

He shakes and sucks the finger he has just caught in the shed door as he surveys the garden for a moment, then moves to peer briefly over the fence. He frowns, holding the frown as his gaze falls on to one of his shrubs. He walks over to it, examines a leaf and then takes out a tissue to gently wipe the leaf

Michael (somewhat self-consciously) That's better, eh? How are you settling in? Everything all right for you, is it? Good—good. (He runs out of things to say) I'll—umm—I'll let you get on then. Well done.

Michael exits behind the shed as:

Mrs Hinson comes out of her kitchen with a pile of washing which she drapes in the Zimmer basket. She puts her handbag on the table and uses the frame to move across to the washing line

She is a working-class widow in her late sixties. Her mind is a mixture of pure gristle and animal cunning. She feigns deafness when it suits. She dresses top to toe in clothes from Marks and Spencers and is wearing a floral pinny and slippers. She seldom goes anywhere without her handbag over her arm, even at home. She moves perfectly well without the use of the walking frame

She takes a damp cloth from her pinny and runs it along the washing line wiping it clean as:

Roma appears in the Smethurst kitchen doorway. She is short and has a slight weight problem. She wears a headband and a tracksuit and trainers that exactly match those worn by Michael. She is loaded down with shopping bags which include ten french sticks, and a large bag of barbecue charcoal

Roma Mickey?

Michael (off) Hello.

Roma I'm back. (She puts the charcoal on the step)

Roma exits carrying the rest of the bags back inside the kitchen as:

Michael enters from behind the shed:

Michael Any problems?

Roma enters the garden

Roma Quite the reverse actually.

Michael Ah, you got the charcoal, well done. (He puts the charcoal behind the shed)

During the following speech Roma stands on tiptoe on the french window step to look over the fence

Mrs Hinson is pegging out her washing which consists of dusters, tea towels, a pinafore and underwear

Roma frowns slightly but doesn't waver in the recounting of the story

Roma They were rather quiet in the car and I thought—well—I know we've talked it through with them but—first time they've been away on their own—stand by for a last minute little tizzy—William if not James—

instead of which, as soon as I stop the car it's, "Off you go mummy have a lovely party, see you on Sunday." Honestly.

Michael Just as we thought then—weekend with grandma—they'll love it.
Roma And so will she. Honestly Mickey, you should have seen her. I just know she'll have been out buying all the wrong things. "Please remember, Mummy", I said, "No sweets, definitely no orange cordial and possibly one hour's telly", and fat chance of that I shouldn't wonder. I'll make you a little sarnie, shall I?

Roma exits into the kitchen

Michael Roma.

Roma puts her head out the door, knowing what is coming

I don't need a sandwich thank you and neither do you.

There is nothing heavy in the following exchange. Michael teasing Roma about her weight is one of their 'fun things'

Roma (*indicating*) Just a tiny . . .

Michael No nibbling between meals.

Roma (*indicating a smaller size*) Just—

Michael No nibbling.

Roma Oh it's all right for you, you never put on—

Michael All right, eat what you want, Fattie.

Roma Meanie. Oh you've got the tables out—well done. (*She moves to look at them admiringly*)

Michael What d'you think?

Roma Excellent, Mickey.

Michael Worth the effort?

Roma Oh they are, they're smashing.

Michael The things people—(*miming*) throw away.

Roma I know, I know . . .

During the following Roma moves busily in and out of the kitchen

Michael sets about the apparently none-too-easy task of taking down the rotary line

I took your short cut through Stanley Crescent, which is smashing by the way, *much* shorter, then I went via Gladstone Avenue which has two more "For Sales" up. What I think is really smashing, Mike, is the way the whole area is coming up. You were absolutely right of course. I mean I thought Gladstone Avenue, for example, was a lost cause but it's really on the move. Another couple of years and it could be really villagy.

The Hinson doorbell rings

Mrs Hinson does not respond

Michael Oh yes, Nick phoned. They're not coming.

Roma Oh, that's sad.