.

Verna: Well, so far it has served me well. *(laughs)*

Besides I want to more know about Paul, the mystery man.

AUDIO: Sound of rustling paper

Verna: What's this?

Bernadette: What's what? Verna, look I don't like this, going through other people's papers.

Verna: (*sharp intake of breathe, then distressed voice*) Berny, all of this seems to do with that dreadful financial company Joe got tied up with and lost all our money.

Bernadette: Let me see. (*rustle of papers*)

(*intake of breath*) Oh no. You're right, you know Verna.

Wait here's a sheaf of receipts as well, made out to Jack.

(*distressed*) Why would all this be here?

AUDIO: **Sound of caravan door opening**

Paul: What on earth is going on in here?

(*angrily*) What do you two think you are doing?

AUDIO: MUSIC. FADE OUT

SCENE 7: In the house, later that day. AUDIO: MUSIC FADE IN

Jack: *(angrily)* Why don't you two just sit down, drink your tea and let Paul and I explain.
What on earth possessed you to go into the van?

Bernadette *(voice rising)* We just thought we would give it a bit of a clean up and a tidy.

Jack: *(louder voice)* How many times have I told you not to touch the van?

Bernadette: *(hysterically)* Well, what's done is done.

But what have you been up to Jack?

Verna: Yes, Jack.....

Bernadette: *(sniffing)* I think I've had enough of your secrets, Jack.

There's been far too many of them for my liking.....

Jack: *(resigned voice)* It's a long story, Bern, *(pause)* one I hoped I'd never have to tell you.....

Bernadette: *(sighing)* Alright then. Please tell us.

Jack: Paul and I were in the same unit in Vietnam.

Paul: I was Jack's commanding officer

Jack: One day there was a terrible blunder made by our platoon and innocent villagers were killed.

Paul: You mean, I made a terrible blunder, Jack.

Jack: Let's not dwell on that, old man.

Things happen in wartime.

Things we must try to forget.

Paul: *(voice rising)* I killed them, Jack.

Me, the most highly decorated officer on the ground.

Carrying on the family tradition of service, valour and bravery.

You took the rap to protect my family honour.

Jack: *(gently)* It's alright mate, you've repaid any debt you might have owed me.

Paul: *(hysterically)* But all those little kids, I killed their mothers.....

Bernadette: *(softly)* They probably ended up in the orphanages Verna has supported all those years.

Verna: *(softly)* Oh no....

Jack: *(loudly)* Stop it, Berny. Don't you think Paul has been haunted

AUDIO: Music fades out then fades in to signify passing of time

Scene 8: In the house, about an hour later.

- Jack:** (*sigh*) So, there you have it. The whole story about Paul and I. (*disagree with Jan's point here – this line is to signify that some time has passed*).
- Bernadette:** Let me get my head around this, Jack.
You two set up the company to invest funds on behalf of retirees.
- Paul:** Yes, that's correct.
- Verna:** Joe thought it was such a good investment.
- Bernadette:** And they lost all their money
- Jack:** Believe me Berny, we tried everything we could to stop that from happening.
- Bernadette:** And you Paul, pleaded guilty and went to gaol?
- Jack:** He took the rap. Kept my name out of the whole sorry mess to protect you and my boys.
- Paul:** Well, my old man was dead. There was no-one to worry about the family honour anymore.
- Bernadette:** So, you weren't having an affair Jack, when you disappeared every month and you weren't paying your ex wife all that money?
- Jack:** Good God woman. No, I wasn't having an affair, I was flying to Perth to visit Paul in goal.
- Paul:** He was the only one who bothered.
(regretfully) I lost everything....
Everything disappeared when I was sentenced.
(pause) Everyone, but Jack.
- Bernadette:** But all that money, every month, Jack?
- Jack:** Paid to our creditors so that Paul could be released early.
- Bernadette:** Well, Joe and Verna didn't get anything.....
- Verna:** Nothing, not a single cent.
(wails) All this time, you knew, Jack!
My Joe's dead. *(pause)*
(sobbing) Me, trying to make do on that miserable pension.
Watching you and Berny living the high life.....
- Paul:** But Verna, let Jack explain, you *(loudly)* ARE getting your money back!
- Verna:** *(loudly)* The orphanage closed because I couldn't support it anymore.
No-one was held to account for those killings.....

Bernadette: Verna darling, calm down and listen to what Paul is saying.

Verna: (*Screaming*) Why should I listen to him?

You're all liars. How can I believe anything you say?

I'm going home. I can't stand being around you a minute longer.

Paul: But Verna...

AUDIO: Sound of footsteps fading

Jack: Leave her, Paul.

Berny and I will go and talk to her when she settles down a bit.

Bernadette: (*cheerfully*) Well, it's basically good news isn't it?

Verna's going to get her money back and we can all get on with our lives.

It will be just like old times again.

Jack: (*clearing throat*) There's something else you need to know, Berny.

Bernadette: (*anxiously*) Something else?

Jack: Yes. You know I've sold our investment properties and the farm?

Bernadette: (*bitterly*) And all the time I thought it was to pay out Madam Ex Wife.

Jack: Well, I made the final payment last month, but it meant that I've had to sell our house in Melbourne.

Bernadette: No, not our beautiful house. (*wailing*) Where will we live?

Jack: Here, Berny, here. This all I have left and Paul is going to live in the old van in the carport underneath.

I was going to tell you this weekend.

Bernadette: Oh, no, no, (*pause*) live here permanently?

What will I tell our friends?

Jack: That's the least of our worries.

But at least your friend Verna will have money to live on.

Now, what's for dinner?

Scene 9. Later that night - on the balcony overlooking the driveway

Paul: A fine port, Jack. Good to relax out here on the balcony.

AUDIO: **Sound of car stopping on gravel driveway**

Jack: Who's that pulling up?

Bernadette: It's Verna!

She must have realized what you said, Paul.

Yoo, hoo Verna, we're up here on the balcony.

Jack: What's she taking out of the car?

Paul: I can smell petrol.

Jack: *(loudly)* Wh-a-at the.....Verna, put the jerrycan down!

(softer) C'mon, let's talk about this.

Verna: Talk, talk, I'm done with your talking.

You and your mate need to pay for what you have done.

Murderers and thieves, that's what you are!

Bernadette: Please, Verna.

Verna And you...Berny, *(sarcastically)* my generous, charitable friend, what a joke!

You paying for me when I couldn't afford to.

Bernadette: I felt so sorry for you, Verna, it was the least Jack and I could do.

Verna: *(screaming)* But it was our money you were spending.

Joe and I worked so hard so we could enjoy our retirement.

No money in the world is going to bring him back to me.

Jack: *(shouting)* She's set fire to the van!

Bernadette: *(loudly)* Verna, get away from that gas bottle! Pllle-e-ease.

AUDIO: **Sound of van gas bottle exploding**

Paul: *(panicking)* Bloody hell, the flames are coming up through the floorboards. The house is going to burn too.

Jack: If the house goes, I'll have lost everything.

Bernadette: *(hysterically)* No-oo-o Verna, no-oo-oo.

AUDIO: **Sound of fire engine in the distance, getting louder.**

Fade to silence

THE END