

Write a guided analysis of the following text.

### Act one

3 p.m. Saturday.

5     *The open plan living room of a modern executive-style house. Archways leading off to the kitchen and back doors. Another to the front door and bedrooms etc. Primarily furnished with English Swedish style furniture. A lot of wrought iron for gates in lieu of doors and as used for room dividers. Also artistic frosted glass. Doubtful pictures. Possibly a bar. It all cost a great deal of money. Parquet floor with rugs.*

10     *At the start, EVELYN, a heavily made-up, reasonably trendily dressed, expressionless girl, is sitting by a pram which she is rocking absently with one hand whilst gazing blankly out of the window. Near her, on the table, underneath suitable coverings, tea is laid out in the form of sandwiches and cakes. Only the teapot and hot water jug are missing. EVELYN chews and sings to herself.*

*After a moment, DIANA enters. She is older, mid to later thirties. She always gives the impression of being slightly fraught. She smiles occasionally, but it's painful. Her sharp darting eyes don't miss much after years of suspicions both genuine and unfounded.*

15     DIANA: Have you got him to sleep?

EVELYN: Yes.

DIANA [*looking into the pram*]: Aaah! They look so lovely like that. Like little cherubims.

EVELYN [*unenthusiastic*]: Mmm.

DIANA: Just like little cherubims. [*Anxious.*] Should he be covered up as much as that, dear?

20     EVELYN: Yes.

DIANA: Won't he get too hot?

EVELYN: He likes it hot.

DIANA: Oh. I was just worried he wasn't getting enough air.

EVELYN: He's all right. He doesn't need much air.

25     DIANA: Oh well... [*She looks about her.*] Well, I think we're all ready for them. John's on his way, you say?

EVELYN: Yes.

DIANA: How is he these days? I haven't seen John for ages.

EVELYN: He's all right.

30     DIANA: I haven't seen either of you.

EVELYN: We're all right.

DIANA: Not for ages. Well, I'm glad you could come this afternoon. Colin will really appreciate that, I'm sure. Seeing us all.

[*Pause.*]

35     Paul should be home again soon. I think he's playing his squash again.

EVELYN: Oh.

DIANA: Him and his squash. It used to be tennis – now he's squash mad. Squash, squash, squash. Can't see what he sees in it. All afternoon hitting a ball against a wall. It's so noisy. Bang, bang, bang. He's not even out of doors. No fresh air at all. It can't be good for

40     him. Does John play squash?

EVELYN: No.

DIANA: Oh.

EVELYN: He doesn't play anything.

45 DIANA: Oh, well. He probably doesn't need it. Exercise. Some men don't. My father never took a stroke of exercise. Till he died. He seemed fit enough. He managed to do what he wanted to do. Mind you, he never did very much. He just used to sit and shout at we girls. Most of the time. He got calmer though when he got older. After my mother left him. [*Looking into the pram.*] Did you knit that little jacket for him?

EVELYN: No.

Alan Ayckbourn, *Absent Friends* (1975)

- How is the relationship between the two characters established in this extract?