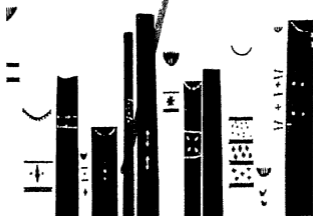


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PLAYS OF THE YEAR

Volume 9

1953

PLAYS OF THE YEAR

CHOSEN BY
J. C. TREWIN

TRIAL AND ERROR
Kenneth Horne

AN INSTANT
Marcelle Maurette, adapted by Guy Bolton

THE RETURN
Bridget Boland

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY
Vernon Sylvaine

BIRTHDAY HONOURS
Paul Jones

VOLUME 9

1953

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TRIAL AND ERROR

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BIRTHDAY HONOURS

Copyright 1954 by Paul Jones

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FOR WENDY

Of Course

INTRODUCTION

I

At least one play in this volume is straight from the Theatre Theatrical—and why not? It is ANASTASIA, by the French dramatist Marcelle Maurette, in Guy Bolton's version; and its production at the St. James's—it had been done at the Theatre Royal, Windsor, and also on television—revived memories of a famous problem. (Did a ghost walk in Europe?) That is an easy enough phrase. Perhaps it would be more truthful to say that, whereas a few playgoers remembered the problem, many others found it fresh to them. It was a surprising bulletin from the past.

ANASTASIA is a claimant-drama. To understand it we must think of that day of tragedy for Imperial Russia, July 17, 1918, when the Czar Nicholas II, his Empress Alexandra, their four daughters (Olga, Tatiana, Marie, and Anastasia), and their son Alexis, were shot in a cellar at Ekaterinburg in Siberia. I say "four daughters", there we reach the heart of the play. Rumour held that the youngest daughter, the Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaeвна, had got clear and escaped into the Balkans. The play depends upon that rumour.

History has many similar legends of escape. Not long ago a French researcher surprised all by asking for possible confirmation of his belief that Joan of Arc had fled to

England. *A Times* fourth leader writer commented sadly: "Authentic news (for example) of the settling in Bermondsey or Barking, about 1431, of a young woman with a strong French accent, a military gait, and a suspicious familiarity with French court gossip, is not the kind of thing that can be expected to reward inquiries at this distance of time."

The *Anastasia* story is much nearer. It is known that a claimant to the title appeared during the nineteen-thirties, a challenging phantom who was described as Madame Anastasia Tschaikovsky. She declared that she had got away from the firing-squad; she now sought a sum of money held for the Czar in America. War blotted out the fragments of the tale. Anastasia, like so many claimants of various kinds, slid again into the mist.

Marcelle Maurette's version of the story is her own. Here, in effect, is a Galatea with three Pygmalions. The woman calls herself Anna Broun; she has been saved from suicide; and she is in a Berlin cellar (the period is sometime between the wars). About her are three Czarist exiles, led by a Prince Bonnine, sinister and suave. Hers not to reason why; at the command of these men she is to become the Grand Duchess Anastasia, a revenante from the cellar at Ekaterinburg. How did Anastasia escape the massacre? That will be explained; all will be explained. She will take the habit and the bearing of the Romanov Grand Duchess; she will marry her presumed cousin, Prince Paul; they will receive the remnants of the Czar's fortune; the Pygmalions will benefit; and Anna-Galatea-Anastasia will settle (maybe) to long life and happiness as the lost heiress of Imperial Russia. So much for the plan. The first act exposition is a model of its type. We can imagine the ghost of Pinero clapping soundlessly from a box, though it is by no means the kind of situation he favoured. Marcelle Maurette plants in our minds—and this is most difficult—a suspicion that the woman is being trained, very likely, to play herself: in other words, that the wan sleepwalker is indeed the woman she is alleged to be.

This "Anna" has unmistakable dignity and truth. The conspirators are imagined with precision. We are, then, quite prepared to collaborate; and we are rewarded by a second act of wire-taut excitement, and by a third that, until the inevitable blurring—and I do not propose to say now exactly what happens—can keep us tense. The author has summoned for us that sad make-believe world of the exiled Russians, symbolised by the papier-maché throne hired from operatic "props" for the installation of the Grand Duchess. ("Oh, hollow! hollow! hollow!" as Bunthorne said on another occasion.)

Although I scratched with enthusiasm on my programme at the St. James's, I did not realise until later that night that the result was a queer palimpsest. The programme, when I looked at it, resembled one of those Victorian letters in which a writer, to save space, deliberately crossed and recrossed an original script until the page was an inky, latticed tangle. Reading one's mail must sometimes have been a problem at the Early Victorian breakfast-table. Similarly, my programme of ANASTASIA would delight a cryptographer. It may speak against the quality of the drama that (without reference to the text) I cannot now often recall the exact words. They should have returned to mind without need for an aide-mémoire. However, what we are obliged to describe (hideously) as the Overall Impression, is clear enough. ANASTASIA is defiantly a play of the Theatre Theatrical; and for this, much thanks.

The lines I was searching for on my programme-scrrawl had to do with living in the past, the backward-looking habit that someone—though I wish he wouldn't—is bound to call "nostalgia." But there is no reason on earth why we should not remember the past, so long as we guard against submergence in it. In ANASTASIA this backward-looking has become a weary habit. The Czarist Russians, hopelessly exiled, try to remember their dead world, to keep up appearances. It is the perfect atmosphere for the tale of a claim that, as Anastasia makes it, is like a voice

ringing from the past through some tottering world of make-believe.

Although this is not more than straight theatrical drama, its problem of identity becomes something that Pirandello might have liked. We begin early to feel that the wandering enigma, so far from being Anna Broun of nowhere-in-particular, is—well, a Galatea impersonating Galatea. Is she, or isn't she? How much can she have been taught? How much does she know? The questions multiply; for once multiplication is not vexation—not, at least, until the dramatists must make their final count. Consider the problem now for yourselves.

II

From ANASTASIA I remember such performances as those of Mary Kerridge, Anthony Ireland, Laurence Payne and—as the Dowager Empress of Russia, possibly the woman's grandmother—Helen Hays. The part could have been merely brushed in, but Miss Hays had the clarity of a starlit night on the Neva. From a very different type of piece, Kenneth Horne's alert comedy of TRIAL AND ERROR, I think of the work of Naunton Wayne, a baffled butter-ball of a man, and the wide-eyed tantrums of Constance Cummings. I must explain that Miss Cummings acted a wife who, on her wedding day, was flanked by two husbands. The first husband had vanished—his name was Nightshade; his wife called him Dudley—and unkind rumour said that she had pushed him off a liner to drown. In fact, she had stood trial for murder, had survived Holloway and the Old Bailey, and had been acquitted: most properly, because Dudley was alive in a Liberian gaol. (It was exactly the sort of place in which one would have expected to find him). Unknowing, Andrea married again, and . . . on the whole, you had better turn to the text. I think of the Victorian murderess who disposed of her husband with a poisoned cake, served her sentence, and

married again. "I hope her husband doesn't like cake," said somebody; and, in similar fashion, I found myself wondering a little about Mr. Horne's *Andrea*.

III

In the first volume of *Plays of the Year* we printed *Bridget Boland's Cockpit*. She is a dramatist of uncommon quality, who refuses to use any puff-ball plot. When she planned *THE RETURN* she set herself a task as awkward as any writer had had for a long time. A nun, after thirty-six years in an enclosed convent, has lost her vocation and seeks the outer world again. The play shows the sudden impact of life beyond the wall. How can the woman come to terms with a secular world so strange to her? It is hard to treat such a theme as this without straying from the path; any extraneous diversions are likely to be fatal. Miss Boland has resisted them; she has had the tact and taste not to joke at the expense of a woman of 1913 returned to the modern world. More anxiously we ask whether she has been able to make a reasonable figure of the woman, from "shady cloister mew'd," whom *Flora Robson* was ready in the theatre to express with all her extraordinary gift of restrained emotion. The text of this honest play will help us to decide.

IV

*Vernon Sylva*ne, a farce-writer of great experience, has faith in the general knowledge of his listeners. In *AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY* he plies us with references of a sort that we do not expect in a hands-across-and-down-the-middle romp. The scene is an opulent house in *Regent's Park*. There is a pianoforte at one side at which the *Crying Crooner* will presently sing "Please Don't Forget To Remember" There is a staircase which the wife will mount, quoting *Hedda Gabler*. There is an entrance from the hall through which the house-parlourmaid

will scuttle now and then, usually to fall prostrate at the crooner's feet. And there is a French window by which a charming and quite unnecessary character has frequent entrances and exits.

What is it all about? Now is that a fair question? Let me say merely that, at the Garrick Theatre, Jack Buchanan appeared as a stockbroker; that one of his three daughters arrived home suddenly, dressed "like a morbid fisherman," and with a black eye; and that her husband, an Existentialist, was in "a very small prison" in Paris. It was only a temporary confinement because, before very long, the husband arrived in person, putting on a pair of boots that had been filled with whiskey. Who filled them? Why, the Crying Crooner (he used an onion), with whom another daughter of the house was in love. The third daughter—married to a cowboy—did not get back until later. Not that it mattered, because we had plenty to occupy our minds. The business of modern sculpture, for example; the question of psychiatry; the appearance of one of Fleet Street's less distinguished young men; and, throughout, the icy gibbering—if that is the phrase—of the father of the house tangled in a web woven by his own remarkable offspring.

The last thirty seconds of the farce will show what a night it is:

John gives a loud moan and Corinne swings Stella round with her embrace as Barnaby, over six feet of dude cowboy, with ten-gallon Stetson and all the trappings, comes striding in through the archway. He makes straight for Stella—who has her back to him—swings her round, and lifts her high in the air as he bellows:

BARNABY (*lifting and lowering*): Hi-ya, Mom!

John goes all to pieces and, as Barnaby moves to him to grab a hand and shake the daylights out of him, is gibbering, cross-eyed, twitching, and shaking. Barnaby bellows:

Mr. Bentley, sir—you sure am jest as ab pictured yew!

At this point the startled curtain falls. AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY is sure jest as ab picture farce.

V

There can be times during a comedy for six characters (in search of a plot) when one would like to be watching, say, Sardanapalus, the pleasures of which include the Hall of Nimrod and a cast to match. But BIRTHDAY HONOURS is much better than the usual fragile wisp (2 m., 4 w., one interior set); the author, Paul Jones, has a quick sense of humour that freshens an anecdote about a specialist with a histrionic wife, a deplorable mother-in-law, a determined sister-in-law, and a secretary who is (to coin a phrase) a treasure. These persons have a trick of saying the unexpected. True, another six characters and another couple of sets would have helped, but we do not long too desperately for that Hall of Nimrod. The theme, I suppose, is really that of Maugham's Penelope in reverse. There we had philandering husband (a doctor) and apparently complaisant wife. Here we have philandering wife and apparently complaisant husband (a specialist). Paul Jones enjoys the mock-dramatic and its deflation. Quite the happiest passage is the first, with wife and lover ("Look here, Bestwood!") being defiantly tense about it all—one enjoying the chance for a scene, the other wooden and glaring—while the husband, who should be playing up to them, spoils it by his politely detached small-talk.

J. C. TREWIN

Hampstead,
March, 1954.

TRIAL AND ERROR

by

KENNETH HORNE

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Applications for the performance of this play by professionals must be made to E. P. Clift, 29 Mansfield House, Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2. Applications for the performance of this play by amateurs must be made to Samuel French Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.

E. P. Clift, with Linnit and Dunfee Ltd., presented *Trial and Error* at the Vaudeville Theatre, London, on September 17th, 1953, with the following cast:

MRS. O'CONNOR	<i>Nan Munro</i>
DUDLEY	<i>Derek Farr</i>
CLAUD	<i>Naunton Wayne</i>
ANDREA	<i>Constance Cummings</i>
GERTRUDE	<i>Nora Nicholson</i>
BRIGGS	<i>Patricia Heneghan</i>
RON	<i>Brian Smith</i>

The play directed by Roy Rich
Setting by Richard Lake

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

MRS. O'CONNOR, *housekeeper*
DUDLEY, *visitor*
CLAUD, *bridegroom*
ANDREA, *bride*
GERTRUDE, *aunt*
BRIGGS, *reporter*
RON, *press photographer*

SCENES

The entire action of the play takes place at a house situated somewhere on the Sussex coast within easy reach of London. It is September.

ACT ONE

Monday evening after dinner.

ACT TWO

Tuesday evening before dinner.

ACT THREE

SCENE 1. *Wednesday afternoon before tea*

SCENE 2. *Thursday afternoon after lunch.*

ACT ONE

Scene: The living-room of a "summer residence" situated somewhere on the Sussex coast within easy reach of London.

The room is gay, pleasant and modern.

Layout: Against the wall right steps lead up to a low landing which lies across the up right corner of the room. From this landing, wide glass doors, back right, give on to a sun-deck outside. Up right, contiguous to the doors, are spacious windows. Both provide a view of sea and sky. From the sun-deck two sets of steps lead down and off: right to the beach, and left inland. Right centre, in the wall of the landing, is a semi-circular recess with a built-in seat. Back left a door opens into the kitchen. Up left an open passageway leads off left to the front door. Immediately down of this passageway, a staircase leads off upwards to the bedrooms, etc. Down left a door opens into the library.

Furniture: Down right is a small easy chair. Right centre, before the built-in seat in the recess, is a round table for meals. On the sun-deck are two outdoor chairs and a table. Back centre is a sideboard. On the sideboard is a bowl of flowers and a tray with a bottle of whisky, a siphon and glasses. Back left centre is a small table bearing a telephone and a pad and pencil. Against the wall, left, is a pedestal-table with a vase of flowers. Down left is a second easy chair. Left centre is a couch. Before the couch is a low coffee-table bearing a cigarette-box, an ash-tray, and magazines. There is a picture on the wall, down left, and a mirror on the wall, down right.

It is late evening in September.

Curtain rises on an empty stage. The lights are on. The glass doors are open and the curtains undrawn. It is dark outside. A meal has been partly cleared from the table. A lady's handbag and a bridal bouquet lie on the coffee-table.

ACT ONE

There is a knock at the front door (off), a pause, and the knock is repeated.

Enter Mrs. O'Connor from kitchen.

As she opens the door, dance music is heard from within.

Mrs. O'Connor is the housekeeper. She is a spare, prim, bleak, middle-aged person of the "superior" type. She wears overalls and carries a tray.

MRS. O'CONNOR (*as she enters, addressing someone in the kitchen*): Of course you don't mind. Why should you? You just sit and listen to your wireless. (*Crossing to table—her voice getting louder as the range increases.*) I'm the one who has to do the work. I'm the one who's being kind, you know—not *her*. (*Begins putting the few remaining dinner things on tray.*) All *she* does is ask the people down here. Anyone can do *that*. I should be delighted to lend my house to people—if I had one—especially for a honeymoon. I shouldn't think it was *kind* of me, though—not if it was somebody else who had to do everything. (*Takes cruet and table-mats to sideboard and puts them in.*) It's doing things for people that's *kind*, O'Connor, not getting others to do it. (*Returning to table.*) Especially with newlyweds! (*Picking up tray and bearing it to kitchen.*) They don't know what *is* going on, half the time. Don't even appreciate what's being done for them. (*Goes into kitchen—continuing off.*) Not that I've anything against *this* pair, mind you. You'd hardly know they *were* just married.

[*The unintelligible rumble of a man's voice is heard, off.*]

(*Coming out again with crumb-tray and brush—crossing to table.*) I don't doubt it, O'Connor. I'm sure you

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wouldn't mind being in his shoes, knowing what you seem to think marriage is for. (*Brushing table.*) It doesn't surprise me in the least. The only thing that is surprising (*moving to sideboard*) is that you should ever have wanted to marry me (*picking up bowl of flowers and bearing them to table*) for I'm sure I don't inspire that sort of thing.

[*Enter Dudley on to sun-deck from left. Dudley is thirty-five, well-bred and charming, but there is something about him which fails to inspire confidence. He has a warm heart and a good temper, but doubtful standards. He wears a light raincoat over tweeds, and is bareheaded. He now halts tentatively in the open doorway.*]

(*Continuing—putting bowl on table and returning to sideboard.*) You never called me a smasher, anyway. That I do know. (*Opens sideboard, stoops and begins peering inside for something.*) A simple English rose! That's what I was in your estimation. Not a . . .

[*Dudley taps on the door jamb to attract her attention.*]

(*Starting up violently.*) Ooah!

DUDLEY: I'm so sorry! I did try at the front, but . . .

(*Breaks off.*)

MRS. O'C. (*complainingly*): Well, all the bells are out of order, and you can't hear the knocker with *that* (*indicates music*) going on—What is it you wanted?

DUDLEY: Do Mr. and Mrs. Merrilees live here?

MRS. O'C.: They're *staying* here, if that's what you mean. Got here this afternoon.

DUDLEY (*moving into the room*): Ah—then it *is* the house.

MRS. O'C.: They won't be receiving tonight though.

DUDLEY (*confidently*): They'll see me all right. (*Wanders across.*)

ACT ONE

MRS. O'C.: They were only married this morning.

DUDLEY: I know. (*Grins disarmingly and sinks into chair down left.*)

MRS. O'C.: They're out, anyway

DUDLEY: When do you expect them back?

MRS. O'C.: I've no idea. They're walking. (*Indicates outdoors right.*)

DUDLEY: *That* won't take 'em long, then—not if I know *her*. (*Draws an evening newspaper from his coat pocket, opens it and settles himself*)

[*Mrs. O'Connor seems a little nonplussed.*]

MRS. O'C.: Well, I've no wish to be rude, young man, but I'm afraid you can't stop there.

DUDLEY (*in faint surprise*): Can't I?

MRS. O'C.: I have to go to bed.

DUDLEY (*surprised*): You don't sleep in here, do you?

MRS. O'C.: Of course not! I can't *leave* you here—that's what I mean. I—I don't *know* you.

DUDLEY: Ah! I see your point. (*Rises and returns paper to his pocket.*)

MRS. O'C. (*uncomfortably*): It's nothing personal, I assure you.

DUDLEY (*crossing right*): My dear lady—you're so right! You'd be even less inclined to leave me here if you did know me. (*Smiles winningly.*) I'll take a walk myself. (*Goes up steps right.*)

MRS. O'C. (*softening somewhat*): What name shall I say—if I *am* still up?

DUDLEY (*balting*): Mr. Nightshade!

MRS. O'C.: Oh.—Well, I shouldn't be *too* long, if you *are* coming back.

DUDLEY: No.—*They* won't be sitting up tonight, either, will they? (*Grins and goes out.*)

[Exit Dudley from sun-deck to left.]

MRS. O'C. (*scandalised but quite thrilled*): Well! What a thing to say! (*Returns to sideboard, collects crumb-tray, carries it to coffee-table and begins emptying ash-tray—again raising her voice.*) Did you hear any of that? A man came in. Calling on them, if you please! *Tonight!* . . . Well, I don't . . .

[Telephone bell begins to ring.]

(*Muttering.*) Oh, for heaven's sake! (*Goes to telephone and lifts receiver.*) Hullo?—Yes—No, I'm afraid he's not.—I've no idea, I. . . . Oh, just a minute!

[Enter Claud on to sun-deck from right. Claud is forty, good-looking, honest, precise, respectable and kind. He is a trifle unimaginative but by no means lacking in wit—especially when annoyed, which is fairly often. He wears a suit of grey flannel. He hurries in a little breathlessly.]

CLAUD (*coming down and crossing*): Is that for me?

MRS. O'C.: Yes.

CLAUD: Ah! Thank you! (*Takes receiver from Mrs. O'Connor.*)

[Exit Mrs. O'Connor into kitchen. As Mrs. O'Connor closes the door after her, the music is extinguished.]

(*Continuing*) Miss Winter? (*Glances at his watch.*) No, you're right on the nail. I cut it a bit fine getting back, that's all.—Yes, on the—er—on the beach, as a matter of fact. Didn't notice the passage of time. You know how it is! (*Laughs self-consciously.*)—Oh, go on! You know you do. (*Laughs again, then suddenly continues in a brisk tone.*) Well—what happened

ACT ONE

about the Jones and Matherson thing?—Ah, that's all right then! And Tilling Limited?—Good! We can leave that too. Anything else come up? Who?—What name?—Nightshade?—Haven't the least idea. Never heard of him.

[Enter Andrea on to sun-deck. Andrea is thirty-two and very attractive. She is a woman of contrasts; easy-going, amiable and languid—yet with the temper of a squib. Maddeningly illogical—she is yet intuitively astute. She is exasperating and adorable. She wears her “going-away” dress and carries one of those long, trailing, ribbon-like bunches of seaweed. She halts up right, watching him.]

(Meanwhile continuing into telephone.) What did he want, then?—But didn't he say?—What?—Oh, I see!—Yes, most mysterious!—Well, we shall soon find out, I expect.—Yes, I. . . (Notices Andrea.) Just a minute! (To Andrea.) What have you got there? ANDREA (holds up seaweed—childishly pleased with it.) Seaweed! (Continues down and crosses to right of couch.) CLAUD: Oh! (Looks doubtful, then returns to telephone.) Sorry, I—just had to speak to my wife.—(Smirks.) Yes, it does seem strange, yes.—Well, all right, Miss Winters, you'd better get to bed.—No, I don't suppose we shall need any rocking, either. (Catches Andrea's eye.)

[Andrea moves abruptly, in slight confusion, to couch, where she sits, putting down seaweed beside her.]

(Continuing hurriedly.) I—I mean, er. . . Thank you! Goodnight! (Replaces receiver and moves down to behind couch.) I say—do you think you ought to bring that in here? (Picks up seaweed.)

ANDREA: Why not?

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CLAUD: Well, it is a borrowed house, isn't it?

ANDREA: It's perfectly clean. Some people eat it.

CLAUD: Some people eat horses—but you don't bring them indoors, do you?

ANDREA (*pleasantly sarcastic*): You're going to be far too clever for me, I can see that.

CLAUD: What shall I do with it, then?

ANDREA: Hang it up somewhere!

CLAUD: What for?

ANDREA: It also foretells the weather. Didn't you know?

CLAUD: Oh! (*Looks about him, then moves left and hangs the seaweed on a picture—then turns and stands smiling bashfully.*)

ANDREA (*beckoning him*): Come!

[*Claud hesitates slightly, then, after a cautious glance towards the kitchen, goes and sits beside her. Reclining in the corner, Andrea pulls him to her so that he lies across her lap.*]

CLAUD (*warningly*): She's still about, you know.

ANDREA: Who is?

CLAUD: Mrs. Whatsname?

ANDREA: Darling—we're married.

CLAUD (*uncomfortably*): Only this morning, though . . .

ANDREA (*squeezing him with impulsive enthusiasm*): Oh, I do think you're sweet.

CLAUD (*in surprise*): What's sweet about that?

ANDREA: Have you ever paused to wonder why I should want to marry you?

CLAUD (*a little ruefully*): Yes—I must say I have.

ANDREA: It's for the very reason that you *are* like that.

CLAUD: Like what?

ANDREA: Afraid that Mrs. Whatsname might come

ACT ONE

in! (*Ruminatively.*) It's because you have such a sense of the fitness of things. It's because you tell the truth, and read *The Times*, and wear a bowler, and can't understand Picasso. It's because you don't talk about women at the club. It's because you get all unhappy when I come indoors with seaweed. All those things! It's because you make such a *change*, I suppose.

CLAUD (*puzzled*): Change! From what?

ANDREA (*faintly surprised at the question*): My first husband, dear!

CLAUD (*not too pleased*): Oh! (*Draws away and sits up.*)

ANDREA: He was nothing like that, you know. Far from it! I got so that my yearning for respectability was almost morbid. So you've got him to thank for me, in a way.

CLAUD (*sourly*): I shall endeavour to keep that in mind.

ANDREA (*snuggling to him*): Why did you want to marry *me*?

CLAUD (*ill-at-ease*): I—I don't know. I'm not much given to that sort of analysis. I just couldn't resist you, I suppose.

ANDREA (*a little disturbed*): But you *must* have a better reason than that, dear—an experienced man like you! That's the mistake *I* made with *him*. Isn't there anything about me that you *admire*?

CLAUD: Yes, of course there is.

ANDREA: What, for instance?

CLAUD (*vaguely*): Well, I. . . . Well—everything I *know* about you.

ANDREA: That can't be much. We only met three weeks ago. (*Sitting up and looking at him.*) Come to think of it—what *do* you know about me?

CLAUD (*barassed*): Well, I know you were a widow, of course. I know you're an orphan. I know you were

TRIAL AND ERROR

brought up by an aunt. I know you've been living in France and—and so on and so forth.

ANDREA: That's not much of a reason for wanting to marry anyone, though, is it?

CLAUD: Well, of course it isn't. I don't mean that, I. . . . (*Breaks off at a loss.*)

ANDREA: You see, dear, what I *really* want to know is that it's not just physical.

CLAUD (*shocked*): Andrea!

ANDREA: Because that can be fatal, honestly. I know that only too well.

CLAUD (*affronted*): Do I *seem* the sort of man who. . . ?

ANDREA (*suddenly reassured*): No, dear, of course you don't. I'm just being silly. You're far too methodical. (*She seizes his arm and leans her head on his shoulder.*) No man who arranges for his secretary to ring him up on his honeymoon could possibly fail to have the most excellent reasons for getting married. (*Slight pause—conversationally.*) Everything all right at the office?

CLAUD: Perfectly, thanks!

ANDREA (*with apparent enthusiasm*): Oh, good! (*Nestles to him.*)

[*Claud remembers something.*]

CLAUD: By the way. . . .

ANDREA: Uh-huh?

CLAUD: D'you know a Mr. Nightshade?

ANDREA: Now *now*, dear, no! Why?

CLAUD: Chap by that name got on to Miss Winters this afternoon. Wanted to contact you.

ANDREA: Me?

CLAUD: Yes—urgently.

ANDREA: What about?

CLAUD: Wouldn't say apparently. Doesn't it mean anything to you?

ACT ONE

ANDREA: Not a thing!

CLAUD (*dismissing the subject*): Oh, well, she told him where to get you, so I expect you'll soon find out.

ANDREA (*puzzled*): But who can the *man* be? Something to do with him, of course, but. . . .

CLAUD (*interrupting*): Something to do with whom?

ANDREA: My first husband, dear.

CLAUD (*blankly*): Why?

ANDREA: Well, his name was Nightshade.

CLAUD (*draws away, sits up and looks at her—perplexed*): Nightshade?

ANDREA: Yes.

CLAUD: But how can that be?

ANDREA: Why shouldn't it?

CLAUD: You were Mrs. St. John Willoughby.

ANDREA: I changed my name, Claud—by deed poll. Didn't I tell you?

CLAUD: No!

ANDREA (*put out*): Oh, I *am* sorry! Oh, Claud! I wouldn't have had that happen for *worlds*, because, if there's one thing I'm determined upon *this* time, it's to start with no shadow of misunderstanding on either side.

CLAUD: I can't see that it matters much what your name was.

ANDREA: But it isn't that. It's a matter of trust.

CLAUD: It was only an oversight, anyway.

ANDREA (*gloomily*): I know—I had a terrible time with Dudley on account of oversights.

CLAUD (*getting irritable*): Who's Dudley?

ANDREA: My first husband, dear.

CLAUD: I thought you said his name was Roderick.

ANDREA: So it was. (*Idly picks up bouquet.*) I used to call him Dudley, though, because I thought it went better with Nightshade.

TRIAL AND ERROR

[*Looking deeply perplexed, Claud rises and moves round left end of couch.*]

CLAUD (*suddenly halting and pointing at her*): Oh, yes! (*Laughs and continues on up right where he stands looking out through the windows.*) What ever possessed you to marry such a chap, though?

ANDREA: I told you. I couldn't resist him. I knew perfectly well he was only after my money but— (*With a touch of wistfulness.*) Oh, he had such charm.

[*Claud throws her a cold look.*]

(*Continuing quite dreamily.*) I don't think I ever met anyone who. . . .

CLAUD (*suddenly struck by a thought, turns—interrupting*): But, look here, Andrea. . . .

ANDREA: Yes?

CLAUD (*moving down to her*): I thought you hadn't got any money.

ANDREA (*hangs her head and fiddles with the ribbon of the bouquet*): Yes—I know I told you that.

CLAUD: Then how could he have. . . . ?

ANDREA (*interrupting—rising*): Darling! (*Moves swiftly to him and stands close, looking deeply contrite.*) I lied to you. I've got quite a lot.

CLAUD: You have?

ANDREA: My aunt left it to me. The one who brought me up.

CLAUD (*bewildered*): What on earth's the point of lying about *that*?

ANDREA: Well, you see. . . . (*Breaks off.*)

CLAUD: Yes?

ANDREA: I wanted so much to be sure that—you weren't doing—what he did.

CLAUD: What, marrying you for your. . . . ? (*Turning away down right—angrily.*) Andrea!

ACT ONE

ANDREA (*following*): I didn't know *what* you were like then. I hardly *knew* you.

CLAUD (*shocked*): I dare say you didn't, but even so. . . . !

ANDREA (*taking his arm*): Don't be hurt, dear, please!

[*Claud turns his head away.*]

(*Continuing.*) It's only right to profit from past mistakes. You must see that.

CLAUD (*still surly*): Well, having duly profited, I suggest that we now forget the past—and everything *in* it.

ANDREA (*meekly*): Certainly, dear, if you wish.

CLAUD: And turn our attention to the future, for a change.

ANDREA: Of course! (*Drawing his face round to her.*) What's wrong with the present, though (*holds her face up provocatively*) in the meantime?

[*Claud seems to resist momentarily, then, after a precautionary look towards the kitchen, takes her in his arms—and they kiss.*]

CLAUD (*taking her hand*): Come and sit down!

[*Claud strides to couch, dragging her after him. Andrea throws her bouquet on to the coffee-table. Claud sits and draws Andrea down after him, so that she now reclines across his lap. They take each other in their arms.*]

ANDREA: We're going to be so happy.

[*They kiss again. But in the middle of this embrace Claud seems to lose interest. Slowly his lips leave hers, and his face comes up a little, wearing a thoughtful look.*]

(*In faint alarm.*) What's the matter?

CLAUD (*his face still very close to hers*): Look—I don't want to pry into your affairs, of course, but *why* did you change your name?

ANDREA (*surprised at the question*): Well, wouldn't you have done—in similar circumstances?

CLAUD (*looking blank*): What circumstances?

ANDREA (*disengages, sits up and stares at him*): You—you can't mean that you don't know what I'm referring to?

CLAUD: Well, I don't, I can assure you.

ANDREA (*suddenly agitated, rises and moves away right*): But it isn't possible. (*Faces him.*) Don't you ever read the papers? *Heaven knows* they made enough fuss about it.

CLAUD (*with the air of one who has taken enough—rising*): Andiea—if you're trying to tell me that there was some sort of a scandal—honestly, I think I'd rather not. . . . (*Breaks off, and moves away down left.*)

ANDREA: *Scandal!* My dear, you don't know what you're saying. Why do you think I went to live in France?

CLAUD (*getting ratty*): I haven't the least idea why anyone should live in France—except the French.

ANDREA (*going upstage*): But, this is awful, Claud. I don't know *what* to say. I took it that you *knew*. (*Coming down again.*) The very fact that you never mentioned it made me think that. I thought you were being delicate about it.

CLAUD: How could I mention something that I didn't know of?

ANDREA: Oh, I see that *now*, but I thought everyone knew. Why, good gracious me, I'm pointed out to American tourists in the streets of Cannes.

CLAUD: What *as*?

ACT ONE

ANDREA (*turning away right—becoming evasive*): Well—as the—as the woman who changed her name.

CLAUD (*crossing to centre.*): But *why*, Andrea?

ANDREA (*her back to him*): Because—because of the things that came out in Court.

CLAUD: *Ab!* “*Court!*” I see! So that’s another lie, is it?

ANDREA: What is?

CLAUD: I thought you were supposed to be a widow.

ANDREA (*quite pained*): Claud—you don’t think it was a Divorce Court, do you?

CLAUD: Wasn’t it?

ANDREA (*shocked*): Good heavens, no!

CLAUD: Oh!

ANDREA: I *am* a widow. Or rather, I was—until this morning. He fell off a liner.

CLAUD: Who did?

ANDREA: Dudley! In the middle of the sea. (*Goes up right.*)

CLAUD: I’m sorry. I didn’t realise. It was a Court of Enquiry!

[*Andrea clears her throat and looks at her feet.*]

Is that what you mean?

ANDREA (*innocently*): What, dear?

CLAUD: It was a Coroner’s Court!

ANDREA (*looking uncomfortable*): Well, not exactly, no! You see—I was supposed to have *pushed* him off the liner.

CLAUD (*going to her—incredulously*): You were supposed to have *pushed* him off the liner?

ANDREA (*airily*): Yes.

CLAUD: Deliberately?

ANDREA: Oh, yes.

CLAUD (*staggered*): You—you don’t mean. . . . You can’t mean that—that it was a Criminal Court?

TRIAL AND ERROR

ANDREA: Old Bailey!

CLAUD (*staring at her*): You were accused of. . . ?
(*Breaks off.*)

ANDREA: Tried for it!

CLAUD: Murder?

ANDREA (*a little impatiently*): Well, of course, Claud!

CLAUD (*horrified*): Andrea! (*Turns away to centre.*)

ANDREA (*a little sulkily*): I got off.

CLAUD (*turning, with sudden violence*): Well, of course you got off. I can see that.

ANDREA (*in slightly hurt tones*): There's no sense in getting huffy about it, dear. After all, it *is* over and done with. (*Moves to recess.*) It wasn't my fault, anyway. (*Sits, right end of seat.*)

CLAUD (*crossing to her*): Whose fault *was* it, then?

ANDREA: Phoebe Hogg's!

CLAUD: Who the hell's Phoebe Hogg?

ANDREA: Oh, some fool of a girl on the ship. (*Resentfully.*) There wouldn't have been any fuss at all if it hadn't been for her.

CLAUD: What did *she* do?

ANDREA: Said she saw me, that's all.

CLAUD: Saw you *what*?

ANDREA: Push Dudley *in*, Claud! (*Her tone suggests that he is being very obtuse.*)

CLAUD (*claps his hand to his brow*): This is frightful! (*Turns and comes down right.*)

ANDREA (*aggrieved*): I can't see what's so frightful about it. He was an awfully bad man, anyway.

CLAUD (*turns and stares at her*): Do you mean by that, that there was a miscarriage of justice—that you *shouldn't* have got off?

ANDREA (*indignantly*): Of course I don't. I had every right to.

CLAUD (*relaxing with relief*): Oh!

ACT ONE

ANDREA: There wasn't enough evidence. Even the Judge admitted that, and *he* was on the other side.

[*Claud seems to give up. With a gesture of defeat, he sinks into chair, down right, and abandons himself to a sort of stunned gloom. Andrea regards him with mounting compassion for a moment, then rises and comes down to him*]

(*Kindly.*) Darling—this is worrying to you, I can see that. Wouldn't it be better if you let me tell you about it?

CLAUD (*ironically—as if the thought had not occurred to him before*): Perhaps it would.

[*Andrea at once sits on the floor at his feet.*]

ANDREA: Well, you see—Dudley and I were coming back from Cape Town where we'd been to see some friends—and the ship was somewhere off that lump—you know—that sticks out on the left-hand side of Africa (*Looks up at him*)

[*Claud nods.*]

(*Continuing.*) Well, it was a very hot night, and, also, there had been a bit of a party. Heaven knows what *he'd* had, but I'd had two glasses of champagne and a green Chartreuse. So I. . . . Or was it Crème de Menthe?

CLAUD: Does it matter?

ANDREA: Yes, dear, it *does* matter. *You* don't know what falsehood can do to a marriage. *I do.* He was a shocking liar.

CLAUD: I see! I'm sorry.

ANDREA (*considers again*): I think it was green Chartreuse.

TRIAL AND ERROR

CLAUD: Right! (*Turns away.*)

ANDREA: So I got Dudley to take me up on to the boat deck for some fresh air, d'you see?

[*Claud nods.*]

Which he very kindly did. And when we were up there, a scarf I was wearing blew off and caught under one of the boats, and Dudley very kindly climbed over the railings to get it for me. (*Pauses.*)

CLAUD (*turning to her again*): Well?

ANDREA: Well, now—according to the prosecution—that's where I saw my opportunity—see? *They* said I leaned over the railings and pushed him.

CLAUD (*sitting forward in his chair to question her*): That's what the prosecution said?

ANDREA: Yes.

CLAUD: And what about the defence?

ANDREA: My counsel, you mean? Old Smithers?

CLAUD: Yes. What did *he* say?

ANDREA (*giggling*): I couldn't make out what he was talking about half the time.

CLAUD (*persevering patiently*): Look! Did he put you in the witness-box?

ANDREA: Yes.

CLAUD: Well, what did you say *yourself*?

ANDREA: About what?

CLAUD (*with iron control*): In answer to the charge that you leaned over the railings and pushed him!

ANDREA: Oh, I just said I was trying to get him back.

CLAUD: Andrea—how did the prosecution know that you were doing anything at all?

ANDREA: Ah, that's where the girl comes in.

CLAUD: The one who was supposed to have seen it?

ANDREA: Yes.

CLAUD: And she thought you were pushing—not pulling?

ACT ONE

ANDREA: She was *sure* I was pushing.

CLAUD: But it was dark. How *could* she be sure?

ANDREA: Oh, she could see all right. There was such a lovely moon.

CLAUD: Then how were you able to show that she was wrong?

ANDREA: I wasn't. It was her word against mine, that's all.

CLAUD (*hopefully*): Well, it was yours that they believed, anyway.

ANDREA: Do you know—I don't think anyone believed a word I said from start to finish.

CLAUD (*getting quite frantic*): But, Andrea, they *must* have done.

ANDREA: Why?

CLAUD: You were acquitted!

ANDREA: Ah, but that wasn't so much a matter of believing me as disbelieving the girl. You see, *she'd* been having a party too.

CLAUD: You mean they couldn't rely on her evidence?

ANDREA: That's it, exactly! (*Gets to her feet, yawning and beginning to move left.*) Well—it was nasty while it lasted—but all's well that ends well, and. . . .

CLAUD (*rising in dismay and starting after her—interrupting.*) But that's not *all*? You're not going to leave it at that?

ANDREA: It's all that mattered, dear. (*Takes up her handbag from coffee-table, and begins vaguely searching in it.*) There *were* one or two people who came in and said that Dudley had seduced their wives—you know—to show motive—and a charwoman who testified that she'd seen me hit him with a piece of Crown Derby, which was a lie because it was Spode. (*Closes handbag.*) But nothing of importance. It all really centred round the. . . .

TRIAL AND ERROR

CLAUD (*crossing behind couch—interrupting*): Andrea—don't you realise that what I want to know is not whether you got off; it's not even *how* you got off—it's whether you *did* it?

ANDREA: How do you mean? (*Sits on couch.*)

CLAUD (*left of couch*): Whether you *did* push him in!

ANDREA: Didn't I say?

CLAUD: No, you *didn't* say.

ANDREA: Oh! (*In faint surprise.*) And you want me to?

CLAUD: Well, of *course* I want you to.

ANDREA (*blankly*): Why?

CLAUD: What do you mean, "why?"

ANDREA: I should have thought you'd take it for granted that I didn't.

CLAUD (*getting uncomfortable*): Well, I do, but. . . .

ANDREA: Without having to be told. D'you think I should be likely to do a thing like that?

CLAUD: No, but. . . .

ANDREA: Then, why ask?

[*Claud is reduced to frustrated silence.*]

Don't you trust me?

CLAUD: Yes, of course I trust you.

ANDREA: Then, I'm sorry, dear—but I don't understand.

CLAUD (*with a defeated air*): All right! Forget it! (*Moves away down L. and sits*)

ANDREA: I'll tell you with pleasure if you *want* me to, of course, but. . . .

CLAUD (*interrupting loudly*): The question's withdrawn. (*Folds his arms and turns away.*)

ANDREA: Thank you, darling! (*Puts handbag back on coffee-table.*)

CLAUD: And I'm sorry!

ACT ONE

ANDREA (*smiling indulgently*): There's no need to be sorry. You spoke without thinking, that's all. (*Bristly.*) Now! Let's talk about something not so. . . .

CLAUD (*interrupting*): I don't want to talk about anything, if you don't mind.

ANDREA (*dismayed, rises, goes to him, goes down on her knees and takes hold of him*): Darling—don't be cross! I know it was wrong of me not to make sure that you knew about all this before, but —*please* don't be cross!

[*Claud does not reply.*]

(*Sits back on her heels—continuing.*) Please, Claud! It worries me when you behave like that. It's just the way Dudley started.

CLAUD (*turning to her—bitterly*): Did you forget to tell *him* something, then?

ANDREA (*a little self-consciously*): As a matter of fact, I did.

CLAUD (*deeply ironical*): There wasn't another husband who fell off a liner, was there, before *him*?

ANDREA (*ignoring his ill-temper*): I neglected to mention that my aunt would be living with us, that's all.

CLAUD: Oh! Is she going to live with us too?

ANDREA: She's dead, dear!

CLAUD (*sarcastically*): You're sure of that?

ANDREA (*laughingly*): Of course I'm sure. (*Rises and turns away to coffee-table.*) I nursed her in her last illness.

CLAUD: Is that the one who left you the money?

ANDREA (*brightly*): That's right! (*Takes up bouquet.*)

CLAUD: I thought you said he married you for your money!

ANDREA: So he did.

TRIAL AND ERROR

CLAUD: But how *could* he have done if your aunt was still alive when he married you?

ANDREA (*idly examining the flowers*): Well, he could see how decrepit she was, Claud. Anyone could. That's what I mean. It was so silly of him to make such a fuss. She couldn't hope to be with us for long, poor pet. Though, oddly enough, it wasn't old age that she died of at all, in the end.

[*Claud seems suddenly gripped by a horrid suspicion.*]

CLAUD (*stiffening*): What *did* she die of, Andrea?

ANDREA (*buries her nose in the flowers, then—*) Botulism!

CLAUD: What the hell's botulism?

ANDREA (*turning to him—plaintively*): Claud—we don't want to talk about things like that. This is our wedding night.

CLAUD (*with a sort of bitter surprise*): Good God! So it is! (*Turns away, morosely hunched in his chair.*)

[*Andrea stands a moment looking a little forlornly at Claud's uncompromising back view*]

ANDREA (*sighs*): Well—I'm going to bed, anyway. (*Turns away up left.*)

[*Exit Andrea by staircase. Claud at once rises and crosses in aimless agitation, right*]

CLAUD (*muttering worriedly*): Botulism! Botulism!

[*Enter Mrs. O'Connor from kitchen. Dance music emerges.*]

MRS. O'C. (*remaining in the doorway*): Oh, I forgot to tell you! A gentleman called. Wanted to. . . .

ACT ONE

CLAUD (*interrupting*): Mrs. O'Connor, is there a dictionary in the house?

MRS. O'C. (*indicating door down L.*): Well, that's the library. I don't know whether. . . .

[*Enter Dudley on to sun-deck from left.*]

CLAUD (*interrupting—making for library*): Ah! Thank you!

[*Dudley appears tentatively in the doorway.*]

DUDLEY: I say!

[*Claud, at library door, halts and turns in surprise.*]

MRS. O.C.: Ah!

[*Exit Mrs. O'Connor into kitchen. The music ceases as she closes the door.*]

DUDLEY (*advancing a little into the room*): I'm terribly sorry to come in like this. I'm sure it's not convenient, but. . . . (*Breaks off.*) You are Mr. Merrilees, I take it?

CLAUD: What is it you want?

DUDLEY (*coming down and crossing*): Well—that's a thing I think I'd better lead up to a little. (*Begins to take off his coat.*) You see, what I have to tell you. . . .

CLAUD (*interrupting*): Look—I'm awfully sorry, my friend; I don't know who you are or what you're doing here, but it's late, and I want to go to bed.

DUDLEY (*meaningly*): I can well understand that you do—but that, unfortunately, is the very thing that I'm here to prevent. (*Throws coat over back of couch.*)

CLAUD: What the devil do you mean?

DUDLEY (*regretfully*): I had intended—in common

humanity—to break it gently. But I perceive that you are not a man with whom the indirect approach is possible. (*Fixes Claud with his eye.*) I—am Roderick Nightshade, Mr. Merrilees.

CLAUD: Oh, you're the man who called at my office.
DUDLEY: That is so.

CLAUD: Well, what's it all. . . ? Did you say *Roderick* Nightshade?

DUDLEY: I did.

CLAUD (*stares at him*): But—but that was the name of my wife's first husband.

DUDLEY: That *is* the name of your wife's first husband.

CLAUD (*incredulously*): You don't mean. . . ? You're not implying. . . ? (*Breaks off.*)

DUDLEY (*with real regret*): I can't *tell* you how sorry I am.

CLAUD (*hurrying to him with outstretched hand—delightedly*): But this is wonderful!

DUDLEY (*astomshed*): Huh?

CLAUD (*seizing Dudley's hand and wringing it*): I'm overjoyed—delighted! You—you don't *know* what a relief it is. I couldn't *be* more pleased.

DUDLEY (*mystified*): But, look. . . .

CLAUD (*interrupting*): And Andra! Just *think* what it will mean to *her*! (*Drops Dudley's hand and turns away.*) I must *tell* her. (*Making for staircase.*) I must tell her at *once*.

DUDLEY: But just a minute!

CLAUD (*halting*): Yes?

DUDLEY (*looking bemused*): I don't quite follow this. Why should you be pleased to see me?

CLAUD (*returning to him—in some surprise*): Why!—your mere presence here, my dear fellow! The very fact that you're *alive*! Surely you must realise what a terrible shadow it lifts from my married life?

ACT ONE

DUDLEY. I should have thought it meant you hadn't got a married life.

CLAUD: What! (*The elation drains from his face.*)

DUDLEY (*beginning unhappily*): Well. . . .

CLAUD (*interrupting*): You don't mean that *you* still regard yourself as married to Andrea?

DUDLEY (*regretfully*): Nothing's happened to unmarried us—has it?

CLAUD (*looking completely stunned*): No, I. . . . Good heavens!

DUDLEY (*taking Claud's arm and piloting him to couch—kindly*): Look! You sit down, old chap, and let me get you a drink.

[*Claud sinks into couch. Dudley goes up to sideboard and begins to pour two neat whiskies.*]

CLAUD (*after a dazed pause*): But—this morning! What we went through together this morning! Was it—meaningless?

DUDLEY (*reluctantly*): Well—not so much meaningless, perhaps, as—bigamous.

CLAUD (*moaningly*): Oh, no! That's *too* much!

DUDLEY (*coming down with glasses*): Don't see how it can be anything else. (*Hands a glass to Claud.*)

CLAUD (*almost snatching glass, in sudden anger*): For God's sake, then, why did you leave it until *now*?

DUDLEY: I didn't know where she was. Couldn't find her. (*Draws newspaper from the pocket of his overcoat and moves round left of couch.*) I shouldn't know now, if it hadn't been for this (*Puts down his drink and reads from paper.*) "Mr. Claud Merrilces, the architect, and Mrs. Andrea St. John Willoughby, leaving Caxton Hall after their marriage this morning." (*Passes paper to Claud.*) There you are! Lunch Edition! First I knew of it. (*Picks up his drink, turns to chair down left and sits.*)

TRIAL AND ERROR

[*Claud puts down his drink, gets out his spectacles and regards the picture gloomily.*]

I got your office from the telephone directory—found out where you'd gone—borrowed a car from a friend—and came down. Didn't waste *much* time. (*Suddenly looks puzzled.*) By the way. . . .

CLAUD (*morosely*): Well? (*Puts spectacles away*)

DUDLEY: Has she married somebody else in the meantime, or what?

CLAUD (*startled*): Uh? Not that I know of. Why?

DUDLEY: Then why the "Mrs. St. John Willoughby"?

CLAUD (*relaxing*): Oh, that! She changed her name, that's all.

DUDLEY (*perplexed*): Changed it! What for?

CLAUD (*rising and throwing paper down on coffee-table—irritably*): Oh, use your brain, man, for heaven's sake! (*Moves away up right.*)

[*Enter Andrea by staircase.*]

ANDREA (*as she enters*): Forgot to put the car away. (*Making for front door*) Really, dear, you must learn to drive. (*Glances at the glum Claud, halts and changes her direction towards him.*) Claud—you're not still fussing about. . . .

[*Dudley rises slowly. Andrea glances at him, continues on a few steps, then stops in her tracks and turns to stare at him. For a moment she remains thus, frozen with astonishment.*]

No! It can't be!

DUDLEY (*smiling regretfully*): It is, you know. (*Puts down his drink.*)

ACT ONE

ANDREA (*still dazed*): We—we thought you were dead.

DUDLEY (*with a glance at Claud*): So I gather.

ANDREA (*suddenly running to him*): Oh, but how lovely! (*Locks him in a fervent embrace.*) I—I can't believe it. (*Kisses him heartily—then to Claud.*) It's Dudley, dear—alive! (*To Dudley again.*) Oh, but you've met my husband!

DUDLEY }
 CLAUD } (*together*): { Yes. (*Inclines his head to Claud*)
 { (*Bowing slightly.*) How d'you do?

ANDREA (*to Dudley*): We were only married this morning—and now you. . . . (*Squeezing his arm.*) Oh, darling, this makes my day complete.

[*Neither man seems quite equal to the situation. Dudley is a little embarrassed. Claud looks on unbelievably.*]

DUDLEY (*weakly*): Well, I'm—glad you're pleased to see me, Andrea.

ANDREA: How can you say such a thing? It's like another wedding present. (*Drawing him to couch*) Here, come and sit down! Get him a drink, Claud! (*Takes in glasses.*) Oh—you have!

[*Andrea plants Dudley in couch, hands him his drink and sits beside him right.*]

(*Continuing.*) Oh, this is nice.

DUDLEY: Actually I felt a bit awkward—barging in at a time like this.

ANDREA: Awkward! Why?

DUDLEY: Well, I—I knew you'd just got married, and. . . .

ANDREA (*interrupting*): Why didn't you come to the wedding?

TRIAL AND ERROR

DUDLEY (*picks up newspaper*): I didn't know until it was over. (*Shows her the picture.*)

ANDREA (*taking newspaper—interestedly*): Oh!—a picture! (*Studies it—then, to Claud.*) What a pity you were making such a face, dear! (*Puts down newspaper—to Dudley.*) But where have you *been* all this time?

DUDLEY (*something in his manner becoming subtly evasive*): It's a bit of a long story, really.

ANDREA (*innocently*): Oh, we're in no hurry to go to bed (*to Claud*) are we?

[*Claud shakes his head in a dazed sort of way, shrugs slightly, moves to recess and collapses on to right end of seat.*]

(*Continuing, to Dudley.*) And how did you manage it? I mean, the last I saw of you, you seemed to be going down for the third time.

DUDLEY: Somebody heaved a lifebuoy after me. I hung on to that.

ANDREA: The captain wasted *hours* looking for you, dear.

DUDLEY: I know.

ANDREA: He was furious.

DUDLEY (*plaintively*): I couldn't make myself heard.

ANDREA: How long did you have to hang on to the lifebuoy, then?

DUDLEY (*resentfully*): Until about half-way through the next day.

[*Andrea makes a sympathetic noise.*]

Then I was picked up by some native fishermen—that's about all there is to it, really. (*He does not seem anxious to pursue the subject.*)

ANDREA: But where have you been ever since?

DUDLEY (*vaguely*): Out there!

ACT ONE

ANDREA: In Africa?

DUDLEY: Yes.

ANDREA: Why didn't you let me know, dear?

DUDLEY (*hesitates slightly*): I—I'd lost my memory, Andrea.

ANDREA: You what?

DUDLEY (*with apparent effort*): You see—it had all been rather a shock. I—I was really quite ill. Even now I. . . . (*Breaks off, puts down his drink and passes a shaky hand across his brow. One feels that he is acting.*)

ANDREA (*in deep sympathy*): Oh—poor darling!

CLAUD (*rather aggressively*): Hadn't you anything in your pockets to identify you?

DUDLEY (*pitiifully*): Nothing! I—just didn't know who I was!

ANDREA: Perhaps you'd rather not talk about it, dear?

DUDLEY (*gratefully*): Well, if you *don't* mind, I. . . .

CLAUD: How long did this go on, then—not knowing who you were?

DUDLEY: Until quite recently.

ANDREA: Nearly a year?

DUDLEY (*to Andrea*): Yes. As soon as I remembered, of course, I came back for you.

ANDREA (*understandingly*): Of course!

CLAUD: He couldn't find you, though—or, that's what he says.

ANDREA: Well, naturally, Claud! I'd changed my name and gone to live in France.

DUDLEY (*looking puzzled again*): Yes—what was the idea of that?

ANDREA: What?

DUDLEY: Calling yourself Mrs. St. John Willoughby!

ANDREA (*blankly*): I liked the sound of it, that's all. I mean—if you *have* got to change your name, you might as well pick one you like.

DUDLEY: But, that's what I mean. Why change it at all?

ANDREA: *Well*, because. . . .

CLAUD (*suddenly rising—interrupting*): Well, I'm sorry, but I don't believe a word of it.

ANDREA: What?

CLAUD (*moving to centre*): All this nonsense about amnesia. He could easily have found out who he was through the name of the ship on the lifebuoy for one thing—if he'd wanted to.

ANDREA: Well, you don't think *I* believe it, do you?

CLAUD (*in surprise*): Don't you?

ANDREA: My dear Claud, nobody ever believes Dudley.

DUDLEY (*reaching for his drink, quite unabashed*): I must say I hadn't thought of *that*, though—about the lifebuoy.

ANDREA (*to Claud*): You see? He hardly expects to be believed. (*In reproof.*) But I don't think *you* know him well enough, yet, to try and trip him up like that.

CLAUD (*going up to glass doors*): Well, I devoutly hope I shall never know him any better. (*Stands looking out into the night.*)

ANDREA (*rising and going to left end of recess*): Claud, dear, I can't think why you're adopting this attitude to Dudley. He hasn't done anything to *you*. (*Glances at Dudley.*)

[*Dudley avoids her eye.*]

(*Continuing, to Claud, suspiciously.*) Or *has* he?

CLAUD (*turning to her*): He's only turned up on my wedding night and claimed my wife as his, that's all.

ANDREA (*at first uncomprehendingly*): Your wife—oh, me, you mean!

CLAUD: *Yes—you!*

ACT ONE

ANDREA: But he's only joking! (*Turns and looks at Dudley.*)

CLAUD: Ask him!

DUDLEY (*uncomfortably*): I've told him how sorry I am. I don't know what more I can do.

ANDREA (*returning to right of couch—incredulously*): Do you mean that you *are* claiming me?

DUDLEY (*with a note of defiance*): I don't have to. You—*are* my wife, and I'd rather like to have you back, that's all.

ANDREA (*astounded*): *What on earth* are you talking about, Dudley? And, for heaven's sake, what do you want me back for? You never appreciated me when you had me.

DUDLEY (*his manner suddenly grave, puts down his now empty glass, rises and turns away before replying*): No—I didn't. God knows I didn't. It wasn't until I—couldn't find you, Andrea—until I began to think that I might never see you again, that—I realised what had gone out of my life. (*He is acting again.*)

ANDREA: What *bad*, dear?

DUDLEY: Something—*healing*!

CLAUD (*muttering*): Healing, my foot!

DUDLEY (*still deeply moved*): I just found that I—couldn't get on without you, Andrea, that's all.

CLAUD: Couldn't get on without her money, more like it!

ANDREA (*wearily*): Claud, dear, please don't keep on pointing out the obvious. I'm trying to find out why he thinks he's my husband. (*To Dudley.*) *Have you a reason?*

DUDLEY: Only that I married you first.

ANDREA (*relieved*): Oh, well—if that's all—there's nothing in that. (*Moves to couch.*) I thought you were dead. (*Sits.*) You don't think I should have married Claud if I'd known you were alive, do you?

TRIAL AND ERROR

DUDLEY (*moving to left of couch*): Of course not! And you had every justification for believing me dead. I appreciate that.

ANDREA: Well, then. . . !

DUDLEY: But, unfortunately, dear, it's not what *you* believe that matters.

ANDREA: What does, then?

DUDLEY: The simple and undeniable fact that I'm alive.

ANDREA (*scornfully amused*): Well, really—you never were exactly logical, Dudley, but that's absurd. What on earth has *that* got to do with it? Of course you're alive—in *fact*. Nobody disputes that. But it's what you are in *law* that matters.

DUDLEY: What am I in law, then?

ANDREA: Dead as a door-nail!

DUDLEY: Who says so?

ANDREA: Well, it stands to reason. You *must* be officially dead before anyone can be hanged for killing you.

DUDLEY (*mystified*): Who's been hanged?

ANDREA: As it happens, nobody. But I should have been, shouldn't I, if they had believed that girl. I mean, the law doesn't even *try* you for murder if it thinks the victim's still alive. That's common sense.

[*Dudley is now completely bemused.*]

CLAUD (*coming down—pessimistically*): Still, I doubt whether there's much in that argument, you know.

ANDREA (*turns to Claud in astonishment*): Are you agreeing with him?

CLAUD: Not exactly, no, but. . . .

ANDREA: What *do* you mean, then? Don't you want me, or what?

CLAUD (*moving in to centre*): Of course I want you. It's no good shutting your eyes to facts, though.

ACT ONE

ANDREA: Well, really, you talk as if you were perfectly ready to hand me over to the first Tom, Dick or Harry who comes along.

CLAUD (*harassed*): Not at all, I. . . .

DUDLEY (*interrupting loudly—to Andrea*): *Look!* Would you mind telling me what the hell you're talking about? *What murder?*

ANDREA (*stares at him*): Well, yours, of course.

DUDLEY (*seems to think a moment, then*): Well, I don't know. I suppose I'm being very stupid, but. . . . (*Breaks off.*)

ANDREA (*incredulously*): Do you mean that you don't know about it?

DUDLEY: Yes, I *do* mean that I don't know about it.

CLAUD (*crossing to Dudley*): In that case, my friend, let me have the exquisite pleasure of telling you. While you were so callously engaged in keeping your continued existence a secret—*your wife* very nearly went to the gallows on your account.

DUDLEY (*thunderstruck*): What!

ANDREA (*to Claud, complainingly*): There you go again! I'm *not* his wife.

CLAUD (*irritably*): You were at that time, anyway. There can't be any doubt about that.

ANDREA: Yes, but. . . .

DUDLEY (*to Andrea, interrupting*): Is this true?

ANDREA: Certainly it's true. (*Counting the events on her fingers.*) I was confined to my stateroom by the captain, arrested when the ship got in, charged and committed before the Essex Justices at Tilbury, sent to Holloway to await trial, and tried at the Old Bailey.

[*Dudley is dumbfounded.*]

CLAUD (*moving away down right*): And what's more—he knows it.

TRIAL AND ERROR

ANDREA: Why should you say that? He mightn't have seen the papers—especially in Africa. You didn't—even at Cheltenham.

DUDLEY (*still unable to take it in*): They thought you'd killed me?

ANDREA: I've got the press cuttings, if you don't believe me.

[*Dudley sinks into chair down left.*]

CLAUD: He would have made it his business to see the papers—wherever he was. Anyone would, who'd fallen off a ship.

DUDLEY (*rather weakly*): There weren't any papers where I was.

ANDREA (*to Claud*): See?

CLAUD: That's nonsense! There are papers everywhere nowadays.

ANDREA: Well, you're not suggesting he kept quiet on purpose, are you?

CLAUD: I wouldn't put it past him. (*Sits chair down right.*)

ANDREA: But—why should he?

CLAUD: He may have wanted you to pay the extreme penalty, for all I know.

DUDLEY: Don't be so damn silly!

ANDREA (*to Claud, indignantly*): That would have been almost like murder.

DUDLEY (*defensively*): I didn't know a thing about it, Andrea.

ANDREA: I'm sure you didn't, dear. (*Then, as if soliloquising—with less confidence.*) It does seem a little odd, though, I must admit.

DUDLEY (*getting harassed*): What's odd about it?

ANDREA (*looking worried*): Well—it was even on the B.B.C.

ACT ONE

CLAUD: Exactly! Where could he have been to get away from *that*?

DUDLEY (*rising and going up left—sullenly*): All right! If you must know—I was—I was in prison.

ANDREA (*relieved*): There! I knew there must be some perfectly innocent explanation

CLAUD: In prison where?

DUDLEY: Liberia.

CLAUD: How long for?

DUDLEY: Nine months! And if you want to know *what* for, you can mind your own business because that's got nothing to do with it.

ANDREA (*to Claud*): Now are you satisfied?

CLAUD (*grudgingly*): Certainly seems more likely than anything else he's said. I don't see why he shouldn't have written, though, to say he was alive, even if he didn't know what was going on.

DUDLEY (*righteously*): And disclose where I was? I've got *some* self-respect, you know.

CLAUD: That, I feel, is the most remarkable assertion yet.

[*Even the good-natured Dudley is getting tired of this hostility.*]

DUDLEY (*going to Claud*): Look here—I thought you were supposed to be pleased to see me!

ANDREA (*to Dudley*): What on earth can have given you that idea?

DUDLEY (*returning up centre*): He said so.

[*Andrea looks at Claud for an explanation.*]

CLAUD (*beginning to look uncomfortable*): Well, when he first came in, the only thing I could think of was that it showed that you—well, that you weren't a murderess.

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ANDREA (*ominously*): Showed who?

CLAUD: Oh, not me, dear, the world in general.

ANDREA: Oh!

DUDLEY (*to Claud*): Actually, of course, it didn't show anything of the kind. All it did show was that she's not a successful murderess.

[*Claud is quite undismayed.*]

ANDREA (*appealing to Claud*): There! Now, there's an example. You see how the man splits hairs! Can you wonder that I found him impossible to live with?

CLAUD (*makes a reassuring gesture to Andrea, then—to Dudley, confidently*): You mean, she might have *tried* to kill you and failed?

DUDLEY (*maliciously*): For all *you* know! (*Goes to recess and sits morosely, left end.*)

ANDREA (*to Claud*): Take no notice, dear! He's only trying to get his own back.

CLAUD (*rising*): I know, I know. (*Going to right of recess—to Dudley.*) For all *I* know, she might have done, yes. But not for all *you* know, my friend. Indeed, you're the only person—apart from Andrea herself—who *does* know, for certain.

ANDREA: Well, if you have it in your mind to *ask* him, Claud, you'd better save your breath because, whatever the truth is, you'll only get one answer from *him*—and that is that *I did*.

DUDLEY (*resentfully perplexed*): What!

CLAUD (*a little startled*): Why?

ANDREA (*to Claud*): Because, obviously, dear, if he wants me back, he's going to give the answer best calculated to remove your competition.

CLAUD (*relaxing*): Oh!

ANDREA (*turning to Dudley*): I warn you, though, if you *do* say anything like that—after I've been found not guilty—I can have you for slander.

ACT ONE

DUDLEY (*beginning protestingly*): I haven't the slightest int. . . .

CLAUD (*with a satisfied air—interrupting*): In any case, my dear, he's already answered the question by the very fact of wanting you back. No man—not even *he*—would want a wife he believed to be a killer—however rich she might be.

[*Andrea does not seem particularly impressed. Dudley is not impressed at all. He looks like a man with a secret worry.*]

ANDREA (*rising*): Well, if you're satisfied, dear, I'm sure I am. (*Going to Dudley.*) And now, if you don't mind, both of you—I *must* go to bed.

[*Dudley rises.*]

(*Continuing*) Good-night, Dudley, dear! (*Kisses him.*) You *are* staying the night, I suppose?

[*Even Dudley seems a little taken by surprise.*]

CLAUD (*incredulously*): Staying the night?

ANDREA (*to Claud*): He won't get in anywhere round here, dear.

[*Claud turns away with a gesture of despair.*]

DUDLEY Well, I have got a bag in the car, of course.
ANDREA: Then do! (*Crossing to stairs.*) You don't want to go all the way back tonight, and there *is* a room. Claud will show you. (*At stairs—to Claud.*) And then—don't be too long, will you, dear? (*Going upstairs.*) It's been a heavy day.

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[Exit Andrea by staircase Dudley re-seats himself Claud goes to coffee-table, picks up his glass, drains it, takes it up to sideboard and begins to replenish it.]

DUDLEY (*worried*). Look! What does she say, herself, about that?

CLAUD: About what?

DUDLEY: About whether she pushed me in! Doesn't she deny it?

CLAUD (*loftily*): Andrea would naturally regard it as beneath her dignity to answer such a question. What does it matter to *you* what she says, anyway? (*Going to Dudley in sudden suspicion.*) Don't you *know* whether she pushed you in?

[Dudley looks uneasy and avoids his eye.]

(*Continuing.*) Don't you?

DUDLEY (*with a note of defiance*): No, as a matter of fact, I don't. (*Rises and moves down right.*)

CLAUD (*following*): You don't?

DUDLEY: There had been a bit of a party that night.

CLAUD (*horrified*): You mean you can't remember?

DUDLEY: Not a thing—until after I got in the sea. That seemed to sober me.

CLAUD: But think what you're saying, man! (*His dismay is monumental.*)

DUDLEY: Well, I don't like it any more than you do.

CLAUD: It means that nobody knows (*indicates staircase*) but *her*. It's—it's an appalling thought.

DUDLEY: I know. (*Sits gloomily, down right.*)

CLAUD (*muttering*): Good heavens! (*Crosses to chair down left and sits.*)

[There is a worried silence.]

DUDLEY: What do you think yourself? Do *you* think she pushed me in?

ACT ONE

CLAUD: How the hell should I know?

DUDLEY: Put, I mean, you know her. Is she the sort of woman you'd expect to do a thing like that?

CLAUD: I couldn't have married her if she were, should I?

DUDLEY (*quite impressed*): That's true, you know.

CLAUD: You know her better than I do, anyway.

DUDLEY: What about it?

CLAUD: Well—what's your opinion of her?

DUDLEY (*brightening*): Well, if it comes to that, of course, I married her *too*, didn't I?

CLAUD (*brightening*): That's right! You *did*.

DUDLEY (*rising and crossing to couch*): Well, we can't both be wrong about her, can we?

CLAUD: Well, not as wrong as all that, surely!

DUDLEY: I mean, we're neither of us complete fools, are we?

CLAUD: No, we're men of experience.

DUDLEY: Judgment!

[*The atmosphere is getting quite gay.*]

CLAUD: Of course! (*Rising.*) Look! (*Picking up glasses from coffee-table and bearing them up to sideboard.*) Let's have another drink and talk it over sensibly.

DUDLEY (*sitting, couch*): By all means!

CLAUD (*pouring drinks*): There's no need to get in a panic over a thing like this.

DUDLEY: None whatever! (*Ponders.*) And there's another thing, you know.

CLAUD: Oh?

DUDLEY (*looking clever*): Now look! I don't *know* whether she pushed me in, do I?

CLAUD (*coming down with drinks*): No.

DUDLEY (*craftily*): But *she* didn't know that, did she—until I told her?

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CLAUD (*looking unintelligent*): Well? (*Hands drink to Dudley.*)

DUDLEY: Well, for all *she* knew, I was in a position to say she'd done it—if she *had*.

CLAUD: What about it? (*Sits beside Dudley.*)

DUDLEY: She didn't seem concerned, that's all.

CLAUD: No, by Jove, she didn't, did she?

DUDLEY: Delighted to see me, in fact!

CLAUD (*very impressed*): I say, you know, you've got something pretty conclusive there.

DUDLEY (*looking smug*): I think so.

CLAUD (*lifting his glass*): Well—your good health, Mr. Nightshade!

DUDLEY (*lifting his glass*): And yours, Mr. Merrilees!

[*They drink gaily.*]

CLAUD (*more soberly*): Look—I don't want to appear rude, but would you mind telling me—do you *know* the law when you say she's still your wife—or is that just your opinion?

DUDLEY (*a little uncertainly*): Well—I must admit—I don't know absolutely for certain. I did pop in to a Public Reference Library for a few minutes this afternoon—but I didn't seem able to find the right book. Still, it seems common sense.

CLAUD: That, I must admit. (*With a flicker of hope.*) However, the law is not always what one would expect.

DUDLEY: It isn't. For instance, you wouldn't expect to get nine months for trying to get into somebody's harem, would you?

CLAUD (*laughing*): Is that what you did?

DUDLEY (*laughing*): That's all.

CLAUD (*laughing*): Well, I'm blowed!

ACT ONE

[*They enjoy the joke a moment longer, and take another drink.*]

Well, obviously, the first thing to be done tomorrow is to see a lawyer and find out whose wife she is.

DUDLEY: Yes. (*Hesitates.*) In the meantime. . . . (*Breaks off—looking uncomfortable.*)

CLAUD: Yes?

DUDLEY: It's going to be a bit awkward for you, isn't it?

CLAUD: In what way?

DUDLEY (*delicately*): Well, the—er—the nuptials will have to be suspended *pro tem*, won't they?

CLAUD (*stiffening*): I naturally appreciate that.

DUDLEY: Yes, but—does *she* appreciate it, that's the point?

CLAUD (*coldly*): I think I have sufficient tact and delicacy to make it clear to her.

DUDLEY (*sbrugs*): It's not the sort of thing I should care to have to make clear to Andrea. (*With a touch of malice.*) You may find it easier, of course.

CLAUD (*rising and taking his glass up to sideboard*): Well, as far as that goes—perhaps you'll be good enough to mind your own business!

DUDLEY (*quite mildly*): But I think it's very *much* my business.

CLAUD (*returning to right of couch*): Only in so far as it concerns where you're going to spend the night.

DUDLEY (*mystified*): Where I'm going to spend the night?

CLAUD: Certainly! The first thing that becomes apparent is that I shall need the room *you* were going to have.

DUDLEY: Why?

CLAUD: Because it's the only other one in the house.

DUDLEY: Can't we share it?

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CLAUD: It has only a single bed, my friend, and I don't propose to double up with *you*, I can assure you.

DUDLEY (*reasonably*): No, I do see that. That would be *too* much—after what you anticipated. What do you suggest I do, then?

CLAUD: Ah—that's where it *does* become your business. (*Indicates couch.*) You can have that if you like.

DUDLEY: This! (*Considers a moment.*) No—I'm sorry—I shouldn't be comfortable.

CLAUD (*crossing towards staircase*): That's your business too. It's all there is.

DUDLEY: I mean in my mind.

CLAUD (*halting at staircase*): What do you mean by that?

DUDLEY: You can't expect me to stop down here and leave a woman who's very likely my wife on the same landing as a man she persists in regarding as her husband. It isn't reasonable.

CLAUD (*returning down left to Dudley—furious*): Are you suggesting that I should be such an unutterable cad as to take advantage of that?

DUDLEY (*calmly*): You might never even think of it, for all I know. But I should. (*Rises, wanders up to sideboard and begins to help himself to another drink.*) You see, I've got the sort of mind that does think of things like that. I shouldn't sleep a wink with you up there.

CLAUD (*going to Dudley*): In that case, you can take your car and spend your sleepless night somewhere else, because, if *that's* the sort of mind you've got, I won't even have you under the same *roof* as Andrea. I've at least been through a *form* of marriage with her, and, until you can prove anything to the contrary, I intend to regard her as my wife—even if I can't *treat* her as such. (*Goes down left.*)

ACT ONE

DUDLEY (*incredulously*): And I leave you here with her?

CLAUD: Certainly! I don't care a damn what you think. (*Sits, chair down left.*)

DUDLEY (*coming down centre*): All right! Let's forget my feelings for the moment. We'll take it that I trust you, if you like. I'll come round tomorrow and believe you when you say you stopped in your room all night. How's that?

CLAUD: Very handsome of you!

DUDLEY: Nobody else will, though.

CLAUD: What do you mean?

DUDLEY: You only got married this morning, old man. You know what the world is.

CLAUD: Blast the world!

DUDLEY (*sitting right arm of couch*): By all means. It was Andrea I was thinking of. I mean, if she *has* committed bigamy, at least let her be able to show that it's bigamy in name only. We don't want her having to change her name again, do we?

CLAUD (*impressed and disturbed*): All right! I'll sit up in here all night.

DUDLEY (~~*pretending*~~): My dear fellow—that's even *more* difficult to swallow.

CLAUD: Not if I've got a witness, it isn't.

DUDLEY: What witness?

CLAUD: You, my friend! If you're so jolly concerned about Andrea, you can damn well stop here and check up on me. You can still have the couch if you want it. I'll sit here.

DUDLEY: *Oh* no!

CLAUD: Why not?

DUDLEY: I'm a very heavy sleeper.

CLAUD (*jumping to his feet—angrily*): Now, look here. . . .

DUDLEY (*interrupting*): Who's going to believe *me*, anyway, with *my* reputation?

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[Enter Andrea by staircase.]

ANDREA (*as she enters*): Forgot the car after all.

CLAUD (*shouting at Dudley*): Then what the hell *do* you want me to do?

ANDREA: Dudley!

DUDLEY (*rising*): Yes, dear?

ANDREA (*crossing to centre*): You're not *still* on about being my husband, are you?

DUDLEY: Not exactly—no!

ANDREA: Then what are you wrangling about now?
(*Looks from Dudley to Claud.*)

[*Claud avoids her eye.*]

DUDLEY (*hesitates slightly*): It's something, my dear, which you—in your innocence—would not even have thought of.

ANDREA (*mystified*): Huh?

[*Moving with deliberation, Dudley bears his glass to side-board, then returns to Andrea and takes her hands.*]

DUDLEY: Andrea! (*He is acting again.*) I don't blame you for marrying again—you know that, don't you? I even take it as a compliment—because it shows that there was at least something about married life that I taught you to appreciate.

ANDREA (*thinks a moment, then*): I can't think of anything, dear.

CLAUD: What's all that got to do with it, anyway?

DUDLEY: I don't want her to think what I'm going to point out to her is due to petty spite on my part, that's all.

CLAUD: I wasn't aware that anyone asked you to point out anything. And there's no need to hold her hands like that, either.

ACT ONE

DUDLEY (*releases Andrea's hands and moves away down right*): All right! You tell her! But, if ever you're married to her as long as I was—you'll learn that it's sometimes wise to hold her hands.

ANDREA (*to Claud*): What *is* this?

CLAUD (*acutely ill-at-ease*): Well, the fact is, Andrea—we both feel—he and I—that it would be better for all concerned if—just for the time being—until we've got things straightened out a bit. . . .

ANDREA (*interrupting warningly*): Claud—if it's anything at all to do with this idiotic claim of his. . . .

DUDLEY (*returning to Andrea—intervening*): Darling, it isn't. In fact, I want you to forget the whole thing. (*With impulsive magnanimity.*) Look—pretend I haven't come yet. Put the clock back twenty-four hours and pretend it's yesterday, and then, as far as you're concerned, I'm still at the bottom of the sea. Now—how will that do?

[*Claud looks puzzled.*]

ANDREA (*perplexed*): Well, it's terribly nice of you, Dudley, but—what's the point of it?

DUDLEY (*right of Andrea*): I seem to have mucked things up a bit, that's all.

ANDREA: But if it *is* yesterday—that means that this morning's ceremony hasn't taken place yet!

DUDLEY: Well, naturally!

[*Claud's change of expression shows that he has cottoned on.*]

ANDREA: Then I'm still a widow!

DUDLEY: One must be consistent, of course.

ANDREA: But I shouldn't like that, dear.

DUDLEY: You can't have it both ways, Andrea.

CLAUD (*crossing to Andrea*): You've been a widow

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for nearly a year. A day or so can't make much difference, surely.

ANDREA (*turning to Claud—with a suddenly hard eye*): Do you want to play this game?

CLAUD (*left of Andrea*): I think it might help, dear, really.

ANDREA: But, how can I pretend to be a widow when we're occupying the same room, Claud? It wouldn't be nice.

CLAUD (*takes Andrea's hands and tries to emulate Dudley's tender manner*): But, darling, that's just it. We both think—he and I, that—we *shouldn't* occupy the same room.

DUDLEY: Just for a day or so, that's all.

ANDREA (*ominously calm*): Does that mean—in plain language—that I'm to spend my wedding night alone?

CLAUD (*very unhappy*): Sounds awfully dreary, I know, but. . . (*Breaks off.*)

ANDREA (*placidly*): Very well—since I'm outvoted—we'll *play* games and pretend I'm still a widow. (*Looks from one to the other.*) But it's going to last longer than a day or so. (*With sudden ferocity.*) I *promise* you—*both*.

[*On the word "promise" Andrea kicks Claud smartly on the shin, so that he releases her hands, enabling her to turn and—on the word "both"—slap Dudley's face. She then stamps out. Exit Andrea by staircase. Claud hops to right arm of couch, and sits.*]

DUDLEY (*holding his face*): See what I mean?

CLAUD (*thoughtfully rubbing his shin*): Hm! Rather surprising!

DUDLEY (*moving away up right*): Wouldn't think it, would you—to look at her? (*Sits left end of recess.*)

ACT ONE

[Pause.]

CLAUD: I say!

DUDLEY: Hm?

CLAUD: Do you know what botulism is?

DUDLEY (*faintly surprised*): Botulism? Sort of food poisoning! Why?

CLAUD: I just wondered.

DUDLEY: It's what her aunt died of.

CLAUD (*turns his head and looks at Dudley*): I know.

DUDLEY (*rising in horror*): Good Heavens! You don't think. . . ?

Claud's suitcase hurtles down the staircase. Claud jumps to his feet. A hat and raincoat follow. Claud and Dudley look at each other. Then Claud goes solemnly up left, picks up the hat, coat and suitcase, puts on the hat, looks at Dudley and stands waiting. Dudley crosses—grabbing his coat from the back of the couch as he does so—and they go off together.

[Exeunt Claud and Dudley into passageway. As they move to go off a bag of golf-clubs descends the staircase with a crash, and a shooting-stick, camera case, bowler hat, umbrella, brief-case, kit-bag, etc., etc., follow in rapid succession. The cascade continues as the

Curtain descends]

ACT TWO

Scene: The same, the next evening before dinner. It is daylight, but the sun is setting.

The table is almost fully laid with dinner things for three. The kitchen door is open, and the usual music issues forth.

Curtain rises on Mrs. O'Connor, dressed as before. She is bending to burrow in the sideboard and her rear end is presented to the audience.

MRS. O'C. (*shouting to top the music*): It isn't a question of letting people live their own lives at all. (*Straightens up with table-mats and cutlery box.*) It's a question of whether they're fit to be at large. (*Going to table.*) Of course everyone has their own way of doing things. (*Begins laying mats and cutlery.*) I know that as well as you do. But there *is* a point when the way you do things ceases to be normal, that's all—and hanging seaweed on the pictures is one of them—you can say what you like. (*Returning to sideboard.*) So is throwing your things all over the floor and leaving them there all night. (*Puts box in sideboard, takes out cruet.*) And as for a man who goes back to London on his wedding night—well, I should have thought that *you*, of *all* people, would have considered that *most* abnormal. (*Taking cruet to table.*) People *do* have their own way of doing things, but it's the first time I ever heard of anyone having *that* way of doing *that*. (*Plants cruet.*)

[*Telephone bell rings.*]

(*Continuing—going up to kitchen door.*) That'll be her ladyship again, wanting to know if everybody's still appreciating how kind she is. (*Closes kitchen door. The music ceases—she turns to telephone and lifts receiver.*)

ACT TWO

Hullo? (*With a slightly offended air.*) Yes, Mrs. Fish! No, I'm sorry, she's out again, and Mr. Merrilees is still in town. He *did* ring up this afternoon to ask if Mrs. Merrilees could *see* him this evening—on business and I don't know what he *meant* by that, I must say.—Well, I've *laid* for him, but he hasn't *come* yet.—Certainly I'll tell her, Mrs. Fish.—(*Sourly.*) Oh, I'm sure she's most grateful. Good-bye! (*Hangs up and opens kitchen door. The music issues forth.*) There! Just as I said. She. . . .

[*There is a knock at the front door.*]

Oh, fiddle! (*Closes kitchen door, turns and goes off.*)

[*The music ceases. Exit Mrs. O'Connor into passageway. We hear the front door being opened.*]

CLAUD (*off*): Oh—good evening! Is Mrs. Nightshade in?

MRS. O'C. (*off*): Who?

CLAUD (*off*): Mrs. Merrilees!

MRS. O'C. (*off*): She's still on the beach.

CLAUD (*off*): Oh!

MRS. O'C. (*off—after a slight pause*): Well, aren't you coming in?

CLAUD (*off*): Oh—thank you!

[*Enter Claud followed by Dudley followed by Mrs. O'Connor from passageway. Claud glances apprehensively up the staircase as he passes it. Mrs. O'Connor has an angrily bewildered air. Both men now wear lounge suits. Claud carries a bowler hat, umbrella and a brief-case, and his manner is stiffly formal. Dudley wanders down left.*]

(*Up right centre—to Mrs. O'Connor.*) Is she—er—is she expecting us?

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MRS. O'C. (*up left centre*): I told her *you* were coming—if that's what you mean. (*Glances resentfully at Dudley.*)

CLAUD: May we wait?

MRS. O'C.: Well, of course you can wait if you want to. I thought you were living here. (*Rolls her eyes to heaven, goes up to kitchen door, halts and returns.*) And I hope you don't think it eccentric of me, Mr. Merrilees, but I put all your—hockey-sticks and things, upstairs again. (*Turns and goes out.*)

[*Exit Mrs. O'Connor into kitchen accompanied by the usual burst of music. Claud goes solemnly to couch and sits stiffly upright with hat, brief-case and umbrella on his lap. There is a slight pause during which Dudley stares at Claud as if waiting.*]

DUDLEY: Well—have you made up your mind?

[*Claud shifts unhappily and avoids Dudley's eye.*]

Look, Claud—you heard what the man said. The *first* thing we've got to do is decide what we *want* to do. We can't *move* until we've done that. I want her—whatever she may or may not have done. There's something about Andrea that's not easy to give up. Now, I'm definite. What about you?

CLAUD: I don't know what to say. I—I love her—and yet there's this dreadful possibility which. . . . (*Breaks off helplessly.*)

DUDLEY: I know how you feel, of course, but. . . . (*Breaks off, looking concerned.*)

CLAUD (*tenderly reminiscent*): When I think of her warmth, her sweetness—when I think of the tenderness she displayed towards me on this very couch, only last night. . . .

DUDLEY (*sympathetically*): You can't tell *me*, old man.

ACT TWO

CLAUD: When I think of things like that, I—I just can't believe it of her. And yet. . . . (*Breaks off.*)

DUDLEY: I know. (*Moves upstage, turns and, for a moment, regards Claud's back view with a grin, then—apparently on impulse—coming down to Claud's right.*)

Claud—I'm going to give myself the luxury of doing something decent for a change.

CLAUD (*slightly startled*): Huh?

DUDLEY: You've been nice about all this. There was no need for you to take me with you to see Counsel this afternoon—but you did—and I appreciate it. I'm going to tell you something. (*Slight pause.*)

She didn't push me in. (*Turns away right.*)

CLAUD (*rising*): What!

DUDLEY (*apparently ashamed*): Did her best to save me, in fact.

CLAUD: But—but you said. . . .

DUDLEY: I know I did. It wasn't true.

CLAUD: You *can* remember?

DUDLEY: Perfectly! I wasn't plastered—just lit-up.

CLAUD: I see! (*Sinks back on to couch.*) You wanted me to doubt her! You wanted me out of your way.

DUDLEY (*apparently contrite*): That's what it comes to.

CLAUD (*in sudden temper*): Why didn't you make a job of it, then—and say she *did* push you in?

DUDLEY (*turning to him*): You wouldn't have believed it, old man.

CLAUD (*bitterly*): Why not? I seem to believe anything.

DUDLEY: It wouldn't have been credible, would it—seeing that I want her myself?

CLAUD (*grudgingly*): Oh, well, I'm glad you've told me, anyway. No doubt it's kindly meant (*Gloomily.*) I'm not sure it wouldn't have been kinder to let me go on doubting, though—with things as they are.

DUDLEY (*moving away right—encouragingly*): What do

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you mean "with things as they are"? You mustn't be defeatist about it, Claud.

CLAUD: She's your wife and you want her. If that's not a handicap I don't know what is.

DUDLEY: But does *she* want *me*? That's what matters. (*Turns.*) So far it seems a bit doubtful.

CLAUD: All right! Supposing she *doesn't* want you. It doesn't follow that she's going to want *me*, does it?

DUDLEY: Not necessarily, no. But she's married you once. That's some encouragement, surely.

CLAUD: Suppose she *does* want me, then! Where do we go from there?

DUDLEY (*moving in to Claud's right—indicating brief-case*): Look at your notes, old man, and see what Sir Henry said!

CLAUD (*putting his hat on coffee-table*): I *know* what Sir Henry said. (*Getting out his spectacles.*) It's precisely that that I find so disheartening. (*Takes some papers from brief-case and reads.*) "In the event that it is the wish of the parties of the second marriage to remain together. . . ."

DUDLEY (*leaning over*): That's you two!

CLAUD: Yes. ". . . and assuming that the legal husband is disposed to be generous. . . ."

DUDLEY: That's me!

CLAUD (*a little testily*): Yes, all right. ". . . the only course open would appear to be—(a) dissolution of the first marriage. . . ."

DUDLEY: That's mine!

CLAUD: ". . . and—(b) re-solemnisation of the second."

DUDLEY: That's yours!

CLAUD (*putting notes away*): Exactly!

DUDLEY (*straightening up*): In other words—a divorce for me—and your performance all over again. That's all. It's perfectly simple.

ACT TWO

CLAUD (*putting his spectacles away*): But, my good man, you can't get a divorce just like that. You've got to have grounds.

DUDLEY (*moving away right—airily*): Oh, one can always rake up something.

CLAUD: That's all very well, but. . . . (*Looks at him keenly.*) She *hasn't* any grounds, I suppose?

DUDLEY: Well, not just at the moment, perhaps—not that she knows of anyway.

CLAUD: Well, you've nothing on *her*. I'm quite certain, so. . . . (*Breaks off with a hopeless shrug.*)

DUDLEY: I should have had, of course—if I hadn't turned up here when I did.

CLAUD: If what?

DUDLEY (*trying to be delicate*): Well, if I—if I hadn't mucked up your honeymoon.

CLAUD (*indignantly*): Are you implying that that would have given you grounds for divorcing her?

DUDLEY (*returning to Claud again*): Well, look at your notes, old man!

[*Claud irritably takes out the papers again and while he is putting on his spectacles, Dudley grabs the papers from his lap.*]

There you are! (*Reads.*) "Since the second marriage is invalid and therefore no marriage at all, its consummation would be adulterous and accordingly would provide grounds for the dissolution of the first. . . ." (*Tosses papers back to Claud.*)

CLAUD (*having put away his spectacles*): But—but that's preposterous.

DUDLEY (*wandering away right*): Seems to be the law, though.

CLAUD (*putting away papers—fervently*): Thank God, then, that you arrived in time!

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DUDLEY (*going upstage*): Yes—if I did.

CLAUD (*looking at him sharply*): What do you mean by that? You *know* you did, you were here soon after dinner.

DUDLEY (*at the glass doors, looking out*): You'd had all the afternoon, though, hadn't you?

CLAUD (*rising with umbrella and brief-case and going angrily to Dudley*): Now, look here, Nightshade—I don't know what you mean by that, but. . . .

DUDLEY (*interrupting*): Nobody would have blamed you, old man. You *thought* you were married.

CLAUD: I don't care what I thought. I'm not going to have you, or anyone else, suggesting that I. . . .

DUDLEY (*turns—interrupting*): I'm not suggesting anything, anyway—except that you had the opportunity.

CLAUD: Why suggest even that? Don't you *know* when you're being offensive?

DUDLEY (*patiently*): Look! All I'm doing is to point out that, if she *does* want you, and I *am* disposed to be generous—there's my grounds for divorce, that's all—ready made. All you've got to do is say you stopped on the way down, or something.

CLAUD (*incredulously*): Do you seriously believe that I would stand up in public and say a thing like that?

DUDLEY (*coming down again*): I don't see why not! Nobody would be able to contradict you.

CLAUD (*following—outraged*): You don't see why not? On the way down? In daylight? Before dinner? You and I don't speak the same language, you know.

DUDLEY: Well, there's no need to get huffy about it, old man. I'm only trying to be decent.

CLAUD: Then I hesitate to think what your idea of indecency must be. (*Goes to chair down right and sits stiffly. He still clings to his brief-case and umbrella.*)

[*Enter Andrea from staircase. She wears a house-coat.*]

ACT TWO

ANDREA (*at once crossing*): Dudley!

DUDLEY (*moving to meet her*): Hullo, darling!

[*Claud rises.*]

ANDREA: How nice! I didn't expect *you*.

[*Dudley and Andrea greet each other with a kiss.*]

DUDLEY: We thought you were out.

ANDREA: No, I've been lying down, dear. I didn't sleep very well.

DUDLEY (*sympathetically*): I expect it's the silence.

ANDREA: Yes. Nobody breathing even. (*Throws a cold glance at Claud.*) Good evening! (*Moves to couch.*)

CLAUD: Good ev. . . .

DUDLEY (*moving after her—interrupting*): Matter of fact, we were a little surprised to find you still here.

ANDREA (*in surprise*): Surprised! But I came for a fortnight. (*Sits couch.*) Claud could have told you that.

CLAUD: Yes, but after—what's happened, I thought you'd very likely. . . .

ANDREA (*interrupting coldly*): I really don't know what justification you have for assuming that I'm going to change all my plans just because *you* don't appear to know your own mind.

[*Claud re-seats himself.*]

(*To Dudley.*) I shouldn't *think* of going off like that after Valerie Fish had been so kind as to lend us the house. She even had the bedroom done up specially.

DUDLEY: You're stopping on, then?

ANDREA: Somebody has to pretend to be enjoying themselves, Dudley.

DUDLEY (*sitting on R. arm of couch*): But you'll be lonely.

ANDREA: Oh, not now, dear. I've sent for Aunt Gertrude.

DUDLEY (*delighted*): Gertrude! Oh, but that's a wonderful idea.

CLAUD: Who's Gertrude?

DUDLEY: Aunt Maggie's sister, dear boy! My favourite in-law.

CLAUD (*plaintively*): But I don't know who Maggie is.

ANDREA: You see, Claud, you don't even listen. Aunt Maggie's the one I *told* you about.

[*Claud looks blank.*]

Died of botulism!

CLAUD: Oh!—and this is her sister!

DUDLEY: Elder sister, believe it or not—and quite the most adorable thing you'll ever meet.

ANDREA: Yes, I'd forgotten what chums you used to be. Why don't you stay a few days and see something of her?

[*Claud stiffens. Dudley's manner becomes a little wary.*]

DUDLEY (*rising*): Stay?

ANDREA: You might as well, dear.

DUDLEY: But—where am I going to sleep?

ANDREA: There's the guest-room.

DUDLEY: But if Gertrude's going to. . . .

ANDREA (*interrupting*): Oh, she'll be in with *me*. That's what I got her for.

[*Both men relax. Claud puts umbrella and brief-case down beside his chair.*]

DUDLEY: Oh!

ACT TWO

ANDREA (*innocently*): I can't bear sleeping alone. You know that.

DUDLEY: Yes. I remember. (*Grins.*)

[*Andrea looks at him, looks away again in slight confusion and reaches for an American magazine on coffee-table.*]

(*Starting up left.*) Well—I'll get my bag, then.

ANDREA: And while you're about it, Dudley. . . .

DUDLEY (*halting*): Yes?

ANDREA: I think her train gets in about now.

DUDLEY: Right! I'll get her too.

ANDREA (*turning left and putting her feet up*): Would you, dear? I wouldn't bother you, only Claud can't drive—either. (*Opens magazine.*)

DUDLEY: Of course! (*Hesitates and glances at Claud.*) Before I go, though (*to Claud*) would you mind stepping outside a moment, old man?

[*Claud inclines his head coldly, solemnly collects his umbrella and brief-case, rises and goes out on to sun-deck. Dudley comes down to Andrea.*]

Aren't you being a bit rough on the man?

ANDREA: After his behaviour last night, I think it's extremely nice of me to recognise his existence at all.

DUDLEY: Well, I know how you must feel, but. . . .

ANDREA (*interrupting*): No woman with any self-respect could possibly overlook such conduct.

DUDLEY: I know, but. . . .

ANDREA (*interrupting*): Refusing to spend the night with me like that!

DUDLEY: There was nothing else he *could* do.

ANDREA: Well, of course there wasn't. I know that. He acted with the utmost discretion. But you can't expect me to *like* it, Dudley. It's so *rude*.

DUDLEY (*beginning to move up right*): Well—try to be charitable, dear. He hasn't really *done* anything, remember.

ANDREA (*muttering*): No—that's just it.

DUDLEY (*calls outside*): All right, old man! (*Crosses left.*)

ANDREA: Come to think of it, though. . . . (*Breaks off.*)

DUDLEY (*balting*): Yes?

ANDREA: Why are *you* defending Claud?

DUDLEY (*in a slightly hurt tone*): Even I have *some* sense of justice, Andiea.

ANDREA: Oh yes, dear, I'm not being critical. It shows a nice spirit. I just can't see what you're up to, that's all.

[*Claud comes in from the sun-deck.*]

DUDLEY (*abandons his wounded air and grins*): You will.

[*Exits into passageway. Claud moves down right centre and stands unhappily hesitant. Andrea becomes absorbed in the magazine.*]

CLAUD (*after a pause*): You're still cross with me, then?

ANDREA (*absently*): Um?

CLAUD: I say you're still. . . .

ANDREA (*interrupting*): I do love these American advertisements for "intestinal regulators" and that sort of thing, don't you? They're so uninhibited. (*Looks up from magazine.*) What did you say?

CLAUD: I said you're still cross with me.

ANDREA (*surprised*): *Am* I? What makes you think that?

CLAUD: I can tell by the way you treat me, Andrea.

ACT TWO

ANDREA: You're getting too sensitive, Claud. (*Returns to magazine*)

CLAUD (*beginning to take umbrage*): Well, may I proceed?

ANDREA (*looking up again—faintly surprised*): Oh, was there something else you wanted to say?

CLAUD: I have to explain the legal position, Andrea.

ANDREA: Oh! (*Returns to magazine.*)

CLAUD: That's why I'm here.

ANDREA: I had wondered, I must say. (*In a bored tone*) Well? (*Begins searching for a handkerchief.*)

CLAUD (*goes to chair, down right, sits, puts umbrella on floor and begins to open brief-case*): Well—we've seen a lawyer, and. . . .

[*Claud becomes aware of Andrea's preoccupation. Having searched her person, she is now looking under the cushions and between the upholstery of the couch. Claud watches with growing exasperation. Finally she finds the handkerchief, elaborately unfolds it and dabs delicately at her nose.*]

As I was saying—we've seen a. . . .

[*Andrea blows her nose loudly. Claud again waits grimly until she has finished mopping, and again taken up her magazine.*]

(*Sarcastically.*) Would you prefer me to come back another time?

ANDREA (*startled*): What? Good heavens, no! What a very disquieting idea!

CLAUD (*rising, angrily*): Then, *please listen!*

ANDREA (*innocently*): I *am* listening. I've heard every word you've said. You've seen a lawyer.

CLAUD: Yes, I know, but. . . .

ANDREA (*interrupting*): Get *on* with it, then! (*Returns to magazine.*)

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CLAUD (*buffly*): A very eminent lawyer. Sir Henry Sutton-White, as a matter of fact.

ANDREA (*muttering*): Never heard of him.

CLAUD: Well, whether you've heard of him or not, Andrea, he's an authority whose dictum is not to be taken lightly, and you'd better pay some heed to what he says. (*Sits again.*)

[*Andrea begins idly clicking her tongue.*]

(*Continuing.*) He specialises in this sort of thing. (*Pauses and stares at her angrily.*)

ANDREA (*continues clicking for a moment, then glances up*): All right! All right! I'm "heeding". What does he say?

CLAUD: Well, the first thing that becomes apparent is that it's a very unusual case. (*Starts again to open brief-case.*)

ANDREA: I shouldn't have thought you needed an expert to tell you that.

CLAUD: The point is, Andrea, that it's *so* unusual as to be without precedent.

ANDREA: You mean it hasn't happened before?

CLAUD: Apparently not.

ANDREA (*gratified*): Well! Imagine that!

CLAUD: Not *quite* like this, anyway.

ANDREA: Women thinking that their husbands were dead for no better reason than that they'd been tried for killing them, you mean?

CLAUD: Er—yes.

ANDREA (*returning to magazine*): Well, I don't see how he makes a living.

CLAUD: Who?

ANDREA: Sir Henry Thingummy-Whatsisname! I mean, if he specialises in the sort of thing that never happens, how can he hope to? Doesn't sound very bright to me.

ACT TWO

CLAUD (*rises, puts down brief-case and goes to her*): I think you're being flippant, Andrea—and I think you're doing it deliberately in order to show that you no longer like me very much.

ANDREA: For a man, you know, Claud, you do have the most blinding flashes of intuition.

CLAUD: Is it worth my while to go on?

ANDREA: You've nothing to lose, I suppose.

CLAUD (*moving away left*): With your permission, then, I'll be as brief as I can. I won't deny that, on certain points, Sir Henry was reluctant to commit himself then and there, and I suspect that even he needed time to refer to his books. But of *one* thing, Andrea, there is no possible shadow of doubt whatever.

ANDREA (*without interest*): Oh?

CLAUD (*left of couch*): You're married to Dudley!

ANDREA (*looking up in weary surprise*): My dear Claud, you didn't come all the way down here to tell me that, did you?

CLAUD (*incredulously*): You mean you've accepted that?

ANDREA: It's indisputable.

CLAUD: But, last night, nothing would convince you that you were still his wife.

ANDREA: Well, I've slept on it.

CLAUD: I dare say, but. . . .

ANDREA: *And* taken advice, if you want to know.

CLAUD: Oh, you have!

ANDREA: I haven't been entirely inactive *myself*, Claud. After all, I *am* an interested party. I've been on to Valerie Fish.

CLAUD (*puzzled*): Valerie Fish?

ANDREA: Yes.

CLAUD: Is she a lawyer?

ANDREA: She is not.

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CLAUD (*crossing right—sarcastically*): Oh, just happens to *know* about these things, I suppose!

ANDREA: Well, she should do. She was married to a lawyer. She didn't have to look it up, anyway, like *your* man. *She* knew at once.

CLAUD (*taking a grip on himself—facing her*): Well, anyway, she concurred!

ANDREA: Absolutely!

CLAUD: And you accept the fact that you're married to Dudley!

ANDREA: Technically—yes!

CLAUD (*returning to chair down right and sitting*): The particular attitude you elect to adopt towards your husband is, of course, none of my business. (*Taking up brief-case and putting on spectacles.*) All that concerns me is what you intend to *do* about me—and that, I think, you make abundantly clear.

[*Andrea makes no comment, but she is no longer looking at the magazine.*]

(*Taking out papers.*) If you *had* wanted to—er—to continue with me, there would have been very considerable complications—but, as it is, they do not arise, and (*looking at papers*) all that you will need to do will be—“(a) . . .”

ANDREA: I didn't speak.

CLAUD: The letter “a”!

ANDREA: Eh?

CLAUD (*loudly*): “A”!

ANDREA: Oh!

CLAUD (*reading*): “. . . to apply to the Court for the second marriage to be declared null and void *ab initio*.”

ANDREA: Bless you!

CLAUD (*putting away papers and spectacles*): This is

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nothing more than a formality, and apparently not even necessary—merely wise. (*Taking up umbrella and rising.*) Which means, no doubt, that you won't trouble to do it at all. (*Goes to her.*)

ANDREA (*a little sulky*): What's "b" then?

CLAUD: Forget that I ever existed. (*Takes his hat from coffee-table, puts it on and sticks out his hand.*) Good-bye!

ANDREA: Well, I must say. . . !

CLAUD: What? (*Withdraws his hand and takes off his hat again.*)

ANDREA: You *are* an extraordinary man. (*Rises.*) Who said anything about not wanting to go on with you?

CLAUD: Well, nobody, but. . .

ANDREA: Then why on *earth* assume that I don't?

CLAUD: Well, you certainly haven't said that you *do*, Andrea.

ANDREA: But, I haven't been *asked*. You can't expect me to answer a question if you don't even put it to me, Claud.

CLAUD: Does that mean that you *do* want to go with me?

ANDREA: No, I'm not sure that it does—now. (*Moves away left.*)

CLAUD (*following*): But, Andrea. . .

ANDREA: Anyone might think you were trying to get out of it, the way you go on.

CLAUD: But, listen. . .

ANDREA (*turning and facing him accusingly*): I expect that's what you *are* doing, come to think of it. You can't satisfy yourself that I didn't try to kill Dudley—that's what it is—and you're making use of a mere technicality to get rid of me. It's contemptible! (*Turns away.*)

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CLAUD (*shouting*): But it isn't that! I *don't* want to get rid of you.

ANDREA: Simply because of a . . . (*Breaks off and turns to him in surprise.*) You don't?

CLAUD: As it happens, I *am* satisfied that you didn't try to kill Dudley.

ANDREA: You *are*?

CLAUD: I don't think it would make any difference if you had killed him, anyway. It's the sort of thing anyone might do.

ANDREA: You mean that? (*Takes his arm.*)

CLAUD (*cooling down, but still severe*): In any case, I don't care *what* you may or may not have done. I—I love you, Andrea. I've told you that before.

ANDREA (*nestling to Claud*): Oh, I'm so glad to hear it again though, Claud.

CLAUD (*with hat in one hand and umbrella and brief-case in the other—putting his arms about her, but continuing to grumble*): It's ridiculous to say I don't want you. Of course I want you. But you're another man's wife. One must be objective about it. I oughtn't even to be standing here like this.

ANDREA (*enraptured*): Oh, you *are* sweet, really. I do see why I married you. (*Draws his face round and kisses him, then—*) Come!

[*Andrea draws Claud to chair down left thrusts him into it, takes umbrella and brief-case from him, puts them on the floor down of chair, and seats herself on his lap with an arm about his neck.*]

CLAUD: Excuse me! (*Passes his hat across her from his right hand to his left and puts it on the floor with the other things.*)

ANDREA (*kisses him on the forehead*): Will it mean an awful lot of bother?

ACT TWO

CLAUD: What?

ANDREA: If we—decide to go on.

CLAUD (*still faintly hurt*): Not if you want me, of course.

ANDREA: Just a matter of getting rid of *him*, I suppose!

CLAUD (*nods*): And re-marrying me.

ANDREA: Oh, shall we have to do that?

CLAUD: Naturally!

ANDREA (*delighted*): Another wedding? Oh, what fun! Where shall we have it this time?

CLAUD: It doesn't make any. . .

ANDREA (*interrupting*): And where shall we go for our honeymoon? Here again? Or would you like to try somewhere else for a change?

CLAUD: I don't. . . .

ANDREA (*interrupting*): Well, we'll have the reception somewhere else, anyway. The *vol-au-vent* was awful, I thought, and even the. . . . (*Suddenly thoughtful.*)
Claud!

CLAUD: Yes?

ANDREA: Shall we have to ask *him*?

CLAUD: I can't see that it matters. Why?

ANDREA: I don't want to cultivate him, dear. He's always a source of anxiety. Now, for instance. . . .
(*Breaks off, looking disturbed.*)

CLAUD (*faintly alarmed*): What?

ANDREA: Have you noticed how nice he's being to you?

CLAUD: Matter of fact, I have rather, but—what about it?

ANDREA: Well, it's so surprising. I can't think why.

CLAUD (*still a little touchy*): I don't see that it's necessarily surprising.

ANDREA: Oh, no, dear, of course not! I'm sure he's very fond of you. I can't think that it's entirely on

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account of that, that's all. Does he know you're well off?

CLAUD: What's that got to do with it?

ANDREA: Well, it nearly always is a matter of money when he does something you can't account for.

CLAUD (*complacently*): He won't get any out of me, I can assure you.

ANDREA: Well, do be careful, dear, won't you? He's awfully good at it, and I shouldn't like you to be done. After all, I do feel a little responsible for you. You did meet him through me, didn't you? (*Kisses him on the temple and lays her face against his.*)

[*Enter Gertrude, followed by Dudley, from passageway. Gertrude Pigeon is small, old, gentle, innocent and brisk. A blood-relation of Andrea, she has much in common mentally. In appearance she is "countrified". She wears a light overcoat, a flowered cotton dress and a floppy straw hat. Always with her is a large and apparently weighty black plastic carrier bag. Clamped to her head is an ordinary one-sided ear-*phone*. This is connected by heavy flex to something within the bag, and at a convenient point on the flex is a massive switch which emits a very audible "clack" whenever used. At the moment Gertrude is carrying also a cricket bat. Dudley bears two suitcases, and Claud's rain-coat. Both Gertrude and Dudley pause to admire the group on the chair for a moment.*]

GERTRUDE (*up centre*): Andrea!

ANDREA (*scrambling to her feet and running to Gertrude*): Darling!

[*Claud gets up hurriedly and in some confusion. Dudley grins at him and puts his things down on the floor, up left.*]

(*Embracing Gertrude.*) Oh, it is lovely to see you!
(*Kisses her.*)

ACT TWO

GERTRUDE: Just a minute! (*Puts cricket bat along back of couch, clacks switch, and holds her bag towards Andrea.*) What did you say?

ANDREA (*loudly*): It's lovely to see you.

GERTRUDE: Yes, dear, but there's no need to shout. (*Indicates contraction.*) It's very powerful.

ANDREA: Oh!

GERTRUDE (*turning to smile fondly at Dudley.*): What a surprise you have for me!

[*Dudley moves to Gertrude and puts an arm about her shoulders.*]

ANDREA: Yes, isn't it?

GERTRUDE: I could hardly credit my senses.

ANDREA: I know.

GERTRUDE (*beaming*): My first thought was that I must be dead too.

DUDLEY (*laughing*): I'm afraid you and I would never meet in the same place, darling.

GERTRUDE (*to Andrea*): I felt so *sure* he was dead.

ANDREA (*laughing*): It just confirms what you've always said about him, Aunt Gertrude, you can't rely on a thing he does.

GERTRUDE (*with no trace of reproof*): No, but don't say anything unnecessary, dear. It wastes the batteries. (*Indicates Claud.*) Who's this, then, that you were sitting with?

ANDREA: Oh, I'm so sorry. It's Claud. (*To Claud.*) This is Aunt Gertrude, dear. Miss Pigeon! (*To Gertrude.*) He used to play for Kent.

[*Claud and Gertrude advance to meet each other, below couch. Dudley, grinning, moves away down left.*]

CLAUD (*holding out his hand*): How do you do?

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GERTRUDE (*taking his hand and holding it*): Oh, you're the new husband, I suppose?

CLAUD: Well, erm. . . .

ANDREA (*interposing*): In a way, dear, yes.

GERTRUDE (*smiling at Claud*): I'm glad to meet you. I hope you're strong. (*Releases his hand.*)

[*Claud turns his head to Dudley with an anxiously puzzled look. Dudley shrugs lightly.*]

(*Continuing to Andrea.*) He's nice, isn't he? (*Sits, couch.*) What did you say his name was?

ANDREA: Claud!

GERTRUDE: Claud what, though? I must learn it, I may have to write to you some time.

ANDREA: Merrilees!

GERTRUDE: Oh, yes—Merrilees! (*Switches off, closes her eyes, puts her fingers to her brow and begins to repeat the word over to herself.*)

CLAUD (*starting towards Gertrude—anxiously*): But you do realise, I suppose, that. . . ?

DUDLEY (*interrupting*): I wouldn't bother, old man. Not just now.

CLAUD: But we can't let her go on thinking that I. . . .

DUDLEY (*interrupting*): She's switched off, anyway.

GERTRUDE (*still muttering*): Merrilees, Merrilees, Merrilees. . . .

[*Claud moves down left below Dudley. Andrea, at right end of couch, pokes Gertrude.*]

(*Opens her eyes and switches on.*) Yes, dear?

ANDREA: It's the same name as the man who used to wind your clocks.

GERTRUDE: Oh, yes! So it is! How lucky! I can

ACT TWO

remember it by that. Is there anything else you wanted to say?

ANDREA: I don't think so. Not at the moment.

GERTRUDE: Then I'll write a letter. (*Switches off, takes a pad and pen from bag and begins to write.*)

[*They regard her a moment, Andrea a little helplessly, Dudley indulgently, Claud anxiously.*]

ANDREA (*to Dudley*): Well, perhaps you wouldn't mind taking her bag up, dear!

DUDLEY: Right! (*Goes up left and picks up a suitcase.*) Which is her room?

ANDREA: Oh, of course—you haven't been upstairs yet; have you.

DUDLEY: No.

CLAUD (*moving up left*): I'll do it.

ANDREA (*to Claud*): Then show him his own room too, dear, will you?

CLAUD (*to Dudley—picking up the remaining things*): Here—this is my suitcase that you've brought in. My coat too!

DUDLEY (*looking a little self-conscious*): Yes, I—well, to tell you the truth, I felt a bit mean about stopping here and letting you push off alone. I just felt that if anyone was going to spend the night, it ought to be you—particularly as the house was—put at your disposal in the first place. (*To Andrea, meaningly.*) I take it you don't mind!

ANDREA (*looking puzzled*): Well, no I. . . . (*Breaks off, staring at him suspiciously.*)

DUDLEY: Right! Then I needn't trouble to go up at all, need I? (*Hands Gertrude's suitcase to Claud.*)

CLAUD (*in surprise*): I thought you objected to the idea of my spending the night.

DUDLEY: Not with Aunt Gertrude here, old man. I'm not all that prim.

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CLAUD: Well, then—thanks!

[*Exit Claud by staircase. Dudley moves to left arm of couch and sits. Andrea perches on the other arm.*]

DUDLEY (*touching the flex*): What *is* this contraption she's got on?

GERTRUDE (*looks up, switches on*): What, dear?

DUDLEY: Got a new aid, I see!

GERTRUDE: Henry made it for me.

ANDREA: Who's Henry?

GERTRUDE: A boy, dear! Fifteen! Belongs to the man who does the hedges. Such a pet, and so clever with his hands! Did this out of an old wireless, that's all. That, and a pressure-cooker, I think he said. Isn't it lovely? Its works are all in here. (*Holds up bag for Andrea.*)

ANDREA (*looks into bag*): Well, *isn't* that convenient?

GERTRUDE: You wouldn't believe how much better it is than that silly little thing I gave forty-five guineas for.

ANDREA: What do you mean by better, dear—louder?

GERTRUDE: Oh, *much* louder! It's deafening! (*Smiles, switches off, and goes on writing.*)

[*Enter Claud from staircase. He drifts across to recess and sits left end. Andrea rises, goes behind couch and pokes Gertrude.*]

(*Switches on.*) Yes?

ANDREA: Wouldn't you like to see your room?

GERTRUDE (*at once putting away writing materials—enthusiastically*): Oh, yes, Andrea! What a lovely idea!

DUDLEY (*taking up cricket bat*): What's this?

GERTRUDE: Oh, that's for Henry. He wanted a

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cricket bat. (*Suddenly anxious.*) It is a cricket bat, isn't it?

DUDLEY: Certainly it's a cricket bat.

GERTRUDE: Oh, I'm so glad! (*Rises and sets off in the wrong direction, down right.*) I got it on my way through town.

[*Dudley rises and moves up left.*]

ANDREA: Up here, dear! (*Indicates staircase.*)

GERTRUDE: Oh! (*Changes direction, goes up left and halts as if suddenly remembering something—to Andrea.*) Oh, you sent for me, didn't you? What did you want me for?

ANDREA: Only to sleep with me, Aunt Gertrude.

GERTRUDE (*looks puzzled*): Sleep with you? (*Looks at Claud.*)

ANDREA: You know how nervous I am in a strange bed.

GERTRUDE (*stands a moment as if racking her brains*): Well, you know—that's *most* odd.

ANDREA: What is, dear?

GERTRUDE (*sbrugs*): Well—either things have changed considerably or my memory's playing me tricks, that's all. (*Goes off.*)

[*Exit Gertrude by staircase. As Andrea follows, Dudley hands her the cricket bat.*]

DUDLEY: Here!

[*Exit Andrea by staircase. Dudley eyes the rather gloomy Claud, then crosses to sideboard.*]

DUDLEY: Drink?

CLAUD: No, thanks! (*Rises and wanders down.*)

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DUDLEY (*helping himself to a whiskey and soda*): Do you think Mrs. Fish would mind if I had one?

CLAUD (*adjusting his tie before the mirror*): I shouldn't think so—especially as it happens to be mine.

DUDLEY: Oh, I'm so sorry, my dear fellow, I. . . .

CLAUD (*moving to chair down right—interrupting*): Drink it! Drink it! Who cares? (*Sits moodily.*)

[*Dudley looks at Claud and grins craftily to himself. Then, adjusting his face to an appropriate gravity, he moves down and sits on right arm of couch.*]

DUDLEY: Well—you've had a chat, I take it?

CLAUD (*without looking at him*): We have.

DUDLEY: You—learnt her wishes?

CLAUD: I did.

DUDLEY: And. . . ?

CLAUD (*turning his head away*): She wants me.

DUDLEY (*apparently stricken*): I see! (*Rises, moves up to sideboard and stands with his back turned.*)

CLAUD (*after a pause—sincerely*): I'm sorry, Nightshade. I'm terribly sorry.

DUDLEY: It's all in the luck of the game. (*Sighs.*) Ah, well. . . . (*Drains his glass, puts it down and turns, putting on a brave front.*) Then why the worried look?

CLAUD (*with distaste*): I don't like having to "rake up something", as you call it, for this divorce. It's unsavoury. I don't like being associated with it, even.

DUDLEY: It's only a matter of a receipted bill from the Hotel Mizzpah, Bloomsbury—or something like that.

CLAUD: I know, but. . . .

DUDLEY (*breaking in*): You want *me* to do it—is that what you mean?

CLAUD: Do what?

ACT TWO

DUDLEY: Get the receipt, old man.

CLAUD (*astounded*): Well, good heavens, you wouldn't expect *her* to, would you?

DUDLEY: You don't see yourself as a co-respondent, I take it?

CLAUD (*rising and going centre*): I do not see myself as a co-respondent. But that has nothing to do with it. The woman is *never* expected to provide the evidence. It's a matter of chivalry.

DUDLEY (*going to Claud, patiently*): Look—the sooner you get it out of your head that you're dealing with anything remotely resembling a gentleman, the better—because you're not, you know.

CLAUD (*ironically, turning away upstage*): I'm sorry. I keep on forgetting.

DUDLEY (*moving down right—kindly*): Well, do try to hold it in mind, old man, or we shan't get anywhere. Now—where were we? (*Sitting chair, down right.*)

CLAUD (*sullenly*): Hotel bill!

DUDLEY: Right! So with that from me and a few extra details from the chambermaid—Andrea gets her. . . . (*Breaks off, suddenly looking thoughtful.*) No, that can't be right.

CLAUD: What can't be right?

DUDLEY: Well, Andrea gets her freedom. . . .

CLAUD: Yes.

DUDLEY: You get Andrea. . . .

CLAUD: Yes.

DUDLEY: But, what do *I* get?

CLAUD (*coming down centre—puzzled*): What do *you* get?

DUDLEY: Yes—apart from a rather sordid evening's entertainment at the Hotel Mizpah—what do I get in return?

CLAUD: In return for what?

DUDLEY (*in apparent surprise*): My wife, old man!

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CLAUD (*staring at him*): What *can* you get in return for your wife?

DUDLEY (*considers, as if the question had not previously occurred to him*): You know—it's a pitiful thought, but there *is* nothing, *is* there—except money?

CLAUD: Ah—now I begin to see. (*Bitterly sarcastic.*) I'm sorry. I hadn't realised you were putting her up for sale. And the price?

DUDLEY: Haven't really thought about it. Ten thousand?

CLAUD: Sounds to me as if you've thought about it quite a lot. (*With heavy irony.*) That's C.O.D., I take it?

DUDLEY: Certainly, old man. I'd trust you anywhere.

CLAUD: Thanks! And what about payment? Cash—or would you take a cheque?

DUDLEY (*sbrugs*): I'm not fussy.

CLAUD: No—I don't think you *can* be. (*Walks deliberately across to Dudley.*) May I say, I think you are the most unmitigated blackguard I ever met? (*Turns away to recess and sits right end.*)

DUDLEY (*mildly*): Well—now you can see the point of keeping that in mind. With me, you can discuss a thing like this—without embarrassment—without restraint. But how would you feel in the case of, say, Sir Henry Sutton-White, if you wanted to buy *his* wife?

[*Enter Mrs. O'Connor from kitchen, for once without music. Bearing a tray with a glass and side plate, she moves towards the table.*]

CLAUD (*unaware of Mrs. O'Connor—violently*): Well, I don't want to buy Sir Henry's wife. . . .

[*Mrs. O'Connor halts, rooted. Dudley tries to signal her presence.*]

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I don't want to buy anyone's wife, and you can put that in your. . . . (*Following the direction of Dudley's signals, turns his head, sees Mrs. O'Connor and abruptly shouts with nervous laughter.*)

[*Looking quite scared, Mrs. O'Connor turns and rushes back into the kitchen.*]

(*Jumping to his feet, furiously.*) Now, you listen to me, Nightshade. . . .

GERTRUDE (*off*): Oh no, dear, I'm never without it.

[*Enter Gertrude, followed by Andrea from staircase. Gertrude has removed her hat and overcoat. She moves down to couch.*]

DUDLEY (*rising and going upstage*): Talk to you later, old man. (*Goes out on to the sun-deck and sits in one of the chairs.*)

ANDREA: Where does it come from, then—the chemist or the ironmonger, or what?

[*Claud goes to chair down right and sits.*]

GERTRUDE (*sitting right end of couch*): No, it comes from a Peruvian weed, dear—Pettacattel! The natives make it. It's nothing to look at, of course, like so many things that are helpful. (*Begins rummaging in bag.*) I'll show you. Just a brown powder, that's all. (*Produces a small folded white paper.*) There! Though that's only the paper it's done up in, of course. (*Replaces the paper.*)

ANDREA (*behind couch*): But what do you *do* with it, dear?

GERTRUDE: Well, personally, I *drink* it with my milk, but. . . .

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ANDREA: What's it *for*, though?

GERTRUDE: Oh, I see what you mean. Well, the natives use it as a sort of gum for sticking their hair, but *I* take it for headaches and rheumatism. Do you know what a llama is?

ANDREA: Sort of South American camel!

GERTRUDE: That's it! But what I dare say you *don't* know is that (*weightily*) this weed Pettacattel is the llama's favourite food.

ANDREA: *Is* it?

GERTRUDE: It *is!* And it was your own great-uncle Lambert, dear—that most sagacious of men—though never really understood in his day—who first saw the significance of that. (*Begins taking out writing pad, etc.*)

ANDREA (*looking bewildered*): What is the significance of it?

GERTRUDE: Have you ever heard of a llama suffering from headaches or rheumatism?

ANDREA: No, I can't say I have.

GERTRUDE (*in mild triumph*): Well! (*Switches off and begins writing.*)

ANDREA (*puzzled, turns to Claud*): Well—can you see the. . . ? (*Takes in Claud's moody appearance, glances towards the sun-deck and goes to him.*) Have you found out what he was up to, Claud?—because that's what you look like.

CLAUD (*grimly*): I have.

ANDREA: *Was* it money?

CLAUD: It was.

ANDREA: Just a minute! (*Returns to behind Gertrude, stoops and speaks loudly in her ear.*) You are switched off, dear, aren't you? (*Waits a moment.*)

[*Gertrude goes on placidly writing.*]

(*Continuing—going again to Claud.*) All right! Go on!

ACT TWO

CLAUD: He wants me to purchase you, Andrea.

ANDREA (*uncomprehendingly*): Purchase me!

CLAUD: He wants me to pay him a sum of money in return for the right to marry you.

ANDREA: Oh, for my freedom, you mean?

CLAUD: That *is* what I mean.

ANDREA (*ominously*): So, that's what it is! That's why he's "being fair", and taking your part, and throwing the two of us together. I see! (*Goes upstage and calls.*) Dudley!

[*Dudley rises and comes in.*]

(*Returning to Claud.*) Oh, darling, I *am* sorry. I do feel so ashamed of him sometimes.

DUDLEY (*appearing tentatively in the doorway*): Yes, dear?

ANDREA (*sweetly*): Would you come here a minute?

[*Dudley comes down a little apprehensively.*]

DUDLEY (*left of Andrea*): Yes, dear?

ANDREA (*beginning with some restraint*): Dudley—I don't mind when you come back from the dead. (*Advancing on him slowly.*)

[*Dudley backs away before her and casts an anxious glance in the direction of Gertrude.*]

You can't help being alive; I realise that—and it's not your fault that you still happen to be my husband. (*Suddenly bursting out furiously.*) But when you start using the situation. . . .

[*Dudley breaks away round couch, slips into the place beside Gertrude and puts an arm about her as if seeking protection. Gertrude turns her head, smiles vaguely, pats his hand, and goes on writing.*]

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. . . to take advantage of a man like Claud, simply because you think he's rich and easily put upon (*leaning over and shouting across Gertrude*) that I will not have. D'you understand?

DUDLEY (*cringing behind Gertrude*): Yes, dear.

ANDREA: Very well, then! (*Slight pause, then, to Claud.*) How much is he asking, anyway?

CLAUD (*irritably*): What does *that* matter? It doesn't make any difference *what* he's asking.

ANDREA (*going to him—firmly*): Darling, you may be ready to pay almost anything for me, but. . . .

CLAUD (*interrupting—uncomfortably*): I don't mean that, Andrea.

ANDREA: What *do* you mean, then, dear?

CLAUD: I'm not going to pay him at *all*.

ANDREA (*with a little less enthusiasm—moving away centre*): Oh! Well, that's all right, then—so long as you *can* take care of yourself. But don't you hesitate to tell me if he does start again, Claud! (*With a severe look at Dudley.*) I never *heard* of such a thing. (*Slight pause. Then, trying not to sound curious.*) EIM—how much *did* he want for me, though?

DUDLEY (*rising*): Well, I did think about ten thousand. (*Moves down left.*)

ANDREA (*secretly gratified, but trying to sound horrified*): Ten thousand?

DUDLEY: Yes.

ANDREA: Pounds?

DUDLEY: Certainly!

ANDREA (*with diminished conviction*): It's outrageous! Don't you pay it, Claud!

CLAUD: I'm not going to, Andrea. I've just been saying so.

[*Andrea begins to look a little straight down her nose.*]

ACT TWO

DUDLEY: But, now that I look at you, Andrea—I feel it should be more.

CLAUD (*rising*): Then look at *me*, my friend, and save yourself some of the money you're not going to get!

ANDREA (*a little acidly*): There's no need to keep on telling him that, Claud. It *sounds* awfully good, I know, but. . . . (*Breaks off.*)

CLAUD: Keep on telling him what?

ANDREA: That he's not going to get anything.

CLAUD (*moving in to right of Andrea*): But I *like* telling him he's not going to get anything.

ANDREA: I dare say you do. It's not very flattering to me, though, is it?

CLAUD: Why not?

ANDREA: Well, it sounds as if you'd rather let me go altogether.

DUDLEY (*reasonably*): You know you'll have to pay me in the end, old man, so what's the sense in. . . .

CLAUD (*interrupting*): Now look! Once and for all—I'm *not* going to pay you.

[*Andrea's expression begins to harden.*]

DUDLEY (*moving in to left of Andrea—incredulously*): You didn't expect me to let you have her for nothing, did you?

CLAUD: Well certainly! It never occurred to me.

DUDLEY: What didn't?

CLAUD: All this under-the-counter business.

DUDLEY: But how should I manage, old man? I've nothing of my own. I've never earned a penny in my life. I mean, how am I going to *live*?

CLAUD: I see not the slightest *need* for you to live.

DUDLEY: Look! I'll make it nine thousand, seven hundred and fifty. How will that do?

CLAUD: Can't you get it into your head, you parasite? It isn't a question of haggling. I'm not interested.

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[*Dudley shrugs, turns away, returns down left and sits. Andrea is now looking very pent up.*]

ANDREA (*with a cold eye fixed on Claud*): I see. I'm sorry. I didn't realise.

CLAUD: *What* didn't you realise?

ANDREA (*loudly*): You don't think I'm *worth* nine thousand, seven hundred and fifty?

CLAUD: Of *course* I think you're worth nine thousand, seven hundred and fifty. That's nothing to *do* with it. One doesn't pay anything for a wife.

ANDREA: Oh, you would have accepted me as a gift, then?

CLAUD: Well, naturally, I. . . .

ANDREA (*interrupting*): But, not if I *cost* anything!

CLAUD (*loudly*): Not if you *cost* anything!

ANDREA: Right! Well, at least you're honest about it. (*Turns and stamps to staircase.*) I don't mind thrift, Claud, but if there's one thing I *can't* stand, it's a *mean man*. (*Mounts stairs.*)

[*Exit Andrea by staircase. Dudley rises, scoops up Claud's hat, umbrella and brief-case from the floor, bears them across to Claud and holds them out to him.*]

CLAUD: What's the idea?

DUDLEY (*indicating the staircase*): Something tells me, old man. . . .

[*Claud's bag of golf-clubs descends the staircase with a crash, and the shooting-stick, camera-case, brief-case, kit-bag, etc., etc., follow in rapid succession. The cascade continues as the*

Curtain descends]

ACT THREE

Scene I

Scene: The same, the next afternoon. Outside there is brilliant sunlight. The kitchen door is open and the room is filled with the strident blaring of a military band heavily engaged with "Poet and Peasant".

Curtain discovers Mrs. O'Connor, dressed as before. She is on the sun-deck, transferring tea-things from a tray to the table.

Front door slams, off.

Enter Andrea from passageway. She is attractively dressed for a sunny day. She comes in hurriedly, goes straight to telephone, lifts receiver and dials once. Then, with some diffidence, she gently closes the kitchen door. The music stops.

ANDREA (*on telephone*): Atlee 4647, please! (*Waits.*) Oh, Miss Winters, I'm so sorry, but it's me again. He wasn't on that one. Are you sure he said he was coming by train?—Oh—well I'll meet the next. You—er—you did *give* him my message? Did he seem pleased? Yes, it *is* difficult to tell with him, isn't it? Well, thank you so much, Miss Winters! I'll try not to bother you again. How are *you* keeping—all right? That's right! Good-bye! (*Hangs up and opens kitchen door.*)

[*The music blares forth again.*]

(*Putting her head into the kitchen—loudly.*) Oh! Excuse me! Can you tell me what time the. . .

[*The music stops.*]

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(*continuing to shout*) . . . next train gets in?

[*The just-audible rumbling of a male voice is heard, off.*]

Oh! Then is there a time-table, do you know?

[*Again the rumble.*]

Oh—in the library. Thank you so much! (*Turns away, leaving the door open, and moves down left.*)

[*The music starts again. Exit Andrea into library. Mrs. O'Connor enters the room, crosses and goes to the foot of the staircase. Enter Briggs, followed by Ron, on to sun-deck from left. Miss Briggs is slim, pretty, eager, intelligent, diffident and very young. She wears a beret, skirt, jersey and sandals. Slung over her shoulder is a satchel. Ron, equally callow, is gangling, untidy, amiable, loutish and not very bright. He wears dirty grey flannel bags, a pullover, open-necked shirt, no hat and a wild crop of hair. He carries an alarming looking camera with a flash-bulb attachment and slung from his shoulder is a leather case. He chews gum. They enter very tentatively, yet with an air of suppressed excitement.*]

MRS. O'C. (*calling up the stairs*): Your tea's ready. (*Listens for a reply, fails to hear one, goes to kitchen door and closes it.*)

[*The music ceases. Briggs ventures into the doorway.*]

(*Returns to staircase—calls.*) I say, the tea's getting cold.

GERTRUDE (*off*): Oh, thank you, Mrs. er—um!

MRS. O'C. (*bitterly, to herself*): "Mrs. er—um"!

[*Briggs taps on the door jamb.*]

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

(Turns—inhospitalably.) Yes?

BRIGGS (stepping in—timidly): Oh—excuse me! I'm from *The Sun*.

MRS. O'C. (slightly startled): Where?

BRIGGS (nervously): I—I'm a reporter.

MRS. O'C.: Oh! (Crossing to up centre.) What is it you want?

BRIGGS: Is there a Mrs. Nightshade here, please?

MRS. O'C.: Not that I know of.

BRIGGS (nonplussed): Oh! (Exchanges an anxious glance with Ron.) Isn't this Mrs. Fish's house?

MRS. O'C.: Certainly it is. There's no Mrs. Nightshade, though. There's a *Mr.* Nightshade—off and on—and a Mrs. Merrilces, but nothing in between. Why do you want to know?

BRIGGS (coming into the room and going to Mrs. O'Connor): Well, you see, Mrs. Fish is a friend of my mother's, and she knows that I'm just sort of—starting to be a reporter, and she's terribly kind, and she rang up my mother to say that this Mrs. Nightshade had—had got a story that—that might do me a bit of good.

[Ron moves just inside the room.]

MRS. O'C.: And she said you'd find her here?

BRIGGS: Yes.

MRS. O'C. (resignedly): Well, of course, you may do, by now, for all I know. Nobody ever troubles to tell *me* who's staying here. (Moves to go, then halts.) Though, if you ask me—if it's something for the newspapers—it's Mrs. Merrilees you want.

BRIGGS (eagerly): Is she in, please?

MRS. O'C. (pessimistically): She'll be coming in, I suppose, *some* time or other, for her tea.

BRIGGS: May we wait?

MRS. O'C.: Please yourself, my girl! (Moving to

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kitchen door.) People come and go as they like in this place.

[*Exit Mrs. O'Connor into kitchen. Briggs turns away, starts slightly at the burst of music accompanying Mrs. O'Connor's exit, motions to Ron to join her, moves to left end of recess and seats herself. Ron moves warily to her left where he stands chewing watchfully. Both seem very overawed. There is a slight pause. Enter Gertrude from staircase. She is dressed as before. Briggs at once rises.*]

GERTRUDE (*going to couch—smiling vaguely*): How do you do?

BRIGGS (*starting forward*): How d'you do?

[*Gertrude sits left end of couch, takes out pad and begins to write.*]

(*Glances uncertainly at Ron, then—to Gertrude.*) Excuse me!

[*There is, of course, no reply. Briggs, disconcerted, turns and holds a hurried, whispered conference with Ron.*]

GERTRUDE (*looks up and switches on*): Have you come to tea?

BRIGGS (*again starting towards Gertrude*): No, thank you. No, I. . . .

GERTRUDE: Oh! (*Switches off and goes on writing.*)

[*Briggs glances again at Ron, then crosses determinedly to Gertrude who switches on and looks up enquiringly. Ron edges down right a little.*]

BRIGGS (*leaning over Gertrude*): Excuse me—but are you Mrs. Merrilees?

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

GERTRUDE: Oh no, dear—I'm Miss Pigeon.

BRIGGS: Oh!—I'm so sorry. (*Goes back to her seat and sits.*)

[*Gertrude switches off and goes on writing. Briggs takes a notebook from her satchel and makes an entry. Ron sits carefully, right end of recess.*]

GERTRUDE (*switches on*): Are you waiting for someone?

[*Briggs and Ron both rise instantly.*]

BRIGGS (*starting towards Gertrude again*): Mrs. Merrilees—I think.

GERTRUDE: Oh! But she's not Mrs. Merrilees now, you know.

BRIGGS (*dismayed*). Isn't she?

GERTRUDE: No—she thought she was, but there's been a muddle and she finds she isn't. (*Looking suddenly puzzled.*) I don't quite know what she is now. She didn't say.

BRIGGS: Oh!

GERTRUDE (*thinking it out*): I do know that she doesn't intend to call herself by her *first* husband's name—so I suppose she must be going back to Mrs. St. John Willoughby—which is what she was in between. (*Switches off and goes on writing.*)

BRIGGS (*completely bewildered*): Oh!—thank you! (*Goes back to her seat, sits and makes a note.*)

[*Ron slowly re-seats himself. Enter Andrea from library. She is studying a time-table. Briggs and Ron immediately jump to their feet again.*]

ANDREA (*looks up*): Oh—good afternoon! (*Crosses to them.*)

TRIAL AND ERROR

BRIGGS (*starting forward*): Good afternoon! I'm Briggs, of *The Sun*.

ANDREA: Oh, yes!

BRIGGS (*in a nervous rush*): Well, I'm not exactly on *The Sun*; I'm just a sort of local correspondent, and Mrs. Fish was kind enough. . . .

ANDREA (*holding out her hand*): I know. She telephoned me about you.

BRIGGS (*shaking hands*): Oh, she did! Oh, you *are* the lady!

ANDREA (*extending her hand to Ron*): How do you do?

RON (*shaking hands*): Hiya!

ANDREA: Well, do come and sit down, er—Briggs. (*Indicates couch.*) I shall be delighted to give you an "exclusive".

BRIGGS (*moving to couch, breathless with excitement*): Oh, thank you! (*Sits with notebook.*) Er—is it Mrs. St. John Willoughby?

[*Ron re-seats himself.*]

ANDREA (*at centre*): Oh, no, dear! That was the name I took to conceal my identity. There's no need for that any more.

BRIGGS: Oh! (*Hesitates with pencil poised.*) I—don't quite know what to call you, then.

ANDREA: Well, strictly, of course, I'm Mrs. Nightshade. . . .

BRIGGS (*in relief*): Oh, you *are*! (*Begins making a note.*)

ANDREA: But I don't propose to be *called* that, because that would be unkind to Mr. Merrilees. [*Considers.*] Perhaps you'd better use my maiden name for the time being. There seems to be nothing else left.

BRIGGS: What *is* that, please?

ANDREA: Miss Pigeon!

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

BRIGGS: Oh! (*Glances in a confused way at Gertrude and makes another note.*) And is it true, Miss Pigeon, that you are a rather notorious pers. . . . I—I mean a rather famous person who was supposed to have—have murdered. . . ? (*Breaks off with a nervous little laugh.*)

ANDREA: Yes. (*In mild surprise.*) Didn't you know about it?

BRIGGS (*apologetically*): I'm sorry. I was at school.

ANDREA: Oh!

BRIGGS: They didn't let us read that sort of thing.

ANDREA: No—of course not!

BRIGGS: And now he's turned up again?

ANDREA: Yes.

BRIGGS: And—and what does that mean, Miss Pigeon?

ANDREA (*crossing to left of couch*): Well, *that* means, you see, that if Mr. Merrilees and I want to stay married—which we never really were, of course—I shall now have to get a divorce and be married again, although it was only on Thursday that we *were* married.

BRIGGS (*frantically trying to make notes—looking up in agitated bewilderment*): I—er—I don't think I quite. . . .

ANDREA: Because Dudley and I. . . .

GERTRUDE (*suddenly looking up and switching on*): Did you say something, dear?

ANDREA: No, darling! . . .

[*Gertrude switches off and goes on writing.*]

(*Turning to library door.*) Perhaps we'd better go in here. (*Opens door for Briggs.*)

[*Ron rises.*]

TRIAL AND ERROR

BRIGGS (*rising and going down left*): Please, Miss Pigeon—who's Dudley—Mr. Merrilees?

ANDREA: No, dear, Mr. Nightshade. Though he's not really Dudley at all. He's Roderick.

[*Exit Briggs into library looking thoroughly confused.*]

I only call him Dudley because. . . .

[*Exit Andrea into library. Left alone, Ron sinks back on to his seat, looking more uncomfortable than ever. Enter Dudley on to sun-deck from left. He wears now an altogether more "summery" outfit—sports-jacket, scarf, slacks, piebald shoes, etc. He comes into the room and moves towards Gertrude, registering considerable curiosity at the presence of Ron (who rises slowly and returns his gaze with a sort of trapped look). Continuing on to left of couch, he bends over Gertrude, switches on her "aid" and kisses her.*]

GERTRUDE (*in pleased surprise—at once reaching round and patting his face*): Oh—Dudley!

DUDLEY: Hullo, darling! Having a nice time?

GERTRUDE: Lovely, dear, lovely! I didn't know you were coming today.

DUDLEY: Andrea sent for me.

GERTRUDE: Oh!

[*Ron slowly sits again.*]

DUDLEY: You don't know what she wants me for, I suppose?

GERTRUDE: No, dear. (*Thinks.*) Unless it's to put a new flint in her lighter. She did say it needed one. (*Beckons him close to her and adds confidentially.*) I don't think that Mr. O'Connor's very good with his hands, you know.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

DUDLEY: No.

[*Enter Briggs from library.*]

BRIGGS (*she jerks her head at Ron from the doorway, then sees Dudley*): Oh! Excuse me! (*Withdraws again.*)

[*Ron rises with alacrity and rushes across, nearly colliding with Dudley. Exit Ron into library.*]

DUDLEY (*quite startled*): Who are they?

GERTRUDE: I don't know, dear.

DUDLEY (*indicating library*): Is Andrea with them?

GERTRUDE (*looks vaguely round the room*): I suppose she must be. She was here just now.

[*Dudley moves to the library door and stands listening.*]

(*Continuing.*) Is that all, then, for the moment?

DUDLEY (*turning away from the door and moving to behind couch*): Yes, dear. You get on with your letter.

GERTRUDE: Yes. (*Switches off and addresses a stamped envelope.*)

DUDLEY (*with a preoccupied air—leaning over Gertrude, as if talking to her*): Now, why did she send for me—huh? It can't be that she's decided that she wants me back, can it? Or, can it? It *might* be, you know—if only to annoy him. The thing is, though—what do I do if it is that? Do I have her and *risk* it—or what? I'm damned if I know. (*Comes round couch, seats himself next Gertrude and claims her attention.*)

[*Gertrude switches on.*]

I'm sorry to disturb you again.

GERTRUDE: Oh, it isn't that, dear. (*Indicating bag.*) My high tension's getting a little low, that's all.

TRIAL AND ERROR

DUDLEY: I won't keep you.

GERTRUDE: Well?

DUDLEY: Aunt Gertrude—you know Andrea, don't you?

GERTRUDE (*puzzled*): Know her, dear! Of course I do. What are you talking about?

DUDLEY: I mean, you know her very *well*—better than anyone, perhaps?

GERTRUDE (*considers*): I think, perhaps, I do—now that dear Maggie is gone. She *lived* with *her*, of course.

DUDLEY (*registers a slight spasm of anxiety*): Yes. Well, *you* never doubted her, did you? At the trial, I mean.

GERTRUDE: At the trial, dear? Why should I? It was all stuff and nonsense—especially that young woman who said she *saw* her do it.

DUDLEY (*earnestly*): You—you just knew she wouldn't do a thing like that?

GERTRUDE (*quite scornfully*): With somebody looking on? Of course not! She has far too much sense.

DUDLEY: But apart from that, I mean—didn't you feel that she was—well, too essentially *kind* to—to kill anyone?

GERTRUDE (*pats Dudley's knee*): My dear—I've known Andrea draw blood from the head of an undergardener with a hoe—simply because he drowned a half-grown rat in the water-butt. Now if *that* doesn't show an essential kindness, I don't know what does.

DUDLEY (*as if surprised at his own reaction*): I *do* know what you mean by that.

GERTRUDE: And that was when she was only ten, so she's not very likely to drown a full-sized man in an ocean at the age of thirty-two herself, is she?

DUDLEY (*beginning to look reassured*): No.

GERTRUDE: You know how fond I am of *you*, dear!

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

[*Dudley smiles and lays a hand on hers.*]

Well, you don't think I should have gone on leaving my money to her if I had thought she'd pushed *you* in the sea, surely.

[*Dudley pricks up his ears.*]

Why, she would never have seemed the same to me again.

DUDLEY (*trying to sound off-hand*): Oh—you've left her your money! I didn't know.

GERTRUDE: Indeed I have! All of it—now! I wrote and told them so.

DUDLEY: Who, dear?

GERTRUDE: The Government! I was going to let *them* have some of it, because they seemed so worried about money. But after treating Andrea like that. . . !

DUDLEY: I should think so, indeed!

GERTRUDE: And not a word of apology, mind you—even when they had to let her go. (*Suddenly perplexed.*)

But why do you keep on asking me that?

DUDLEY (*looking blank*): What?

GERTRUDE: Whether I doubted her, dear?

DUDLEY: I haven't asked you before.

GERTRUDE: Haven't you? Are you sure?

DUDLEY: Certain!

GERTRUDE (*thinks*): Ah, yes—now I remember. It was Mr. Merrilees. Yesterday! Before he left. (*Suddenly looks puzzled again.*) But why should you ask me at all. It seems such a funny question for *you* to ask. *You* don't think she murdered him, do you?

DUDLEY: Murdered who?

GERTRUDE: Oh, but of course it was you, wasn't it? Yes—I *must* get on. (*Switches off and sticks down envelope.*)

TRIAL AND ERROR

[*Looking thoughtful Dudley rises and begins to move round right of couch.*]

(*Switching on again.*) By the way—you're not going to let him have her, are you?

DUDLEY (*leans over her*): Do you know, dear—I don't think I am.

GERTRUDE: That's right! (*Pats his hand, rises and starts up left.*) I must take this to the post.

DUDLEY (*going to her*): I'll do that for you.

GERTRUDE: Oh, *will* you? You *are* kind. (*Hands him letter.*)

DUDLEY: Which way's the box?

GERTRUDE: It's, um—let me see! Well, I'll come with you, dear, shall I, and show you? (*Turning to staircase.*) I'll get my hat.

[*Exit Gertrude by staircase. Dudley smiles indulgently and wanders down centre putting the letter in his pocket. Enter Andrea followed by Briggs followed by Ron from library.*]

ANDREA (*crossing to Dudley*): Oh, here *is* Mr. Nightshade now. Dudley, dear, this *is* Briggs—a little friend of Valerie's who's on *The Sun*.

DUDLEY (*with a flattering note of interest*): Indeed! (*Bows faintly.*)

BRIGGS: How do you do?

ANDREA (*indicating Ron*): And Mr. um. . . .

RON (*lifting an arm*): Hiya!

[*Dudley lifts his arm to Ron, then stands gravely attentive.*]

ANDREA: I've given her an interview and had my picture taken looking at my two marriage certificates. Actually they were old dog licences belonging to Valerie, but they were all we could find and it won't

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

show. Good evening, dear! (*Presents her cheek to him.*)
DUDLEY (*kissing her*): Hullo, darling! (*Puts an arm about her shoulders.*)

BRIGGS (*still in a state of anxious confusion—to Andrea*): Excuse me—I—I'm terribly sorry—but I still haven't got it quite clear. (*Indicating Dudley.*) Is this the gentleman you've just married?

DUDLEY (*all charm and affability*): No. I'm the one who went in the sea.

BRIGGS (*excitedly—going to Dudley*): Oh! Oh, I wonder whether. . . . Oh, could I persuade you to. . . .

DUDLEY (*cutting in*): Make a statement? Of course! I should be delighted. What would you like me to tell you about?

BRIGGS: Oh, anything, Mr. Nightshade, anything, but—but. . . . (*Breaks off.*)

DUDLEY (*encouragingly*): Yes?

BRIGGS: Well, if you *could* say something about—how you *got* in the sea. . . .

DUDLEY: Certainly! (*Considers momentarily.*)

[*Briggs turns and sits on right end of couch, with notebook.*]

(*Takes his arm from about Andrea and wanders down right.*) You can say this—and quote me. (*Dictating.*) I returned to this country a few weeks ago—after having lain for nine months—in an African. . . . (*Hesitates.*)

[*Dudley meets Andrea's eye fleetingly. Briggs scribbles madly.*]

. . . hospital—with amnesia.

BRIGGS (*looks up startled*): Who did you say?

DUDLEY: Loss of memory.

TRIAL AND ERROR

BRIGGS: Oh! (*Continues writing.*)

DUDLEY (*moving back to Andrea*): At first I was unable to establish contact with my wife. When finally I did so—I was shocked and astonished to learn—that, in my absence—she had been charged with my death. The allegation—that she pushed me in the sea—is, of course (*again puts his arms about Andrea, and smiles at her*) the foulest calumny.

ANDREA (*deeply appreciative*): Dudley! How nice of you!

BRIGGS (*holding up her hand like a schoolgirl*): Please!

DUDLEY: Yes?

BRIGGS: What's cal—calum. . . ?

DUDLEY: A calumny, Briggs, is a false and malicious accusation. A defamation—a slander. She fought like a wild thing to *save* my life.

ANDREA: Oh, you *can* do the sweetest and most unexpected things, Dudley.

DUDLEY (*to Briggs—looking smug*): Will that do?

BRIGGS (*still scribbling*): Oh—boy!

DUDLEY (*removing his arm from Andrea*): Now—would you like a picture?

BRIGGS (*rising and putting away notebook*): Oh, please!

DUDLEY (*considers*): Well— (*Taking Andrea's arm and walking her down left.*) What about my wife in the chair (*thrusts Andrea into the chair*) and me on the arm? (*Sits on the arm and puts his arm about Andrea.*) Like this?

[*Ron, who has been hanging about uncertainly, left, is suddenly electrified at the prospect of a picture and rushes to confront the group.*]

BRIGGS: Wonderful! Eh, Ron?

RON (*down left centre crouching with camera*): Smashin'!

ANDREA (*suddenly rising and moving away to couch*): No—I don't think so, Dudley, if you don't mind.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

[*Briggs and Ron look dismayed.*]

DUDLEY (*a little startled*): Not?

ANDREA: Not without Claud, dear. It wouldn't be in very good taste.

DUDLEY (*rising—resentfully*): What do you mean? I'm your husband.

ANDREA: Only on paper, though. Don't lose sight of that!

DUDLEY (*aggressively*): I've every intention of. . . .

ANDREA (*to Briggs—interrupting*): So if you don't mind waiting a little while. . . ?

BRIGGS: Not at all!

[*Dudley goes huffily upstage. Ron is the picture of resentful disappointment.*]

ANDREA (*quite apologetically, to Ron*): Then they can *both* be in it.

BRIGGS: Yes.

ANDREA (*crossing to library door and opening it*): Then perhaps you'd go back in here, dear, would you?

BRIGGS (*moving left*): Certainly!

[*Ron follows sullenly.*]

ANDREA: I want to talk to Mr. Nightshade before Mr. Merrilees gets here.

[*Exit Briggs followed by Ron into library. Andrea closes library door, turns and looks thoughtfully at Dudley.*]

DUDLEY (*moving down centre not too pleased*): You've sent for *him*, then, have you?

ANDREA: Yes.

DUDLEY: What for?

TRIAL AND ERROR

ANDREA: Because I want to tell him how deeply ashamed of myself I am.

DUDLEY: Ashamed! Why?

ANDREA: For being angry with him for showing the very qualities for which I married him.

DUDLEY (*scornfully*): You're referring, I take it, to his rather marked integrity, honour and—what have you?

ANDREA: Yes, dear! His integrity, honour and what you haven't. (*Moves to chair down left.*)

DUDLEY (*acidly*): Why trouble to send for *me*, then?

ANDREA: To take up your offer, Dudley. (*Sits.*)

DUDLEY (*astonished*): What?

ANDREA: The one you made to him.

DUDLEY: Pay the ten thousand yourself, you mean?

ANDREA: Nine thousand, seven hundred and fifty—to be exact.

DUDLEY (*impressed*): Well—you *do* want him, don't you?

ANDREA: I do.

DUDLEY: He wouldn't have been worth all that to you this time last week, however.

ANDREA (*ironically intrigued*): He wouldn't?

DUDLEY: No. It's a good thing I realise that—otherwise I might be hurt.

ANDREA: What's happened in the meantime then—to make him seem less worthless?

DUDLEY (*falling into the trap*): I've come back.

ANDREA: Ah! Yes—I do see that.

DUDLEY (*undismayed*): You have a use for him now?

ANDREA: Hadn't I a use for him before?

DUDLEY: Only as a moral soporific.

ANDREA: And what has he become since you came back?

DUDLEY (*moving towards her*): Something in the nature of a sanctuary, dear!

ANDREA: A what?

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

DUDLEY: A haven, a harbour, a port in a storm.

ANDREA: What storm?

DUDLEY (*leans over her, pointing to his chest*): Me!

ANDREA (*flattening herself against the back of the chair*):
Have you *any* idea what you're talking about?

DUDLEY: I am talking about your constitutional
inability to resist me, Andrea.

ANDREA (*falsely incredulous*): My *what*?

DUDLEY: Which is better known to you than anyone.
So don't pretend you don't know what I mean!

ANDREA (*trying to bluster*): Are you suggesting. . . ?

DUDLEY (*leaning closer—interrupting*): Yes. So long as
you're free to return to me—I have only to do that
(*snaps his fingers*) and you will.

ANDREA (*staring at him unbelievably*): Return to you!

DUDLEY: Willy-nilly! Against your better judgment.
Whether you like it or not. (*Straightens up.*)

ANDREA (*at once escaping from the chair and moving away
right trying not to hurry*): You're demented.

DUDLEY (*moving slowly after her*): You have no defences
where I'm concerned—and you know it.

ANDREA: That's nonsense! (*Realises he is following, so
turns defensively and backs away as he advances.*)

DUDLEY: You're helpless—and you *know* you're
helpless.

ANDREA (*brought to a halt by chair down right; getting
really agitated*): Well, you keep away, because. . . .

DUDLEY (*moving close up to her—interrupting*): I have
only to touch you. . . . (*Takes her deliberately in his
arms.*)

ANDREA (*leaning away from him—sharply*): Dudley!

DUDLEY (*drawing her to him*): . . . and you're sunk!

ANDREA: Dudley!

[*Dudley kisses her. At first she resists, then, by degrees, the
kiss becomes mutual.*]

TRIAL AND ERROR

DUDLEY (*as their lips part*): See?

ANDREA (*very shaken*): What do you think you're doing?

DUDLEY (*still holding her*): Demonstrating, dear, that's all.

ANDREA (*pushing herself away from him and going to centre*): Well, *stop* demonstratiating and get down to business. I—I've got a train to meet.

DUDLEY (*moving after her—with a leer*): I *am* getting down to business.

ANDREA: Oh, I see! Pushing the price up! All right, I'll make it eleven thousand.

[*Dudley shakes his head, moves close up to her and begins again to take her in his arms.*]

Twelve, then!

[*At right end of couch, unable to back away.*]

[*Again he kisses her. Again she reciprocates.*]

(*The fight gone out of her—remaining with her arms about his neck—anxiously.*) You don't mean that you *do* want me back, though, do you—not really?

DUDLEY: I *do* want you back.

ANDREA (*in growing dismay*): But, Dudley, we're a terrible mixture. You *must* be joking.

DUDLEY: Do I seem to be joking?

ANDREA (*wailingly*): No.

DUDLEY (*gently*): I'll try to do better, this time, dear.

ANDREA: Oh, but I *do* so want to live in peace—with someone I can respect, Dudley.

[*Dudley's expression hardens.*]

(*Imploringly.*) Dudley—*please*—if you've the slightest

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

regard for my happiness! He's *so* much nicer than you are.

[*Affronted, Dudley removes her arms from about his neck and crosses down left.*]

Thirteen thousand!

DUDLEY (*loudly*): No!

ANDREA: But, Dudley. . . !

DUDLEY: You're not for sale. (*Grabs a magazine from coffee-table and sits, couch.*)

ANDREA: But, yesterday you said. . . .

DUDLEY (*interrupting*): I've changed my mind. (*Opens magazine.*)

ANDREA (*stares at him helplessly a moment, then, suddenly stamping with anger*): Well, I'm not going to have it, that's all. (*Going up right.*) It isn't *fair* using your beastly charm like that. It—It's blackmail—that's what it is. (*Coming back again.*) *Why* have you changed your mind, anyway?

DUDLEY (*unsurely*): Because—*well*, because I. . . .

ANDREA (*interrupting*): *That*, of course, I *don't* believe.

DUDLEY: As you please! (*Begins to look at magazine.*)

ANDREA (*going up left*): Something's convinced you that I'm worth keeping, that's all. (*Pauses to think.*)

[*Dudley maintains a discreet silence.*]

Either you've discovered that I'm richer than you thought, or you've managed to satisfy yourself that I didn't push you in the sea—or something. (*Again pauses, and suddenly her look of resentment gives place to one of mischief. She moves down to behind couch and leans over him.*) Well, as a matter of fact—and if you really want to know—I *did!*

DUDLEY (*looking up*): Did what?

TRIAL AND ERROR

ANDREA: Push you in the sea. And you can put that in your pipe and. . . . *Now* what are you grinning at?

DUDLEY (*smiling in a superior way—returns to magazine*): Really, Andrea!

ANDREA (*straightens up*): Oh—I suppose you think I'm just saying that!

DUDLEY: You're slipping, my poppet!

ANDREA: All right! So you think I'm just trying to scare you off! (*Again leaning over—her mouth close to his ear—evilily insinuating.*) You can't be *sure*, though, can you—not *quite* sure?

DUDLEY: I'm reasonably so. (*He is still amused.*)

ANDREA (*trying to look like "Mr. Hyde"*): Are you? Why? Why even reasonably sure? Because you wouldn't expect me to do such a thing? We don't all *look* like it, you know. Babyface Nelson, for instance!

DUDLEY (*looks at her. The grin leaves his face*): Well—it's a risk I'm prepared to take, anyway.

ANDREA: Very well! (*Moving away down right.*) But I should think *twice* before thwarting a woman of my reputation. You don't get all that smoke without some fire, Dudley. (*Goes up towards doors.*)

DUDLEY: *That*, of course, like *most* proverbs, is a complete fallacy. (*But a look of disquiet has come into his eyes.*)

ANDREA (*at glass doors*): Well—so long as you're happy about it! (*Goes out, turns and comes back again—indicating Dudley's magazine.*) I shouldn't start reading any serials, though. (*Again goes out.*)

[*Dudley throws down the magazine and looks alarmed. Andrea again returns.*]

ANDREA (*still with a sinister air*): I spoke to Valerie this morning.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

DUDLEY: Uh?

ANDREA: *She* told me something you might care to ponder, too.

DUDLEY: Oh?

ANDREA: Yes. If you're tried for something, and you get let off—you can't be charged again—not with the same offence. Did you know that?

DUDLEY: What about it?

ANDREA: Well—I *have* been tried for murdering you once, haven't I? (*Goes out.*)

[*Exit Andrea from sun-deck to left. Dudley rises, looking quite shaken. He goes down left. Enter Mrs. O'Connor from kitchen. There is the usual burst of music as the door opens and closes. Dudley sits, chair down left. Mrs. O'Connor crosses up right, looks out at the tea-table and turns back again, rolling her eyes to heaven in exasperation. She goes back to the kitchen and is about to enter when there is a knock at the front door. Mrs. O'Connor again registers suffering, and goes into passageway. Dudley, becoming aware of something uncomfortable in his chair, scrabbles a moment and produces a book. Enter Claud from passageway. He wears a black coat and pin-stripe trousers, and carries a newspaper in addition to his bowler, brief-case and umbrella. Dudley suddenly becomes electrified at the book.*]

DUDLEY: Good God!

CLAUD (*crossing briskly right*): Good evening! (*Puts his umbrella on sideboard, continues to recess, sits left end, puts his hat and brief-case on table, takes out his spectacles and opens paper.*)

[*Mrs. O'Connor re-appears from the passageway, making for the kitchen.*]

DUDLEY (*to Mrs. O'Connor—rising and going upstage*): I say!

TRIAL AND ERROR

[*Mrs. O'Connor halts bleakly.*]

Who's reading this—d'you know? (*Holds up book.*)
MRS. O'C.: I have no idea *what* goes on in this house,
Mr. Nightshade. (*Glances in Claud's direction and goes out.*)

[*Burst of music. Exit Mrs. O'Connor into kitchen.*]

DUDLEY (*crossing to Claud*): It isn't yours, I suppose?
CLAUD (*looking up—frigidly*): *What* isn't mine?
DUDLEY (*indicating book*): *The Crimes of the Borgias.*
CLAUD: She brought it with her—on her honeymoon.
DUDLEY: Oh!
CLAUD: She likes to read in bed, I understand.
(*Retires behind paper.*)
DUDLEY: Did she seem to enjoy it?
CLAUD (*angrily*): How the hell should I know?

[*Dudley stares sullenly at Claud and moves away down left.*]

DUDLEY (*after a slight pause*): Why didn't you let me know you were coming? You could have driven down with me. (*Puts book down on coffee-table.*)
CLAUD: Thank you, but I prefer the wholesome squalor of British Railways. (*Lowers paper and looks at him.*) And before you make any further effort to be friendly—I may tell you that I'm fully aware you were lying when you said you could remember whether Andrea pushed you in the sea. (*Retires behind paper again.*)
DUDLEY: Oh! (*Slight pause.*) Well look! D'you mind if I ask you something?
CLAUD: The point is, of course, academic. You will ask me in any case. (*Gives Dudley his attention.*) Well?
DUDLEY (*going to Claud—looking worried*): Well, you

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

know the law about being tried twice for the same offence! You can't be; you know that, don't you?

CLAUD: Not once you've been acquitted, of course!

DUDLEY: Quite! Well, Andrea's got hold of that, and she seems to think it means she could bump me off, now, any time she liked, and nobody could do a thing about it.

CLAUD (*with a short laugh*): Ingenious, anyway! (*Goes back to paper.*)

DUDLEY (*going down right; anxiously seeking reassurance*): That can't be right, though, surely? It wouldn't be the same offence if she did it again—would it?

CLAUD: Hardly an offence at all, in my view.

DUDLEY: No, seriously. . . !

CLAUD: Andrea has a genius for misinterpreting the law. We know that. I don't know what comfort it would be, though, with a knife in your back, to reflect that it got there illegally.

DUDLEY (*glaring at him*): You sweet thing! (*Goes up centre.*)

CLAUD (*looking up*): From all of which I take it that you *are* planning to live with her again.

DUDLEY: Well, as a matter of fact, I am—though I'm damned if I know what I've said to suggest it.

CLAUD: A certain concern for your personal safety suggests it. (*Goes back to paper.*)

DUDLEY (*suddenly resentful*): You're just plain bloody callous, of course. You don't seem to think it matters.

CLAUD (*tolerantly*): I can see that it matters to you.

DUDLEY: Doesn't it matter to you too? I thought you didn't like women who went in for that sort of thing.

CLAUD: I don't.

DUDLEY (*turning to Claud in sudden alarm*): You don't mean you're dropping out, do you?

CLAUD (*looking up—surprised*): Would you mind?

DUDLEY: Well, of *course* I'd mind if it meant you

didn't believe in her. If I'm going to have her back, I shall need all the moral support I can get. (*Moves away left.*)

CLAUD (*going back to his paper*): Well—if it's any comfort to you—I'm not dropping out.

DUDLEY (*relieved*): Ah! You do believe in her, then! (*Sits L. arm of couch.*)

CLAUD: Not yet! Not implicitly! No! . . .

DUDLEY (*startled*): Uh?

CLAUD: I do know how to find out about her though.

DUDLEY (*rising*): What? (*Going to Claud.*) What did you say?

CLAUD (*looking up*): I said—"I do know how to find out about her *though*", I've given the matter considerable thought and (*very deliberately*) I now know how to find out about her. Is that clear?

DUDLEY: I suppose it's not the least use asking you how?

CLAUD (*rises, takes off his glasses and thrusts his face into Dudley's—loudly*): Not the slightest!

DUDLEY (*suddenly furious*): You know—I've been trying to *like* you, for Andrea's sake. . . .

[*Front door slams.*]

but, from *now on*, so help me. . . .

[*Enter Andrea from passageway, hurriedly. Dudley turns away left fuming. Claud picks up brief-case.*]

ANDREA (*at once running to Claud—delightedly*): Darling—you're here! (*Flings herself at him and kisses him ardently.*) I missed you. You must have come the other way.

CLAUD (*stiffly*): Yes.

ANDREA: I'm so glad to see you. (*Kisses him again.*) I've been so wretched, waiting.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

CLAUD: Wretched? Why?

ANDREA: Didn't they tell you? (*Indicating Dudley.*)
Didn't *he* tell you?

DUDLEY: What?

ANDREA (*to Dudley*): How sorry I am for throwing
him out last night.

DUDLEY: No, I'm damned if I. . . .

ANDREA (*interrupting*): Well, I do think you might
have done, Dudley.

CLAUD (*a little sourly*): Oh, I got all that, all right—
from Miss Winters.

ANDREA (*relieved*): Oh, you did!

CLAUD: *And* from the porter at the club.

ANDREA: And am I forgiven? (*She is still clinging to
him.*) Well, I must be, mustn't I—otherwise you
wouldn't *be* here?

CLAUD: As a matter of fact, Andrea, I was coming
anyway. (*Patting brief-case.*) I wanted to see you
about something.

ANDREA: Oh!

[*Enter Gertrude from staircase. She now wears her hat, and
carries the cricket bat.*]

GERTRUDE (*to Dudley*): I'm ready, dear!

DUDLEY (*uncomprehendingly*): Huh?

GERTRUDE: Didn't you say you had to go to the post?

DUDLEY (*drawing the letter from his pocket*): Oh! Yes!
(*Moves left.*)

[*Gertrude turns towards passageway.*]

What are you taking that for? (*Indicates bat.*)

GERTRUDE (*balting*): What, dear? This? Oh, yes, I
brought it down to do it up. I want to send it.

DUDLEY (*taking bat from her*): Well, Claud's your man
for that.

TRIAL AND ERROR

GERTRUDE: Is he?

DUDLEY (*going to Claud*): Certainly he is. He used to play for Kent. (*Hands bat to Claud then returns up left.*)

GERTRUDE: Oh, well, that's lovely! (*To Claud—graciously.*) Thank you so much!

[*Exeunt Gertrude and Dudley into passageway.*]

ANDREA (*going to couch—resentfully*): Honestly—I could murder that man sometimes. (*Sits left end.*)

CLAUD: Where is the paper and string, Andrea?

ANDREA: Oh, leave it for the moment, dear! (*Patting the place beside her.*) Let's talk while there's a little peace in the place.

[*Claud follows and sits with the bat and brief-case across his lap—and at once begins to take out his spectacles. Andrea clings to him again.*]

Darling, I want you to promise me something.

CLAUD: Yes?

ANDREA: In future, when I get mad with you for being honourable—you're to take no notice!

CLAUD (*perplexed*): Huh?

ANDREA: It isn't reasonable of me.

CLAUD: Isn't it?

ANDREA: No. Particularly when you think that it's precisely for being what you are, that I married you.

CLAUD: What am I, then? I've rather forgotten.

ANDREA: Well—honourable, Claud!

CLAUD: Oh! (*Prepares to open brief-case.*)

ANDREA: I'm apt to be unreasonable at times, you know.

CLAUD (*looking up, apparently surprised*): Are you?

ANDREA: Yes. You'll learn that when you get to know me better. Meanwhile, though, if you *could*

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

just remember, when I *do* hit you, or throw things about, or anything. . . .

CLAUD: To ignore it!

ANDREA: Please! Or I shall worry about you. You take things so seriously.

CLAUD (*not very confidently*): Very well! (*Returns to brief-case.*) I'll do what I can.

ANDREA: There's a dear! (*Sits up and looks business-like.*) Now—what did you want to see me about?

CLAUD (*takes out a huge wad of papers and puts them on coffee-table*): This matter of bigamy, Andrea. (*Takes out a single remaining paper.*)

ANDREA (*looking blank*): What matter of bigamy?

CLAUD (*stares at her*): Surely you must realise?

ANDREA: What?

CLAUD: Well, that—technically, my dear, you've committed. . . .

ANDREA: *I have?*

CLAUD: Yes.

ANDREA (*in astonishment*): In marrying you, you mean?

CLAUD: Yes.

ANDREA (*pugnaciously*): Who says so?

CLAUD: Well, it's—it's obvious.

ANDREA (*rising*): What's obvious? I never heard such nonsense in my life. (*Grabbing papers from coffee-table.*) Have you been seeing that Sir Henry Thing again?

CLAUD: This morning!

ANDREA (*turning away left*): Ah! I might have known. (*Returns to left of couch.*) How can it *possibly* be bigamy when I was a widow?

CLAUD: But you weren't a widow.

ANDREA: Then how could I have *killed* him?

CLAUD (*patiently*): You didn't kill him. That's why it's bigamy

ANDREA: I see. So it's a crime to kill your husband, and it's a crime *not* to kill your husband. (*Turning*

away left.) That makes sense, I *must* say. Really, Claud, it's *too* much. First it's murder, then it's bigamy. What'll it be next—mayhem or nepotism? (*Throws the papers high into the air, so that they flutter down all around Claud.*)

[*Claud waits until the last paper has floated to the floor.*]

CLAUD: Is *this* the sort of thing I'm to ignore?

[*Andrea turns to him aghast at what she has done.*]

I was only going to relieve your mind about it, anyway. (*Puts away the paper.*)

ANDREA (*going back to couch and sitting beside him again*): Oh, I am so sorry. Oh, please go on and relieve my mind, darling.

[*Claud looks uncertain, but remains unresponsive. The bat still lies across his lap.*]

Please!

CLAUD (*getting out the paper again*): Very well! (*Reads.*) "Mrs. Nightshade would have been entitled to assume that all proper enquiries had been made to trace her husband before she was charged with his murder."

ANDREA (*surprised*): Did Sir Henry say that?

CLAUD: He did!

ANDREA: Perhaps I've misjudged him.

CLAUD (*reading on*): "Thus—although the murder charge did not—for matrimonial purposes—create a legal presumption of Mr. Nightshade's death, and Mrs. Nightshade's second marriage was therefore bigamous. . . ."

ANDREA (*sitting up—contentiously*): Now, look. . .

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

CLAUD (*interrupting sharply*): Just a minute! (*Glares at her.*)

[*Andrea's fingers fly to her mouth as, startled, she again recollects herself.*]

(*Shakes the paper sternly and continues reading.*) "It would, nevertheless, provide an answer to a charge of bigamy."

ANDREA (*in a small voice*): Well, I should think so.

CLAUD: "And, this being so, I am confident that the Director of Public Prosecutions would be prepared to assure Mrs. Nightshade that he will not authorise such a prosecution." (*Lays paper on coffee-table and puts away his glasses.*)

ANDREA: Well—that *is* nice!

[*With a suddenly pre-occupied air Claud lays aside the brief-case, rises and moves away right—absently taking the bat with him.*]

Dear Sir Henry! We must ask him to dinner some time. (*Extends herself along the couch.*)

CLAUD: Yes.

ANDREA: Anything else?

CLAUD (*standing with his back to her*): Yes—Dudley! I suggest that we kill him.

ANDREA (*sitting up in astonishment*): What?

CLAUD: I see no alternative, Andrea. We are utterly in his power. And unless we are prepared to sacrifice everything—there's nothing else to be done.

[*Claud pauses. He seems to be listening for the effect of his words. Andrea, expressionless, subsides, turns slowly and faces the back of the couch.*]

TRIAL AND ERROR

I thought, perhaps—if we took him for a walk—along the cliff-tops—at night. Or asked him to go for a swim with us, or. . . .

[*There is a muffled sound from Andrea. Her shoulders are shaking. Claud turns.*]

(*Hurrying to couch.*) Andrea—you're crying! (*Leaning over her.*) Thank God, you're crying!

[*Andrea turns and sits up. She is convulsed with laughter.*]

ANDREA: Oh, Claud—you're wonderful!

CLAUD (*angrily astomshed*): What the hell's funny about that?

ANDREA: *What* a way to find out what sort of a person I am! I never knew anyone so artless.

CLAUD (*shouting furiously*): Blast you, Andrea! (*Flings away up right.*) You are the most maddening creature.

ANDREA (*rising and going after him*): I'm sorry to laugh, dear, but if only you'd learn to trust me, this sort of thing wouldn't happen. What *would* you have done if I'd agreed? (*In renewed laughter, attaches herself to his arm and drops her forehead on his shoulder.*)

[*Claud fumes. Enter Briggs from library. She pokes her head enquiringly round the door.*]

BRIGGS: Excuse me! Did anyone call?

ANDREA (*leaves Claud and moves to right of couch—trying to recover her composure*): Oh, I am sorry, Briggs. I forgot. (*To Claud.*) This young lady's a reporter, dear. I promised her a picture. (*In an exhausted way.*) Oh, dear! (*Takes out a handkerchief and dabs at her eyes.*)

BRIGGS (*coming excitedly into the room*): Is this Mr. Merrilees, then?

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

ANDREA: Yes. (*Looks at Claud and collapses again with laughter.*)

[*Enter Ron from library. Sheepishly unobtrusive, he remains down left.*]

BRIGGS (*crossing to Claud with notebook*): Oh, Mr. Merrilees—*would* you care to make a statement?

CLAUD (*at left end of recess—fiercely*): What about?

BRIGGS (*at once flustered*): About—about your—your plans—for—for the future.

CLAUD: What makes you think I plan my future?
(*Sits.*)

[*Briggs retires in disorder. Enter Gertrude and Dudley from passageway. Dudley looks at Claud with distaste and comes to a halt.*]

GERTRUDE (*to Dudley*): Thank you, dear!

[*Exit Gertrude by staircase.*]

ANDREA: Ah! Here's the other one! Come, Dudley!

[*Dudley remains sullenly up left.*]

(*To Briggs—moving round couch.*) Where would you like us—on this? (*Sits centre of couch and strikes a pose.*)

[*Briggs comes eagerly downstage. Again galvanised into action Ron rushes to centre and crouches with his camera directed at Andrea. Briggs squats behind him.*]

RON: Sooper! (*Begins doing things to his camera.*)

ANDREA: Come then, Dudley!—Claud!

[*Claud rises. With ill grace both men mooch to behind couch—Claud absently shouldering his cricket bat.*]

(*To Ron.*) How would you like us?

RON (*considers momentarily*): Erm—well—how about you two on the sofa holdin' hands, and the other. . . .

ANDREA (*interrupting*): Which two?

RON (*faintly surprised*): You and the legal one!

[*Dudley emits a short, aggravating laugh. Claud throws him an angry look.*]

ANDREA (*to Dudley*): Ssh! (*Encouragingly to Ron.*) Yes, go on!

RON: 'N' the other feller leanin' over the back lookin' cheesed off?

BRIGGS (*enthusiastically*): Oh—wizard!

CLAUD (*glaring at Ron*): Listen, young man—if I consent to appear in the same picture at *all* with this (*indicates Dudley*)—this *spiv*, I'm. . . .

[*Dudley starts and faces him.*]

ANDREA (*interrupting sharply*): *Claud!*

DUDLEY (*to Claud—aggressively*): Look—I'm getting a little *tired* of you, you know, one way and another. I'm half inclined to. . . .

ANDREA (*interrupting sharply*): Dudley! (*Sternly.*) Come and sit down!

[*Muttering mutinously, Dudley comes round couch, sits left of Andrea, folds his arms, crosses his legs and turns his head away.*]

(*To Claud.*) Both of you!

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

[*Claud comes round couch, sits right of Andrea, with the bat across his lap, crosses his legs and turns his head away.*]

(*In an undertone.*) You ought to be ashamed of yourselves. (*Strikes a pose, then to Briggs and Ron.*) There! How will that do? (*Puts on a smile.*)

[*Briggs and Ron survey the group doubtfully.*]

RON (*plaintively*): Couldn't one of 'em put his arm round you, or something?

ANDREA (*doubtfully*): Well, I. . . . (*Breaks off with a glance at Claud.*)

BRIGGS: And the other hold your hand—to make it fair?

DUDLEY (*to Briggs—uncrossing his arms and legs and sitting forward*): Let's get this clear, shall we? I'm the lady's husband. If there's anything like that to be done—I do *all* of it—see?

BRIGGS (*intimidated*): Yes, Mr. Nightshade! (*Rises and retreats down right.*)

DUDLEY (*indicating Claud*): This person is nothing more than a rather doubtful boy-friend, and. . . .

[*Claud starts, uncrosses his legs and turns to face Dudley.*]

ANDREA (*interrupting*): Be quiet, Dudley!

CLAUD (*bristling across Andrea*): May I say that I find that offensive?

ANDREA (*turning to Claud*): You be quiet too!

DUDLEY (*truculently*): That's exactly what you're meant to find, and if you want to *make* something of it. . . .

CLAUD (*rising and flourishing bat—overlapping from "find"*): In that case, perhaps you'd care to come outside and repeat it?

TRIAL AND ERROR

DUDLEY (*beginning to rise*): Certainly, I'll. . . .

ANDREA: *Stop* it—the pair of you!

[*Both subside and re-seat themselves, fuming.*]

(*To Ron.*) I think they'd better just sit, if you don't mind.

RON (*shrugs resignedly*): O.K.! (*Crouches and begins to focus camera.*)

DUDLEY (*muttering*): Let him get his damn picture, and I'll have the greatest pleasure in coming outside. (*Turns his head away.*)

[*Ron puts camera down and goes to Dudley.*]

CLAUD: Good!

RON (*to Dudley*): Would you mind just. . . ? (*Seizes one of his legs and crosses it over the other.*) That's right! Looks more cosy, see? (*Stands off and looks at him.*)

DUDLEY (*muttering*): Teach you some manners, perhaps!

[*Ron steps forward and turns Dudley's head to face Andrea.*]

CLAUD: Manners, eh? (*Laughing mirthlessly.*) Huh, huh! That's likely. (*Turns his head away.*)

[*Ron returns to his camera picks it up and crouches again.*]

DUDLEY (*muttering*): Sitting there like a. . . .

RON (*to Claud—interrupting*): You put your arm along the back, will you?

[*Claud complies.*]

'S the idea. Look at the lady, though!

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

[*Claud complies.*]

(*To Briggs with pride.*) How's that?

BRIGGS (*coming back and again crouching behind him.*):
Colossal!

RON: O.K., then! (*Directs camera again.*)

DUDLEY (*under his breath*): Fatuous ass! I'll knock
his. . . .

ANDREA (*under her breath*): Will you be quiet?

RON: Think of somethin' nice, now!

BRIGGS (*imploringly*): Please look happy!

[*Andrea resumes her false smile. Dudley and Claud
achieve a tortured travesty of a grin. All are still.*]

RON: Hold it, now! Hold it!

[*The attachment on the camera emits a flash.*]

Oke! Now, let's have. . . .

DUDLEY	} (<i>Together—jumping to their feet</i>):	{	Right!
CLAUD			Now then!

[*Both make for the glass doors. Ron, holding his camera
protectively above his head, is nearly bowled over in the rush.
Briggs retreats in panic, down right.*]

ANDREA (*rising*): Don't be so childish, Claud!
Dudley! (*Starts up right.*)

CLAUD: I'm sorry, my dear. (*Goes out on to sun-deck—
still with the cricket bat.*)

DUDLEY: He asked for it. (*Goes out on to sun-deck.*)

[*Exeunt Claud and Dudley from sun-deck to right. Ron is
following enthusiastically with his camera.*]

TRIAL AND ERROR

ANDREA (*to Ron*): You come back here!

RON (*halting*): Can't I just. . . ? (*Indicates camera.*)

ANDREA: No, you can *not*.

[*Crestfallen, Ron returns down right.*]

(*To Briggs.*) And don't you dare print any of *this*, you know.

BRIGGS: Oh, no, Miss Pigeon, I wouldn't *think* of. . . .

[*The voices of Dudley and Claud are heard angrily upraised, off. The others turn in their direction, listening fascinated.*]

DUDLEY: Now then, you drip!

CLAUD: Are you prepared to withdraw what you. . . ?

DUDLEY: I withdraw nothing. You're a. . . .

CLAUD: Right!

DUDLEY: You put that. . . .

CLAUD }
 } (Together): { Take your beastly. . . !
 } { Agh! Ugh! Let go you
 } { . . . ! Uph! I'll jolly
 } { soon. . . .

DUDLEY }
 } { Don't you. . . ! Oh, you
 } { would, would you? All
 } { right, you pompous clot,
 } { I'll knock your. . . Oooh!

[*Grunts, gasps, and the sound of blows follow. Finally there is a musical, percussive sound, as of a wooden object descending upon a human head—and then silence.*]

ANDREA (*turning a scared face to the others*): Why has it gone so quiet?

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

[*Enter Claud on to sun-deck from right. His hair is ruffled; his clothes are disordered; there is an abrasion on his cheek-bone and he is out of breath. He still carries his bat.*]

CLAUD (*comes into the room and halts—with an air of faint surprise*): Do you know—I think I may have killed him. (*Takes out his handkerchief, wipes the end of the bat and continues on downstage.*)

Curtain

Scene 2

Scene: The same, the next afternoon, after lunch.

The room bears signs of disorder. Newspapers lie about the place; cushions are disarranged. The remains of a scrappy meal for three are still on the table. A large suitcase stands by kitchen door, and a smaller one, half filled and open, is on the right end of the couch. Gertrude's plastic bag is on the sun-deck table.

The telephone bell is ringing as the Curtain ascends. After a pause—

Enter Andrea, from staircase. She wears a simple, tailored dress. Bedroom slippers and disordered hair, however, show that her toilet is not yet complete. She has been crying and, at intervals, she sniffs and gasps spasmodically. She carries a small assortment of underwear, etc.—which she hurriedly dumps on the couch. She then goes to the telephone, removes the receiver, takes out a handkerchief and blows her nose—and picks up the receiver again.

ANDREA: Hullo! (*Sniffs.*) Oh, Valerie! You got my message then! (*Sniffs and gasps.*) What? No, a touch of hay fever, that's all.—Well, I get *mine* in September. (*Sniffs.*) What? What phone? This one? No, I don't think so.—But we *have* been engaged all day. It's hardly *stopped* ringing. (*She is becoming, by degrees, more composed.*)—Well, newspapers, mostly.—Yes, it's this article, dear, in *The Sun*, that your little friend did.—Oh, no, there's nothing wrong with it. She didn't say anything that—she shouldn't have done. It seems to have made such a stir, that's all. One can't go out, or anything.—Reporters, dear. Scores of them.—No, only lurking, but there's one in every bush.—People? Ordinary ones, you mean? Darling, you never *saw* so many people. It's like Derby Day. One might be living in a car-park except that they bring their lunch.—Well, it depends what you mean by holiday atmosphere, dear. *They* seem to be enjoying it, but. . . . No, quite! And then there's another thing, Valerie. Mrs. O'Connor's gone. Without a word, my dear. Taken her husband and everything.—*I* don't know. I can't imagine *what's* upset her but, there it is she's. . . . Yes. So you see, what with one thing and another. . . . Well, Gertrude and I will be leaving as soon as we can, but. . . . What?—Oh, no, dear, the house won't be empty.—Well, Dudley! (*Becoming a little careful in her manner.*) Yes, he's—um—he's not very well.—Concussion, dear. He bumped his head.—Yes, isn't it, poor pet. So he'll have to be here for a day or so, anyway—until he can drive himself away—because he's got a car with him. And Claud will be here to look after him, so. . . . Oh, no, he offered to. He's terribly concerned. (*Showing signs of tears again—resentfully.*)—Well, as a matter of fact, dear, it isn't sweet of him at all.

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

He *ought* to be concerned. And Valerie—it *isn't* hay fever, either. It's—it's Claud.

[*Enter Claud on to sun-deck from left. He is dressed as in the previous scene. The damage to his face has developed into an angry bruise. He hurries in, making for the staircase.*]

He's not the man I thought he was, that's all. He's a brute. He's turned out to be. . . . (*Sees Claud and abruptly changes her tone.*) Well, thank you *so* much for the house, darling. Be seeing you! Good-bye! (*Hangs up.*)

[*Claud comes to a halt at centre. Ignoring him, Andrea returns to couch, sits left end and begins to pack the oddments. Claud hovers ingratiatingly.*]

CLAUD (*after a pause*): Been to the chemist.

[*Andrea makes no reply.*]

(*Showing a small bottle.*) Aspirin! Said he had a headache.

ANDREA (*coldly*): Is that surprising?

[*The telephone begins to ring. Claud goes to it.*]

Just say "No", will you?

CLAUD (*lifts receiver*): No! (*Hangs up and turns away.*)

ANDREA: And leave the thing off!

[*Claud returns to telephone and takes the receiver off its cradle. Then he comes down again.*]

CLAUD (*entreatingly*): Andrea! Can't you forgive me!

ANDREA (*in apparent surprise*): Forgive you? What for? (*She does not pause in her packing.*)

TRIAL AND ERROR

CLAUD: Well, for—becoming exasperated with him like that.

ANDREA: If—by “becoming exasperated” you mean nearly beating his brains out—there’s nothing to forgive. You can’t help having homicidal tendencies, presumably.

CLAUD: But you must believe me. I didn’t really mean him any harm. I just happened to have a cricket bat in my hand, that’s all.

ANDREA: Some day you may happen to be toying with a meat-axe when you become exasperated.

CLAUD: *He hit me.* Why aren’t you wild with him?

ANDREA: You’re supposed to be nicer than he is. There’s nothing *else* to recommend you, you know—if you’re not. I don’t care what *he* does, anyway. (*Having packed everything, rises and looks round the room.*)

CLAUD (*with a flicker of hope*): But you do care what I do?

ANDREA: Not now.

CLAUD: Oh!

ANDREA (*sees the seaweed on the picture. Going to it*): I just don’t like cosh-boys, that’s all. (*Takes down the seaweed, returns with it to couch, sits, folds it carefully, and puts it in suitcase.*)

CLAUD: It’s finished, then?

ANDREA: That puts it quite neatly, I think. (*Shuts case and starts trying to fasten it.*)

CLAUD (*humbly*): I see. (*Begins to move slowly away right.*)

ANDREA: There’s no need to go all crushed and silent like that, though.

CLAUD (*halting*): Why not?

ANDREA (*struggling with the suitcase*): It can’t mean all that to you—and it only makes *me* feel a beast.

CLAUD (*with a spark of resentment*): Well, I’m sorry, but I happen to *be* crushed and silent.

ANDREA (*kneeling on the suitcase*): That’s plain silly, of

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

course. Only yesterday you still weren't sure whether I was fit to be your life partner at all.

CLAUD: I am today, though.

ANDREA (*cynically*): What's convinced you this time?

CLAUD (*returning to right of couch*): The fact that you can't forgive me, Andrea. You'd *like* to forgive me. I know you would. But you *can't*. And any woman who's so morbidly squeamish over a slight act of personal violence like that, couldn't possibly be a killer.

ANDREA (*getting a little thoughtful*): I see. (*Stops fiddling with the suitcase.*)

CLAUD: So you needn't feel a beast, or anything. I'm—I'm happy to lose you—that way.

ANDREA (*gently*): Is it *so* important to you to be able to believe in me, Claud?

CLAUD: It is.

ANDREA (*getting off the suitcase and standing*): Could you do this for me, please?

[*Claud moves to suitcase, lifts it down, shuts it and puts it behind couch. Andrea watches with a worried look.*]

(*Turning away down left.*) Well, I'm sorry, Claud, but you must see what a shock it's been.

[*Claud moves up to sideboard and pours out a drink.*]

(*With her back to him.*) I thought you were the last person to do a thing like that.

CLAUD (*bitterly*): I also thought I was the last person to do a thing like that.

ANDREA: Later on, of course, I may feel differently about it—

[*Claud turns to her hopefully.*]

TRIAL AND ERROR

At the moment, though, I just can't bear the thought of you.

CLAUD (*subsiding*): Oh!

ANDREA: I've made other plans now, too.

CLAUD: I know.

[*Andrea turns and stares at him unhappily for a moment.*]

ANDREA (*suddenly bursting out—going up left*): Well, I wish you wouldn't be so humble and contrite about it. I want to get on.

CLAUD: Everything conspires to make me humble and contrite—even he? (*Indicates staircase.*)

ANDREA (*in surprise*): Dudley?

CLAUD: Hasn't shown a spark of resentment.

ANDREA: Oh, well—as far as that goes—he doesn't know.

CLAUD: Doesn't know what?

ANDREA: That you hit him. He *has* lost his memory this time.

CLAUD (*astonished*): You don't mean it!

ANDREA: And, although you don't deserve it, Claud, I haven't enlightened him, because I don't like an "atmosphere" but. . . .

[*Enter Gertrude from staircase. She is dressed as before. Walking briskly, she makes for the sun-deck.*]

CLAUD: Do you mean to say. . . ?

[*There is a knock at the front door.*]

ANDREA (*starting for the passageway*): Oh, bother!

CLAUD: You're not going to answer it, are you?

ANDREA: It can't be a reporter, dear. The police are keeping them out now.

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

[Exit Andrea into passageway.]

CLAUD (*putting his drink on sideboard and crossing left*):
Oh, well, I'll give him his aspirin.

[Exit Claud by staircase. Gertrude goes out on to sun-deck, gets her plastic bag and returns putting on the earphone. At chair down right she switches on and halts, looking faintly concerned. She switches on and off once or twice, shakes the bag, makes a small, cooing noise into it, then sits and draws out the entire electrical contents—a weird, complex and dangling collection of coils, valves, batteries, wires, etc., with a microphone protruding. All this she dumps on her lap and begins to examine. Enter Andrea slowly from passageway. She is reading the last page of a wad of telegraph forms. She comes down to behind couch.]

ANDREA (*having finished reading*): Well, of all things! The little beast! Listen to this, darling! It's a telegram—from the Feature Editor of the *Sunday Record*. He says (*reads*) "Phoebe Hogg, chief witness for the prosecution at your trial, walked into this office this morning and made us a proposition. Stop. It seems that her evidence was false. Stop. She was in love with your husband and consequently did not like you." (*To Gertrude.*) Well, that's only natural, I suppose. (*Continues to read.*) "She was much upset at his demise and wanted to make somebody suffer for it. Stop. You were obvious choice. Stop. Also handy. Stop. Says accusation was made under influence of gin and tonic. Stop. Later found it awkward to retract. Stop. But claims would not have let you hang." (*To Gertrude.*) Well, that's a comfort, anyway! (*Continues to read.*) "She has today read press report of your husband's return also his statement that her testimony was untrue and now

TRIAL AND ERROR

confidently awaits prosecution for perjury. Stop. Making hay she therefore offers to sell us, while still in a position to do so, a one-thousand word confession under the title: 'My Fight with my Conscience', disclosure being inevitable anyway. Stop. Do you object? Stop. Congratulations. Stop. We do not like Miss Hogg." Now *isn't* that nice? (*Takes the bottom form from the bunch, leaves the rest on the back of the couch, and goes up to the telephone table.*) And the length of it, my dear! Must have cost a fortune. Prepaid answer, too! (*Takes up pencil attached to pad and scribbles on form—reading aloud.*) "Of course I don't object."

[*Exit Andrea into passageway with form. Gertrude has meanwhile been quietly and obliviously examining her contraption. She now begins to bundle the whole lot back into the bag.*]

ANDREA (*off*): Thank you so much!

[*Enter Andrea from passageway. Gertrude rises and makes for staircase.*]

(*Coming down behind couch.*) So that will be out on Sunday. Won't Claud be pleased?

GERTRUDE (*below staircase*): Just as well we *are* going, dear. I think I've blown a valve.

ANDREA (*staring at her*): Do you mean to tell me. . . ?

[*A sort of grunting groan issues from the staircase.*]

Dudley!

[*Enter Dudley and Claud, from staircase. Dudley wears a dressing-gown over pyjamas—and slippers. There is an*

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

impressive dressing on his forehead, and he has a spectacular black eye. He moves with care, for fear of jarring his head; his hair is tousled, and he looks pretty much of a wreck. The state of his temper is deplorable. Claud officiously supports him by the arm. Seeing Gertrude, Dudley shields his dressing from her.]

GERTRUDE (*playfully*): Still a late riser, I see!

[*Exit Gertrude by staircase.*]

ANDREA (*hurrying to chair down left for an extra cushion*): What are you doing down here?

DUDLEY (*moving to couch—with ill grace*): I'm all right.

ANDREA (*returning with cushion to couch*): You're not all right. The doctor said. . . .

DUDLEY (*interrupting*): Damn the doctor! Oooh! (*Closes his eyes, frowns with pain, and sinks into left end of couch.*)

[*Andrea swiftly arranges the cushions.*]

ANDREA: Headache no better?

DUDLEY (*putting his feet up*): No.

CLAUD (*before right end of couch*): Won't take his aspirin.

ANDREA (*left of couch*): Well, I could have told you *that*, dear.

CLAUD: Why not, though?

DUDLEY: I don't *like* medicine.

CLAUD (*producing the aspirin*): Well, just this once, old man.

DUDLEY: No!

CLAUD: Come on! To please Andrea!

DUDLEY: No! Oooh!

ANDREA (*to Claud*): You see? I'm sorry, but I must get on. (*Turns and runs straight off.*)

TRIAL AND ERROR

[*Exit Andrea by staircase. Dudley closes his eyes. Claud pockets the aspirin.*]

CLAUD: Would you like another cushion?

DUDLEY (*grumpily*): No, thank you!

CLAUD: Cigarette?

DUDLEY: No, thank you!

CLAUD: Good thing you happened to have a bag with you (*indicating Dudley's dressing-gown, etc.*) otherwise it. . . .

DUDLEY (*opening his eyes—interrupting loudly*): And I don't feel chatty either.

CLAUD: Oh! (*Turns away to recess, sits right end, puts on his spectacles and takes a newspaper from table.*)

DUDLEY (*not very graciously*): I'm sorry.

CLAUD: 'S all right.

DUDLEY: You're being very good to me. I don't know why, I'm sure.

[*Claud looks uncomfortable, but does not reply. Dudley glares at him.*]

What happened?

CLAUD: Huh?

DUDLEY: What really happened? *She* told me I fell down.

CLAUD (*uneasily*): You—er—you can't remember, I understand!

DUDLEY: Not a thing!

CLAUD (*rather feebly*): What makes you think you didn't fall down, then?

DUDLEY: Listen! At four-thirty she says she's going to kill me. At four-forty I'm attacked with a blunt instrument. Doesn't that imply anything?

CLAUD (*rising—borrified*): You don't think *she* did it?

DUDLEY (*sarcastically*): Do *you* believe I tumbled over?

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

CLAUD (*puts paper down on table and takes off spectacles*): No—to be honest—I. . . .

DUDLEY (*interrupting*): Exactly! Well, who else is there with a reputation for trying to do me in?

CLAUD (*going to Dudley*): Well, nobody of course, but that's no reason for assuming. . . .

DUDLEY (*interrupting—irritably*): Look! What's the sense in talking like that? *You* know she bashed me as well as I do. I expect you were even there. As a matter of fact, you probably intervened and stopped her.

CLAUD: What?

DUDLEY: How else did you come by that? (*Indicates on his own face the position of Claud's injury.*)

CLAUD: Well, *she* didn't do it, anyway.

DUDLEY (*wearily irascible*): Claud! I know you're the sort of man who remains loyal through thick and thin, and it's frightfully admirable and all that, but don't come it with me this afternoon, there's a good chap—not when I feel like this! (*Suddenly shouting.*) It's *not good* for me! Oooh! (*Clutches his head.*)

CLAUD (*with a shrug*): Very well. (*Turns away up right.*)

DUDLEY (*slight pause*): Have I got anything to show for it—apart from this? (*Indicates his dressing.*)

CLAUD (*turning*): Haven't you seen yourself?

DUDLEY: Not yet. Why?

CLAUD (*with a note of malicious satisfaction*): Oh! Well, I'll get you a mirror. (*Goes towards staircase.*)

[*Enter Gertrude, followed by Andrea from staircase. Gertrude wears her hat and coat, and carries gloves, her plastic bag and the cricket bat. Andrea has also put on her coat as well as shoes and a smart little hat. She carries her slippers and handbag. Claud stands aside. Gertrude crosses to table. Andrea moves to behind couch and puts the slippers and handbag on the back of it.*]

TRIAL AND ERROR

GERTRUDE (*holding up cricket bat*): What a good thing you didn't do it up, Mr. Merrilees! (*Puts bat on table.*) I needn't send it now. (*Begins to put on gloves.*)

[*Claud turns to staircase again.*]

ANDREA (*picking up small suitcase and taking it up to passageway*): Are you going up, dear?

CLAUD: Yes.

ANDREA: Bring down Gertrude's suitcase, will you?

[*Claud nods, and exits by staircase. Andrea starts down left.*]

GERTRUDE (*to Andrea*): Perhaps you'd ask him to bring my suitcase down, dear?

ANDREA: I have.

ANDREA (*shouting*): I have!

[*Dudley winces. Gertrude still looks perplexed.*]

(*To Dudley.*) Oh, I'm so sorry! (*Returns up to telephone table, grabs pad, goes to Gertrude, scribbles on pad and shows it to her.*)

GERTRUDE: Oh, you have! Thank you! What's the matter with Dudley, dear?

[*Andrea puts her finger to her lips.*]

(*Whispering.*) Isn't he well?

[*Andrea points to her head.*]

(*In a horrified whisper.*) Mental?

[*Andrea glances anxiously at Dudley, scribbles again on the pad, and again shows it to Gertrude.*]

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

(*Relieved.*) Oh—headache! Oh, well. . . . (*Begins to scabble in her bag—whispering.*) See if you can get him to take one of my Pettacattel powders. (*Produces powder and hands it to Andrea.*) They're the very thing for headache—and rheumatism, if he ever gets that. (*Then loudly, for Dudley's benefit.*) Well, I'll just put these things safely in the car, and then I'll come back and say "good-bye". (*Winks conspiratorially, picks up bat and goes out.*)

[*Exit Gertrude into passageway.*]

ANDREA (*considering*): Now, let me see—have I forgotten anything? (*Moving down to right of couch.*) Oh, yes—a young woman rang up.

DUDLEY (*opening his eyes*): What young woman?

ANDREA: I don't know, dear, but she'd seen the papers and. . . .

DUDLEY (*interrupting*): Didn't she give a name?

ANDREA: No. She sounded awfully pretty, though, and quite well off. One could always *get* the name, of course, through the registration number—if necessary. I *have* made a note of it.

DUDLEY (*lifting his head—irritably*): What are you *talking* about? What registration number?

ANDREA: Of her car, Dudley! Didn't I say? The one *you've* got. She wanted to know what you'd done with it. Said you hadn't been home since Monday.

DUDLEY (*deflating*): Oh!

ANDREA: I told her you hadn't sold it or anything. Was that right?

DUDLEY (*looking slightly anxious*): Was she cross?

ANDREA (*as if reluctant to say it*): She was, rather.

DUDLEY: About the car, you mean?

ANDREA: That, and the fact that she hadn't realised you were married until she read this morning's paper.

TRIAL AND ERROR

DUDLEY (*avoiding Andrea's eye*): Oh!

ANDREA: Also, apparently, you went off and left the bath water running. It's too bad of you, really.

[*Dudley has no comment to make.*]

(*Goes up to telephone table and returns pad, then continuing.*)
Now is there anything I can get you before we go?

DUDLEY: I shouldn't mind a drink.

ANDREA: Of course! (*Goes up to sideboard.*) There is one here already. Is that Claud's?

DUDLEY: I suppose so.

[*Enter Claud from staircase. He carries Gertrude's suitcase and a shaving mirror. Andrea begins to pour drink. Claud stands the suitcase down by staircase and continues down to Dudley.*]

CLAUD (*handing him mirror*): I'm sorry. I had to look for one. (*Returns up left.*)

DUDLEY (*sits round, facing out front, and looks at his face in the mirror*): Good heavens! (*Stares in horror.*)

[*Claud picks up suitcase and continues on to passageway.*]

ANDREA (*to Claud*): Can you manage the other one too, dear?

[*Claud nods, picks up the suitcase by kitchen door, and goes off with both. Exit Claud into passageway.*]

DUDLEY (*angrily*): Why didn't someone tell me about this?

[*Andrea starts down with the drink in one hand and the Pettacattel powder still absently clutched in the other.*]

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

Shan't be able to go out for weeks.

ANDREA: Well, never mind, dear! Claud will be. . . .
(*Breaks off, halts, looks first at the powder, then at the drink, and becoming slightly furtive in manner, returns to sideboard.*) Claud will be able to. . . . (*Puts down glass and unfolds the packet of powder.*) . . . stay with you. (*Empties powder into glass.*)

[*Seeing this in the mirror, Dudley stares, for a moment in growing horror, then rises slowly and moves away right.*]

(*Swizzling the mixture.*) He had arranged to take a couple of weeks off, remember. (*Turning and coming down with drink, sees Dudley.*) Should you be on your feet, dear?

DUDLEY: Evidently not!

ANDREA (*putting drink on coffee-table*): Well—you drink this! (*Continues on to left of couch.*)

DUDLEY: Thank you!

ANDREA: Now—is there anything else you'll need?

DUDLEY (*pointing at drink*): Not if I drink that, anyway!

ANDREA (*looking puzzled*): What do you mean, dear?

DUDLEY: What do you *do* it for, Andrea—fun?

ANDREA: Do what?

DUDLEY: Put things in my whisky!

ANDREA: Oh! (*Moves to behind couch.*)

DUDLEY (*moving in to right of couch*): You know you can get rid of me now—without that—legitimately—any time you like. You've only got to trace the woman through her number plates and you've got all the evidence you want. What's the idea?

ANDREA: That may be perfectly platonic, for all I know.

DUDLEY (*fiercely*): Well, it *isn't*—see?

ANDREA: Oh!

TRIAL AND ERROR

DUDLEY: I'll *give* the name and address if you like.

ANDREA: You will?

DUDLEY (*going up right—waving his arms*): You can have a selection of names and addresses. (*Sits left end of recess.*)

ANDREA: Well, thank you, Dudley! That *is* kind.

DUDLEY: Don't mention it!

ANDREA: I've no particular need of a divorce any more—as it happens. . . .

[*Claud enters from passageway. He wanders disconsolately down left.*]

DUDLEY (*in surprise*): You haven't?

ANDREA (*glances at Claud*): It *may* come in useful, though—*some* time.

CLAUD (*dismally*): Anything else to go?

ANDREA (*beginning to look distressed*): I don't think so. What's Gertrude doing?

CLAUD: Waiting for you, apparently. She's sitting in the car.

ANDREA: Oh! (*Picks up her bag and slippers and hesitates, looking wretched.*) That's all, then, isn't it? (*Looks from one to the other.*)

[*Claud nods faintly. Dudley turns his head away.*]

ANDREA (*puts bag and slippers down again, and goes to Dudley—sadly*): Well—good-bye, Dudley, darling! (*Lays a hand on his shoulder.*)

[*Dudley cringes.*]

I do hope we shall never meet again. (*Turns away and crosses to Claud—emotionally.*) Dear—dear Claud!

CLAUD (*Fighting his own emotion.*): I'll see you off. (*Makes a movement upstage.*)

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

ANDREA: No. I'd rather you didn't.

CLAUD (*gruffly*): Good-bye, then!

ANDREA (*her voice trembling*): You *will* keep in touch, though, won't you—in *case* I get over it? I do hope I do. (*Kisses him lightly on the cheek.*) It *would* be such a pity. (*Turns, goes behind couch, collects her bag and slippers, and continues on towards passageway.*)

CLAUD (*moving to left end of couch*): But where are you going?

ANDREA (*halting and turning—in surprise*): To Gertrude's, dear!

CLAUD: I know, but after that! I must have an address.

ANDREA: Oh, but I shall be living with Gertrude. Didn't you realise?

CLAUD: No. Indefinitely?

ANDREA: Well, that's the present arrangement. I wanted to see that she ends her days in peace.

CLAUD: Oh!

ANDREA: But that's only if I've nothing *else* to do, Claud. (*Looks from one to the other, smiles a little wistfully.*) Good-bye!

[*Exit Andrea into passageway.*]

CLAUD (*murmuring*): Good-bye!

[*Claud turns away, comes down to coffee-table, picks up Dudley's glass—and drinks. Dudley, wearing a puzzled and uneasy look, seems absorbed in some half-formed doubt of his own.*]

DUDLEY (*half to himself*): She "wanted to see that she ended her days in. . . ." (*Suddenly galvanised with horror.*) No! (*Jumps to his feet.*) No! (*Comes down centre.*)

TRIAL AND ERROR

CLAUD (*startled*): What's the matter?

[*Enter Gertrude from passageway.*]

DUDLEY: Don't you see what she's up to? It's going to be Aunt Maggie all over again.

GERTRUDE (*coming down centre to Claud*): I'm so sorry, I forgot to say "good-bye". (*Extends her hand to him.*)

CLAUD (*moving to meet Gertrude—to Dudley*): What are you talking about? (*Taking Gertrude's hand.*) You said "good-bye" to me outside.

GERTRUDE	}	(<i>Together</i>):	I'm so glad to have met you,
DUDLEY			Mr. Merrilees.
	}		She's after her money, you fool.

CLAUD (*smiling courteously*): Good-bye, Miss Pigeon!

[*Gertrude turns to Dudley who seizes both her hands.*]

DUDLEY: *Don't go* with her, Gertrude!

GERTRUDE: It's been *so* nice having you alive again, Dudley.

DUDLEY: Gertrude—I implore you!

GERTRUDE: It's no good trying to start a conversation with me now, dear. (*Proffers her cheek to be kissed.*)

DUDLEY: But, listen. . . !

GERTRUDE: Aren't you going to kiss me?

DUDLEY (*pecks her frantically*): She's going to murder you

GERTRUDE (*with satisfaction*): *That's* right! (*Turns away and bustles up left.*)

DUDLEY (*following—clutching at her arm*): Gertrude!

GERTRUDE: Write to me, dear—if it's important.

[*Exit Gertrude into passageway.*]

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

DUDLEY (*turning*): What are we to do?

CLAUD: If you ask me—you're hysterical. (*Sits, couch.*)

DUDLEY (*coming down centre*): But the woman's a murderer.

CLAUD: Nonsense! (*Drains his glass.*)

DUDLEY: *You* must be half insane, you know. First she shoves me in the sea—then she slugs me—then she tries to poison me—and you sit there and. . . .

CLAUD (*interrupting*): What makes you think she's tried to poison you, for heaven's sake?

DUDLEY: Because I *saw* her.

CLAUD: *Saw* her?

DUDLEY (*moving in to Claud*): Not five minutes ago! Put it in my whisky! *Brought* it to me! (*Thumping coffee-table.*) *Stood* it down there. . . .

[*Claud starts slightly, looks at his empty glass and sits up.*]

. . . and waited for me to *drink* it.

CLAUD (*a disquieting thought developing rapidly*): *Stood* it down there?

[*Dudley goes up to sideboard, picks up the powder envelope which Andrea has left there, and flourishes it at Claud. He is masking Claud's view of the sideboard.*]

(*In growing alarm.*) I say!

DUDLEY: Yes?

CLAUD: Is there another drink up there?

DUDLEY (*turning away right*): Oh, for pity's sake, what does that matter.

CLAUD (*almost with a scream*): *There is!*

[*With quivering lips and staring eyes, Claud puts his glass on the coffee-table. Enter Andrea from passageway.*]

TRIAL AND ERROR

ANDREA (*as she enters*): Forgot my suitcase. (*Lifts it up.*)

DUDLEY (*portentously*): Andrea!

[*Andrea catches sight of the stricken Claud, puts suitcase down again, and goes to him—ignoring Dudley.*]

ANDREA (*behind couch*): Don't take it so hard, darling! Just give me a week or so, and I'm sure it'll be all right.

DUDLEY (*crossing to Andrea*): If you take that poor old girl away from here—if you so much as go out through that door—so help me, I'll get the police.

ANDREA (*takes up the bunch of telegraph forms from back of couch and thrusts them into Claud's hand*): Here! This'll cheer you. (*Turns away up left.*)

[*Sunk in his growing terror, Claud seems hardly to notice. Breathing hard, he flings the forms from him and begins to undo his collar and tie.*]

DUDLEY (*following Andrea*): Andrea!

ANDREA (*picking up suitcase*): I'm afraid I can't stop now to find out what you're talking about, Dudley, but it sounds to me as if you're going to make yourself look awfully silly over something, dear.

[*Exit Andrea into passageway.*]

DUDLEY (*following her into passageway—shouting*): I warn you, Andrea. I mean it. (*Immediately coming out again.*) Right! (*Goes to telephone, grabs receiver and at once begins to yell into it.*) Hullo! Hullo!

CLAUD (*rising and staggering up centre to sideboard—also yelling*): For God's sake, man. . .

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

DUDLEY (*to Claud*): What's the matter with you?
(*Into telephone.*) Get me the police!

CLAUD (*half collapsing over the sideboard*): Don't fiddle
with the police, you fool! Get a *doctor*!

DUDLEY (*bellowing into telephone*): Hullo! HULLO!

Curtain

ANASTASIA

by

MARCELLE MAURETTE

adapted by

GUY BOLTON

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When this play becomes available for performance by amateurs, applications for a licence must be made to Samuel French Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2. Applications for the performance of this play by professionals must be made to Story Department, M.C.A. (England) Ltd., 139 Piccadilly, London, W.1. No performance may take place unless a licence has been obtained.

The play was originally produced at the Theatre Royal, Windsor, on May 4, 1953, with the following cast:

PIOTR PETROVSKY	<i>Wallas Eaton</i>
BORIS CHERNOV	<i>Malcolm Russell</i>
PRINCE BOUNINE	<i>Anthony Ireland</i>
ANNA BROUN	<i>Mary Kerridge</i>
SERGEI	<i>Charles Cameron</i>
ANTON	<i>Hedley Mattingly</i>
SLEIGH DRIVER	<i>Geoffrey Tyrrell</i>
CHARWOMAN	<i>Everley Gregg</i>
FELIX OBLENSKI	<i>Michael Malnick</i>
MARIA FEODOROVNA	<i>Helen Hays</i>
BARONESS LIVENBAUM	<i>Ruth Goddard</i>
PRINCE PAUL	<i>Allan Cuthbertson</i>

Produced by John Counsell

It came on August 5, 1953, to the St. James's Theatre, London, under the management of Laurence Olivier Productions, Ltd., with the following cast:

PIOTR PETROVSKY	<i>Laurence Payne</i>
BORIS CHERNOV	<i>Peter Illing</i>
PRINCE BOUNINE	<i>Anthony Ireland</i>
ANNA BROUN	<i>Mary Kerridge</i>
SLEIGH DRIVER	<i>Geoffrey Tyrrell</i>
CHARWOMAN	<i>Susan Richards</i>
FELIX OBLENSKI	<i>Michael Godfrey</i>
DOWAGER EMPRESS OF RUSSIA	<i>Helen Hays</i>
LADY-IN-WAITING	<i>Ruth Goddard</i>
PRINCE PAUL	<i>Ralph Michael</i>
ANTONIA	<i>Verena Kimmins</i>
SERGEI	<i>Michael Malnick</i>

Directed by John Counsell
Settings designed by Hal Henshaw
Costumes designed by Michael Ellis

CHARACTERS

PETROVSKY
CHERNOV
PRINCE BOUNINE } *the Syndicate*
ANNA
THE SLEIGH DRIVER
THE CHARWOMAN
FELIX OBLENSKI
THE DOWAGER EMPRESS
BARONESS LIVENBAUM
PRINCE PAUL
ANTONIA, *a nurse companion*
SERGEI, *a lackey*

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

A basement room in Berlin.

ACT TWO

*A ball in a mansion on the outskirts of Berlin.
Four weeks later.*

ACT THREE

*The same as Act Two.
Two weeks later.*

TIME: *Winter, 1934.*

ACT ONE

A basement room in Berlin. Headquarters of the Syndicate.

This is a small "drop-in" set, or if that proves simpler, a set on a boat truck or slide. It is essential that it can be struck in a matter of seconds. For this reason it must be contained inside the set used for the remainder of the play and furnished sparsely.

It is night, and the window, which is set high up on rear wall, is both shuttered and curtained.

There are some steps up to an archway through which the room is entered. The door to the street need not be visible. There is another door at one side, standing ajar, showing that the premises are not limited to this single room. On one wall there are some shelves containing account books and letter files. Beneath this there is a desk with a typewriter. There is a table centre with lighted lamp standing on it, three chairs. While the essential thing is speed in making the change, the place should not look too bleak; it is the office of the three men who have been circularising the Russian emigres on behalf of the Princess Anastasia, whom they profess to have found after her miraculous escape from the massacre of her family by the Bolsheviks. They have collected a considerable sum, and hence can well afford to make themselves comfortable.

On the wall is a poster with a drawing of a girl with a crown on her head. The thing has lettering on it in Russian, having been made for exploitation purposes.

Chernov is discovered, seated typing. He was formerly a banker and has a dignified bearing. He is suspicious, pessimistic and harsh. He stops typing as he hears the sound of the door shutting and looks up at the arch at the head of the steps. Petrovsky appears.

ACT ONE

He wears a raincoat, belted and buttoned up over his chest; he is of a highly nervous disposition, easily thrown off balance. He is in point of fact a drug addict.

PETROVSKY: Is the Prince here? (*His glance goes to the door of the adjoining room.*)

CHERNOV: Not yet.

PETROVSKY: What's this all about, Chernov? I got a message marked "Urgent", telling me to meet you both here.

CHERNOV: I'm afraid we've run into serious trouble.

PETROVSKY: What sort of trouble?

CHERNOV: It seems two or three of our subscribers have got together and compared notes. I suppose we should have expected something like this. It's over five months since we sent out our first circular. And while we've been keeping up our appeals and taking in their money we've made no serious effort to find the essential element of our enterprise. . . .

PETROVSKY: That isn't true. I've made enquiries all over Berlin. I've seen a dozen or more Anna Brouns. That's one of the troubles; the name is such a common one.

CHERNOV: Do you think there ever was a woman with an uncanny resemblance to the dead Princess?

PETROVSKY: You don't think his Excellency lied to us?

CHERNOV: "His Excellency"! You say it with reverence in spite of all we know about him. You're a snob, Petrovsky.

PETROVSKY (*ponderingly*): But his story didn't seem the sort of thing a man would make up. Taking those people out to that hospital in Spandau in his taxi—

CHERNOV (*cutting in bitterly*): Oh, yes, he was driving a taxi then! Now he sports a car and chauffeur. No

ANASTASIA

doubt Drivinitz and his friends have seen him lording about in it.

PETROVSKY (*pursuing his own thought*): And the amount was so propitious. This Anna Broun, whose likeness to the Princess he described as extraordinary, appeared just when the rumours of Anastasia's escape were flying about the Russian colony.

CHERNOV: The timing of her appearance was, as you say, excellent. Her disappearance, after no one but the Prince had seen her, was not quite so fortunate.

PETROVSKY: If we had found her, I wonder—could we have got away with it? Passing someone off as another—oh, I know it's been done and the fact that Anastasia was practically a child when the murders took place, still—(*he breaks off, shaking his head back and forth*)—I'm a crazy fellow, an artist, a dreamer—it's not surprising I fell for the thing, but you, you're a banker, or were in the old days.

CHERNOV: I needed money—it's as simple as that.

PETROVSKY: I heard a story from someone that you were in a bit of trouble.

CHERNOV (*still resentful*): And what about the business you were engaged in?

PETROVSKY: Oh, make no mistake, I'm not posing as your moral superior. We're two rats who have been turned out of our nice, comfortable granary, and have to snatch our crusts as best we may.

CHERNOV (*looking at his watch*): I wish the master rat would come. He said he'd be here at nine—it's nearly eleven. (*Pursuing his thoughts.*) When this Anna Broun vanished we should have called the thing off. We still had plenty of money.

[*Petrovsky isn't listening. His eyes are glued on the arch at the head of the steps. Chernov trails off his speech, also looking up, as the light from the street lamp outside throws*

ACT ONE

a man's shadow on the wall behind the arch. The light disappears as the door is closed and Bounine appears, a handsome aristocratic figure, elegantly attired.]

BOUNINE: Good evening, comrades—if you'll forgive a term that falls not too pleasantly on White Russian ears.

PETROVSKY: Good evening, Excellency.

BOUNINE: You must excuse me for being so late. I've had an adventure. Not what we usually mean by that expression, but still, I must admit a woman.

PETROVSKY: We're in a state of some anxiety, Excellency.

BOUNINE: Early this evening I was at the Russian Club. Yes, they had been holding a function, perhaps you'd forgotten, but today was the feast of St. Alexander Nevsky. In the days that we were fond of describing as "The Good Old", the court would all have been lined up behind the Royal Family at the Water Gate of the Winter Palace while His Imperial Majesty spooned up a glass of water and the Arch Patriarch blessed the Neva . . . a ceremony punctuated by sneezes . . . so like the Russians to decree the 6th of January for a prolonged function with bare heads.

CHERNOV: What happened?

BOUNINE: It was quite a scene, a resurrection of uniformed crocks with the Tsar's portrait looking down on them: that old hulk Lissenko on his frost-bitten stumps, Vorensky and Martoff, two grey-haired Lieutenants who should have been Generals by this time . . . and the women in their court dresses, most of them as faded as their wearers.

PETROVSKY: What we are anxious to hear about . . .

BOUNINE: And would you believe it, some idiot—Princess Bukarin I think it was—had a bottle alleged

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to be water of the Neva smuggled out of Russia, they poured it into a big crystal goblet and passed it round for everyone to sip. Damned insanitary if Neva water it was. I wouldn't have put my lips to it for a bet.

CHERNOV: We are all in this thing together.

BOUNINE (*turning to him blandly*): Anxious to hear the worst? Well, the worst it is . . . they're giving us a week to produce her, then they're going to the police.

PETROVSKY: A week!

BOUNINE: I was called into the library and there, in front of Drivintz, was a list of our subscribers and their contributions.

PETROVSKY: They wanted to know what we'd been doing with the money?

BOUNINE: Naturally. I explained that we had to bring her Highness from Bucharest, and that this involved the bribing of officials in obtaining papers, not to mention the settling of demands made by people who had been taking care of her.

PETROVSKY: And doctors.

BOUNINE: And doctors—and nurses, and private ambulances. . . . They wanted to know exactly what was the matter with her.

PETROVSKY: Surely after what she would have been through—?

BOUNINE: I enlarged on all that. I spoke of the wounds she suffered at the hands of Yourovski's execution squad, and the hardships endured in the perilous journey from Siberia. I said that her doctors had insisted on isolation, rest, absolute quiet.

CHERNOV: What did they say to that?

BOUNINE: They asked to see her doctors.

CHERNOV: And—?

BOUNINE: I replied that they and she were in a private sanatorium in Switzerland.

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PETROVSKY: Good!

BOUNINE: Two of them offered to make the journey immediately. There wasn't much I could say after that.

CHERNOV (*ejaculating*): God!

BOUNINE (*with a slight shrug*): Makes you sweat, does it? It's easy to see you've never been shot at, Chernov. It's only at such a moment the air has the same taste it had at your birth. (*He inhales, swelling his chest.*) Well, we're at one of those moments now, so take a deep breath.

PETROVSKY: Conspiracy to defraud—what's the penalty in Germany?

BOUNINE: They say we've exploited their patriotism, traded on their sacred loyalties. . . . Of course, it's all damned nonsense, it's the money they're after—the share our prospectus promised them of the Tsar's millions.

CHERNOV: Now is the time to divide up our money, what's left of it, and make a dash for it.

BOUNINE: Wait! Gentlemen, perhaps we're not beaten yet—

PETROVSKY: Not beaten? A week in which to find a resurrected princess?

BOUNINE: What would you say to a miracle? It seems the appropriate moment for one.

PETROVSKY: What do you mean?

[*They stare at him without speaking.*]

BOUNINE: I've found her, gentlemen—at the eleventh hour. I've found her.

PETROVSKY: Her?

CHERNOV: Whom?

BOUNINE: The woman I found before, Anna Broun, on whose resemblance to the Tsar's youngest

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daughter all this business was based. (*He makes a gesture that includes the big poster.*)

PETROVSKY: Where did you find her?

BOUNINE: I caught a glimpse of someone who looked like her the other day when I was driving through the Riemstrasse. Tonight, under the spur of this threat, I went back there. (*He pauses*) On the steps leading down to the Landwehre canal. I think she was about to throw herself into it.

PETROVSKY: Why?

BOUNINE: Ill, out of work, half starved . . . a pathetic spectacle.

PETROVSKY: And do you believe that such a broken down creature as that will pass muster with Drivnitz and his friends?

BOUNINE: If not she will have to be made sufficiently convincing to have deceived us, then in case of trouble it will be she, not her three poor innocent dupes, who will go to gaol. (*He lays his hand on his chest as he speaks.*)

PETROVSKY: And—this time—are we to be permitted to see her?

BOUNINE: Of course, once we have agreed to terms.

CHERNOV: Terms? What terms?

BOUNINE: The division of the money. I want half of whatever moneys are forthcoming.

PETROVSKY: What? You must think we're crazy.

CHERNOV: You've already drawn far more than either of us.

BOUNINE: Listen, Chernov: I found this valuable article, found it not once, but twice.

PETROVSKY: Before I agree to doubling your share of the money I'll see this woman you've found.

BOUNINE: So, you are laying down the law to me, are you, my young drug dreamer? Drugs! That gives me an idea. If worst comes to worst, I might say

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the story on which this swindle is based is one of *your* narcotic fancies. I was deceived by you and your ex-convict friend. (*He indicates Chernov.*)

CHERNOV: What do you mean?

BOUNINE: You served a term for technical forgery, didn't you.

CHERNOV: I see, blackmail, Prince Bounine.

BOUNINE: You won't frighten me with an ugly word, Chernov, I've heard too many of them flung at me.

[*Petrovsky turns abruptly to a little chest of drawers and opens the top one.*]

PETROVSKY: You're playing a dangerous game, Bounine. We too could tell a story—the story of a man faced with a desperate situation who put a bullet through his head. (*He takes a pistol from the desk drawer.*)

BOUNINE: Ah, so—a pistol. You can put away your toy. You see, I have given my lawyer a letter. (*He turns to Chernov.*) And in case of my disappearance, he will learn that I have had dealings with two—gentlemen—whom I did not altogether trust.

[*He turns squarely to the poster, presenting his back to Petrovsky.*]

(*With change of tone.*) The drawing on this poster is exactly life size, I think you said, Piotr?

[*He appears to be measuring the height of the figure against himself. Petrovsky drops the pistol on the table as Chernov whispers to him.*]

CHERNOV (*turning to Bounine*): Very well, we accept.

BOUNINE: Good! I'm glad that's settled. But now I

must confess there is one drawback to my great discovery: she pretends not to understand Russian.

CHERNOV: What? But we agreed that was essential.

BOUNINE: She has a definite Slavic accent, and when I spoke to her in Russian, whereas she didn't answer, I'm convinced she understood.

CHERNOV: You think we can break her down?

BOUNINE: Once we have her under lock and key, I think we shall be able to persuade her. (*He smiles.*)

If not—we will have to picture it as a Freudian quirk, part of a mental barrier built up against a remembrance of past horrors.

PETROVSKY: Sounds pretty fishy.

BOUNINE: To be weighed against that there are certain features that are quite breath-taking. (*He makes a sign in the direction of the steps.*) Shall we have her in?

CHERNOV: What!

PETROVSKY (*astonished*): You don't mean to say she's here?

BOUNINE: Just outside in my car with Sergei standing guard. Fetch her in, Piotr. I bought her some food. She seemed quite badly in need of it.

[*Petrovsky goes to the steps and disappears.*]

CHERNOV (*as Petrovsky disappears*): I still think this matter of the language——

BOUNINE (*interrupting*): I knew them, Chernov, you didn't. The children talked German continually. After all, it was their mother's tongue.

CHERNOV: Perhaps so, but——

BOUNINE (*raising his tone to stop the interruption*): And let me tell you, she speaks French. I said, "Est-ce que Anna Broun est votre vrai nom?" and she replied automatically, "C'est le nom que les religieuses m'ont donné."

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PETROVSKY (*off*): Be careful. There are steps.

[*Anna Brown enters. She has a black shawl about her shoulders; a worn blue dress and heavy stockings and shoes. Her hair is drawn into a simple knot. Her lips are pallid. She seems to have at the moment no pretension to beauty. She stops, looking down at the two men. Petrovsky appears behind her.*]

(*Roughly.*) Go on down.

[*She descends two steps, then stops again, drawing her shawl up about her face. Petrovsky closes the door behind him. She turns, looking up—the effect is clearly as if she were surrounded. He repeats sternly:*]

I said, “Go down.”

[*She hesitates for a second, then continues her way down, coming forward to the table, grasping a chairback for support.*]

BOUNINE (*smiling urbanely*): Take a seat, fraulein.

[*She sinks into the chair.*]

A glass of vodka?

ANNA (*humbly*): Thank you.

BOUNINE (*as he pours vodka*): These are my friends. I am putting you in their hands. They are going to examine you.

ANNA: Examine? They are doctors?

BOUNINE: They only want to look at you.

ANNA: Oh, is that all.

CHERNOV: Does she know why we want to examine her?

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BOUNINE: I told her no details, only that I had a job for her that would mean good food, and a good bed to sleep in.

ANNA: May I smoke?

BOUNINE: Help yourself. Carry on, gentlemen.

[She takes a cigarette. As he speaks, Petrovsky strikes a match and holds it, lighting her cigarette. Chernov moves forward on the other side, both men staring down at her.]

PETROVSKY (*cutting in*): The eyes are right. Possibly the only feature that is.

CHERNOV: Where did you see the eyes of the—other?

PETROVSKY: I was at Notre Dame de Kazan in 1915 when we had been driven back by Hindenburg. She came into the church to pray with her mother and they each placed a candle before the big ikon. I saw two little candles reflected in her eyes.

CHERNOV: Blue eyes?

PETROVSKY: Blue-grey, with the two candle flames like a pair of golden dots. And just now when I held the match for this one's cigarette—there was the same thing exactly. Very few eyes will pick up a reflection like that.

BOUNINE: Eh!

PETROVSKY: I'm an artist. I know what I'm talking about.

CHERNOV: Well. (*Considering.*) What about the mouth?

PETROVSKY: All wrong, a drawn, taut mouth. Hers smiled easily. Even at that solemn moment she smiled. Her teeth were beautifully even, white and shiny.

CHERNOV: What about the height? (*To Anna.*) Stand up.

ANNA: What did you say?

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CHERNOV: I said, "Stand up." She looks too tall to me.

BOUNINE (*without moving*): The last time I held Anastasia's stirrup, when she came to inspect our regiment at Tsarksoie, I noted that the top of her dolman was on the level of my eye.

[*She gets up slowly, coughs and continues to smoke as they move about, scrutinising her from different angles.*]

PETROVSKY: Of course she's twice the age the other was—when she died.

BOUNINE: And I must remind you again that the last sixteen years would not have been what the first sixteen were.

CHERNOV (*to Anna*): Say something . . . in Russian.

[*She looks at him, but doesn't speak.*]

You don't know the language?

ANNA: No.

PETROVSKY: But you speak with a Russian accent. How do you account for that?

[*She again doesn't answer.*]

PETROVSKY: And, clearly, you have Slavic blood.

CHERNOV (*pointing*): Move over there. I want to see how you walk.

[*She turns, obeying him, and walks almost slouchingly, with head at an angle and sagging slightly forward.*]

(*With a scornful laugh.*) They were taught as children to walk carrying a book on their heads. Another thing we would have to tell our subscribers that she has somehow forgotten.

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PETROVSKY: Is this really the same woman you saw at the hospital? The one whose resemblance so impressed you?

BOUNINE: The same, I assure you.

CHERNOV (*looking at her and shaking his head*): There may be a sort of vague resemblance; but not enough to convince our subscribers.

BOUNINE: And how have they seen the original? A white-clad figure in a rapidly moving carriage. Or in the family stand at Krasnoie. Yes, they saw quite a lot of her—in the newspapers.

CHERNOV: What of the royal servants? There are still a few of them about.

BOUNINE: They'll see her through their tears; poor, good faithful souls that they are.

CHERNOV: And the family?

BOUNINE: More difficult, certainly. But it isn't as if there were a mother or a father to be dealt with. Or a brother and sisters. . . . True, there is quite a wealth of uncles, aunts and cousins, despite the Bolsheviks and their execution squads. But they will refer secretly to their photographs, and as she will resemble those photographs—

CHERNOV: *This woman—?*

[*He turns, indicating where she stands in shadow, her shoulder leaning against the wall while she stares at the floor, oblivious to their discussion.*]

BOUNINE: Yes. I am sure by the time we are finished she'll be like, *very* like. Oh, it won't be the gay, pink-checked girl, who danced in the Hall of Columns at the last ball ever held there. But, let us say, she'll be as like as a dead body is to a living person.

PETROVSKY: If we could present her to them lying in her coffin it would be easier. No questions, no answers, no mistakes.

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BOUNINE: A tempting idea, my friend, but you're forgetting the money.

CHERNOV: You surely don't believe you'll be able to convince the bankers?

BOUNINE (*with a shrug*): Well, there's a chance. If the family accept her, the bankers would find it difficult to question their endorsement.

CHERNOV: Listen, Bounine, I admit you knew the original better than we did, but still I've studied those photographs of ours, and I can't imagine—

BOUNINE: Get them out . . . compare her with them feature by feature.

CHERNOV: I don't need to. I know them by heart. In the early ones she wore her hair down—there's one of her dancing on the deck of a yacht.

[*Petrovsky goes and fetches two large but shabby looking albums and places them on the table.*]

CHERNOV: In the more recent ones she appears heavier than her sisters with stronger cheekbones, more Russian looking.

PETROVSKY (*dreamily*): Yes, and then, at least for some of us, there is the final one. The one photographed by our imaginations.

CHERNOV: What are you talking about?

PETROVSKY: She is standing up, the head and the hands she had raised to shield it pierced with bullets.

[*Anna, in the shadow, raises her head.*]

BOUNINE: *Look* at her hands.

PETROVSKY (*startled*): What did you say?

BOUNINE (*nodding to the shadow*): I said: "Look at her hands."

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CHERNOV: You don't mean. . . ?

BOUNINE: I told you there was a special feature—something rather surprising. And that isn't quite all.

[*Petrovsky turns the shade of the lamp so that the light falls on her.*]

CHERNOV: Come here!

[*She does not move. Chernov goes to her.*]

I said, "Come here."

[*He catches hold of her arm and with a rough jerk brings her stumbling forward. Petrovsky, with a quick forward movement, catches her by the other arm, and half dragging, half supporting her, they bring her to the light.*]

PETROVSKY: Open your hands.

BOUNINE: You'll find they are long and well shaped, with a scar in the middle—the hands of a crucified being.

PETROVSKY (*a hoarse whisper*): Yes, it's true.

BOUNINE: Look at her head, gentlemen, the left temple, a long narrow depression, the path of a bullet . . . of course it *may* be something more prosaic; a childhood accident, a rather bad one that caused a fracture. . . .

[*Pulling her close to the lamp they push her head down, holding it there as they examine the scar.*]

CHERNOV: What is this scar? Is it from a bullet? Tell us?

ANNA: I don't remember.

CHERNOV: You're lying! Anyone would remember a

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thing like that. Where do you come from? Your home—where is it?

ANNA: The convent.

CHERNOV: What convent?

ANNA: A convent where they take care of sick people. (*Shaking her head.*) It is the place where I lived for a long time.

CHERNOV: You told this man that the name Anna Broun was given to you by the nuns.

ANNA: Did I?

CHERNOV: What was your name before that—the name you were born with?

ANNA: I don't remember.

CHERNOV: Oh, so you're an amnesiac? Very convenient. I suppose you do not even know what town in Russia you came from?

ANNA: I didn't say I came from Russia. (*For the first time she shows a faint agitation.*) I said nothing of Russia, nothing.

CHERNOV (*grabbing her arm*): Where are your papers? Your identity card? Show it to me.

ANNA: Perhaps the nuns have it.

CHERNOV: You lying slut! (*He pushes her down into the chair.*)

BOUNINE: You're a damned fool, Chernov. The very fact that she can stand up to your questioning should be giving you confidence.

CHERNOV: You're willing to trust her, are you? A woman about whom you know nothing? A woman who says she doesn't know who she is or where she comes from?

BOUNINE: Such things happen to the memory, Chernov. And they happen particularly to people who have the furrow of a bullet along the side of the skull and whose hands, have probably warded off death by the merest fraction.

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PETROVSKY: It's those scars that are the real value. They at least are authentic.

BOUNINE: It's enough excuse for us to believe in her.

PETROVSKY: Up to a point. The unfortunate thing is this time limit they've set us.

BOUNINE: That may not be as bad as it sounds. At that first meeting she will be in bed with a nurse and doctor in attendance.

CHERNOV: Doctor?

BOUNINE: I know a man who can be safely trusted. He'll tell them she is not to be pilloried with questions.

CHERNOV: You expect them to accept that?

BOUNINE: They'll have to. And for the first meeting the scars should be sufficient evidence without offering further proof.

CHERNOV: Well, and—after that?

BOUNINE: Before the meeting with the bulk of the shareholders I shall insist on two months for convalescence with medical attention. That cough of hers will help us. We'll say she's consumptive.

PETROVSKY: We'll have to see she doesn't lose it.

BOUNINE: Plenty of cigarettes will take care of that. (*He rises and crosses to Anna.*) I am going to explain this business to you, and I want you to pay strict attention. . . . In 1918 a young girl died. In 1918 you must have been very close to her age. A story has been widely told, and widely believed, that this girl is not dead. None of us three believe that story, but that doesn't matter.

ANNA: What has this girl to do with me?

BOUNINE: When I saw you in the hospital, I realised you were something like her—that with our help you might be made very like. . . . Do you understand?

[*He pauses. She does not answer.*]

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(*Sharply.*) I want you to answer when I speak to you. I must know that you are following what I say.

ANNA: I am listening.

BOUNINE: If, with our help, you succeed in getting yourself accepted by her friends and relations there is money waiting for you—and those who have helped you.

ANNA: Friends, relations—how could I?

PETROVSKY: If we could only get some member of the family to endorse her—

BOUNINE: Quite.

PETROVSKY: Yes, but who?

BOUNINE: Well, of course, Maria Feodorovna would carry the most weight.

PETROVSKY: The Tsar's mother? People say she went mad.

BOUNINE: She happens to be here in Germany visiting her grand-nephew, Paul.

PETROVSKY: That doesn't sound as if she were *too* crazy.

BOUNINE: Perhaps not too crazy but definitely too difficult. I knew her well in the old days—a tartar with a tongue like a whiplash.

PETROVSKY: What of *him*?

BOUNINE: Him, who? Who are you talking about?

PETROVSKY: The Prince you say she is visiting, Prince Paul.

BOUNINE (*softly, nodding his head back and forth*): I wonder. I wonder which way he would jump? He was her future husband.

PETROVSKY: Anastasia's? *Was* he?

CHERNOV (*protestingly*): But they were children then!

BOUNINE: Fifteen and sixteen. There'd been no announcement of the betrothal, but everyone at Court took it as an accepted fact. The two had been playmates from childhood—second cousins.

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CHERNOV: But obviously he would be the most difficult to convince.

PETROVSKY: Was he in love with the girl?

BOUNINE (*with a shrug*): Royalty, who can say. It was a great match for him. Apart from any question of rank, the Tsar was the richest man in the world. (*He walks away a couple of paces, his head lowered in thought.*) Yes, yes, the more I consider it, the more I think we ought to try it. Paul is poor and pleasure-loving. That big fortune that's waiting in the banks would count a lot with him.

CHERNOV: But surely the only way he could get the money. . . . (*Breaking off.*) My God, you don't think he'd be willing to marry *that*? (*He gives a laugh as he points at Anna.*)

BOUNINE: It's a lot of money, remember.

CHERNOV: You're letting your fancies run away with you.

BOUNINE: I admit it sounds pretty far fetched. It would depend, I suppose, on how hard up he is.

ANNA (*suddenly expostulating*): No!

[*They all look at her.*]

BOUNINE: What do you mean, "No"?

ANNA: I want to go.

BOUNINE: Go where?

ANNA: Anywhere. Back to the nuns. (*She closes her eyes.*) Four white walls and my little bed near the window. . . . I was wrong to run away from it. In summer they let me read my book out under a tree.

[*She turns and goes towards the steps. Petrovsky leaps to his feet and picks up the pistol.*]

PETROVSKY: Stop!

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[*She turns. Chernov, hurrying forward, puts himself between her and the steps.*]

BOUNINE: There's no going now, my girl.

ANNA (*for the first time she shows fear*): What are you going to do to us? (*Her eyes are focused on the revolver.*)

BOUNINE: Us?

CHERNOV (*jeeringly*): You're alone, you seem to have forgotten that.

PETROVSKY (*advancing slowly*): You know too much now to let you go.

ANNA: Give me a moment to say a prayer. (*She puts up her hands, one across her eyes, one shielding her temple.*)

BOUNINE (*to Petrovsky*): Put away that silly pistol. (*To Anna.*) You're safe enough as long as you behave yourself.

ANNA (*wearily*): What is it you want me to do?

BOUNINE: We've already told you—we want you to be someone else.

ANNA: How can I?

BOUNINE: I'm convinced that you can with our help. We will teach you the things you will have to do and see to your appearance.

PETROVSKY: You will have beautiful clothes to wear. On grand occasions you will even wear a coronet.

ANNA: Coronet?

PETROVSKY (*pointing to it*): Yes, like the one you see on that poster. Go and stand by it. I drew it from a record of the lady's measurements as kept by her dressmaker. You questioned the height of the figure. It's exact.

[*As he speaks, she goes to the poster and places her hands on it, following the shape of the face up to the crown. Then, turning round, she faces the three men. Bounine turns the lampshade so that the light is focused on her. She exactly*

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fills the silhouette. The Byzantine crown seems to rest on her head.]

BOUNINE (*exultantly*): Yes, to the nearest fraction!

[Her face becomes suddenly convulsed. She seems to be trying vainly to free her body and her arms from invisible clutches. She seems, in fact, as if nailed to the wall under the gilt crown. She utters a cry.]

ANNA: Let me go!

CHERNOV: What's the matter with you? Are you an epileptic?

BOUNINE (*commandingly*): Come here. There's nothing holding you.

[As if with difficulty she frees herself, and lurching forward she recovers and turns, then walks step by step, backwards, her eyes glued on the poster.]

ANNA (*in a whisper*): Who is it?

BOUNINE: A Princess, a Russian.

ANNA (*with a crooked smile*): I think I must still be in the asylum with the woman who thinks she is an angel, and the three who sit all day crouched and covered because they fancy they have not yet been born.

PETROVSKY (*amused*): Perhaps you are right—here you are with the mad General, the mad painter, and the mad banker.

ANNA: And the mad woman who must believe herself a Princess.

CHERNOV (*with sarcasm*): A Princess who will have to know the names of her palaces, their servants and officials, her family history, the regiments who guarded her, their names, their uniforms—quite a task for a woman with a bad memory!

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BOUNINE (*unruffled*): She will naturally make mistakes, but the injury to her head and the lapse of time will explain that.

CHERNOV: People will come to see her, each with their private store of memories.

BOUNINE: Sentimental occasions invariably bring forth a stream of reminiscences. For the most part she will only have to listen.

CHERNOV: I doubt if she even knows how to behave among people of our class.

PETROVSKY: You saw her hands. They're not those of a peasant.

BOUNINE: We'll find out just how hard it will be to teach her; here sit down.

[*He clears the cigarette box, bottle and glasses from in front of Anna, who sits at the end of the table.*]

ANNA: What if this Princess suddenly appears?

BOUNINE: She won't. I've told you already, she is dead—murdered.

ANNA (*with delicate irony*): Oh, I was murdered, was I?

BOUNINE: With your entire family, in a cellar in Ekaterinburg. . . . That is—officially. Unofficially you escaped with two brothers named Tschaikowsky who were members of your guard. They dragged you from the heap of the dead.

[*She closes her eyes.*]

(*Sharply.*) Now pay attention to what I'm telling you. This is the story you will have to repeat. They hid you under straw in a farm cart.

ANNA (*repeating dully*): Under the straw.

BOUNINE: They trekked across Southern Siberia.

[*She nods her head back and forth.*]

PETROVSKY: You had jewels sewn in your clothes—they used them to get money.

BOUNINE: They moved on south, avoiding the towns and cities, making their way to—where was it——?

PETROVSKY (*supplying it*): Balta.

BOUNINE: Balta.

ANNA (*still with closed eyes*): Balta.

BOUNINE: Right . . . and at Balta you crossed the Rumanian border to Bucharest.

ANNA: Bucharest.

BOUNINE: Bucharest is where we found you. We took you to Switzerland, to a sanatorium—you will also have to remember that.

[*She again nods her head.*]

Now, who was it who saved you that night in Ekaterinburg?

ANNA: Two brothers named Tschaikowsky.

BOUNINE: And they took you across the Rumanian border at what place?

ANNA: Balta.

BOUNINE (*triumphantly*): There, my dear Chernov—what have you got to say to that?

CHERNOV: Most impressive.

ANNA: Is that all?

BOUNINE: It's enough for the moment. I think it's time to introduce you to your family. Get the albums.

ANNA: My family?

BOUNINE: Don't look so startled. I'm not going to produce any living members.

ANNA: Who are they?

BOUNINE: The most important are your second cousin once removed, Prince Paul, known also by his German title, "Haraldeberg", and your grandmother, the Dowager Empress, Maria Feodorovna.

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ANNA: My grandmother?

BOUNINE: Yes, that will be your most trying experience, but it will not happen for some time. (*He opens book.*) Now this is your mother, Queen Alexandra. Why do you close your eyes?

CHERNOV: Is your eyesight bad?

ANNA: No, go on.

BOUNINE: Here's the whole family on a picnic. That is you, the girl, with the hair down her back. . . . Another group: Alexis, Olga, Tatiana and Marie—your brother, your sisters, and again, you.

ANNA (*abruptly*): I see them. (*She herself turns the page.*)

BOUNINE: Uncles and aunts—there's quite a series of them. Say their names after me: the Grand Duchess Marie Pavlovna—Aunt Miechen.

ANNA: Aunt Miechen.

BOUNINE: The Duchess of Cumberland—Aunt Thyra.

ANNA: Aunt Thyra.

BOUNINE: The King of Norway—Uncle Hans.

ANNA: Uncle Hans.

BOUNINE: The old King of England—Uncle Bertie.

ANNA: Uncle Bertie.

BOUNINE: The Queen of Norway—Aunt Swan.

ANNA: Aunt Swan.

BOUNINE: Oh, this one must have got in by mistake, merely a President of the United States.

CHERNOV: And how much of all that can she repeat?

BOUNINE: I'm not asking her to repeat any. We'll go over the list every day. Not all will sink in, but some will. (*Turns back to Anna.*) Now look: we'll close the book on this final one: you in uniform as Colonel of the Kaspiski regiment.

PETROVSKY: Blue skirt, red dolman, kolback of black fur.

ANNA (*trying to place the word*): Kolback?

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BOUNINE (*pointing*): The shoulder cape. You are on the way to review your regiment.

PETROVSKY: Wait. Let us re-enact it. Perhaps that will make her see it. (*To Anna.*) Go up those steps. They are the steps of the Winter Palace. Your father's palace.

[*She hesitates a moment, then obeys him, walking carefully, watching the steps as she goes.*]

Enough. Turn and face us.

[*She does so.*]

You had best describe it, Prince. You have been closer to it than I.

BOUNINE (*driily*): Yes, much closer. (*Addressing Anna.*) Now try to picture it. The long line of the Imperial Guard, your father, the Emperor, in uniform, at their head—behind you, on a balcony, are the white specks that are your mother, your sisters, and your brother Alexis. Below are the palace guards and servants, the Negroes with their feathered turbans. . . . The massed bands strike up "God protect the Tsar". It is your signal. You come down.

[*There is a momentary pause, then erect, head up, quite altered in her carriage, she comes down the steps as if walking to slow music. The three men move back, watching her as if she were a phantom*]

Splendid! I know she can do it.

PETROVSKY: Yes, yes!

BOUNINE: And now let me present the members of your household. (*Indicating him.*) Boris Chernov. Formerly of St. Petersburg. Banker.

ACT ONE

PETROVSKY (*introducing himself*): PIOTR Constantino-vitch Petrovsky, artist—formerly in scenic department Russian Imperial Opera.

BOUNINE (*with a bow*): Prince Arcade Arcadie-vitch Bounine, General of the Don Cossacks. *Ex-aside-de-camp* attached to the person of his Majesty Nicholas the Second, Emperor of all the Russias.

ANNA: And I——?

BOUNINE: Her Imperial Highness, the Grand Duchess Anastasia Nicolaevna.

[*She stares at him for a moment, then bursts out in a discordant laugh that sends her into a fit of coughing.*]

Curtain

ACT TWO

Four weeks later.

The scene represents a living hall in the house that the business syndicate have taken for their "Princess". The house is situated in the suburbs of Berlin and is a left-over from days when the district was rural and a house such as this stood in a park.

There is an archway at centre of rear wall and in it is a landing with three or four steps descending from it into the room. At the back of this landing is a doorway with a pair of heavy curtains hanging in it. It leads to the private apartments assigned to Anna. To the right of this archway is a small door, designated in the script as "exit right". The right-hand wall runs down-stage from beside this door and contains a tall French window and a fireplace, the latter being well down-stage. In the opposite wall and facing the window is a double doorway which is the entrance of the room from the outer hallway where the front door is situated but not visible.

The furnishings are rich, with a couple of handsome grandoles on which there are crystal candelabra. There is also a glass chandelier. On one wall there hangs a large ikon with a prie-dieu placed below it. A console table stands on left of centre archway, and, beside a bowl of flowers, there is a large photograph of the Russian Royal family, the frame surmounted with the double-headed eagle. About the fireplace there is a grouping of chairs, one being given a special prominence, a big straight-backed armchair. It is in this that Anna plays her scene with the two peasants.

Through the window we see the trees of a small park and a misty suggestion of buildings beyond. It is afternoon.

Petrovsky is discovered. He wears black coat and striped trousers. He has a list which he is looking over.

ACT TWO

PETROVSKY (*calling*): Sergei!

[*A powerfully built Russian, in the uniform of a royal servant, enters instantly as if he had been stationed immediately outside.*]

I see there are four more witnesses on today's list. Are they still here?

SERGEI: One had to go, a dressmaker. As a girl she says she worked for the firm who made clothes for the four Princesses.

PETROVSKY: Sonia Rykoff

SERGEI: Yes, that is the one. She will be back tomorrow.

PETROVSKY: And these others?

SERGEI: A peasant woman and a sleigh-driver. The man is blind.

PETROVSKY: And this other man?

SERGEI: Felix Oblenski. Was a soldier in the Guards. Had special sentry duties in the Royal apartments.

PETROVSKY (*looking at list*): The sleigh-driver was in service in the Royal Stables at Gatchina.

SERGEI: Yes, he still has his badge.

[*Chernov enters up centre.*]

CHERNOV: How is it going?

PETROVSKY (*to Sergei*): Tell these people her Highness will see them if they wait.

SERGEI: Yes, sir.

[*He turns and exits.*]

PETROVSKY (*turning to Chernov*): Ups and downs. The servants, most of them, accept her without question.

CHERNOV: The uneducated? Of course. It's what I

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always say, the Russian revolution was started by Alexander the Second—he sent the people to school.

[*Bounine enters left. He has hat and gloves and wears a morning coat with two ribbons in his buttonhole.*]

BOUNINE: Good afternoon, gentlemen.

PETROVSKY: Good afternoon, Excellency.

BOUNINE (*pulling off his gloves*): I've got some news. We are about to have a distinguished visitor.

PETROVSKY (*staring at him expectantly*): Who?

BOUNINE: Maria Feodorovna.

PETROVSKY (*incredulously*): The Dowager Empress. . . .

BOUNINE: The Prince sent for me to ask if her Highness was now well enough for us to bring her to Haraldeberg to meet the Empress. I thought we weren't ready for that, not yet, so I said "No".

PETROVSKY: Quite right, but—

BOUNINE (*overlapping*): The Prince said, "In that case the Empress will visit her Highness under my escort." Of course there was nothing I could reply to that except that I was sure her Highness would be overjoyed.

CHERNOV: Were those his exact words that you quoted? Did *he* say "her Highness"?

BOUNINE: He did indeed. No talk of "the unknown woman", or "the alleged daughter of the Tsar"—the sort of phrases he used before he met her.

PETROVSKY: It sounds as if she'd convinced him.

BOUNINE: He won't exactly come out and say so but I think she *has*. Only he's hanging back until the old lady has accepted her.

PETROVSKY: I hadn't the honour of knowing Maria Feodorovna. Is she as tough a customer as you said?

BOUNINE: She won't be easy.

PETROVSKY: Well, it is anyway good news that the Prince is kindly disposed.

ACT TWO

CHERNOV: I'm afraid *our* report isn't quite as pleasing.
BOUNINE (*a touch of anxiety*): Why, has anything gone wrong with her?

PETROVSKY: With her? No. She seems to be in excellent form. Chernov is referring to the interview with your old friend Plouvitch, the Court Chamberlain.

CHERNOV: A complete failure.

BOUNINE: He wouldn't accept her?

CHERNOV: Not for a moment.

BOUNINE: I've always loathed the stiff-necked old fool. Tell me what happened exactly. Did she make any bloomers?

PETROVSKY: Not one. She spoke of his gilt dress that had so impressed her as a child. And of the tall wand with which he rapped on the floor to give the signal to the trumpets and the drums. He asked, just to trick her, if she remembers him in his gilt dress at the parades, but she said, "No, *then* you were dressed in the uniform of a General of the Guards with a white dolman with an eagle on it."

BOUNINE: And you mean to say he still wasn't impressed?

CHERNOV: He told her she was an excellent pupil.

BOUNINE: The blithering old fool.

PETROVSKY: But all the same, just when Sergei took his arm and was helping out, he turned and called back, "Tell me, who *are* you?" (*He imitates the hollow quavering tone of an old man.*)

BOUNINE: And she——?

PETROVSKY: ——stared steadily at him and gave him no answer.

BOUNINE: Perfect.

PETROVSKY: She's amazing. What she's managed to learn in one month.

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BOUNINE: Her ability at picking out and memorising petty detail is certainly extraordinary.

PETROVSKY: Yes, if that *is* what it is.

BOUNINE: What do you mean?

PETROVSKY: Well it seems to me, at times, that it passes the extraordinary and becomes the—uncanny.

CHERNOV: Rubbish! She's made mistakes, plenty of them, when we've been going over the books of data.

PETROVSKY: Oh yes, the name of some functionary, or whether some event took place at Tsarskoe or the Winter Palace—the sort of mistakes we would all make about things that happened to us sixteen years ago.

BOUNINE: You surely aren't suggesting——?

PETROVSKY (*overlapping*): You're sure she was killed?

BOUNINE: Who? Anastasia?

PETROVSKY: You said you knew for certain.

BOUNINE: Of course she was killed. I had the whole story from Yourovski's head bodyguard before we strung him up. To be sure Anastasia fainted when Yourovski shot her father and so the first volley of the execution squad didn't kill her. She came to, to find herself lying in a heap of dead. If she hadn't screamed she might have stood a chance!

CHERNOV: The bodies were tossed down a deserted mine shaft. You don't suppose Yourovski didn't count them, do you?

PETROVSKY: All the same the tale of her escape has also been insisted on by people who claimed to have first hand information.

BOUNINE: Russian peasants. You know their love of the miraculous.

PETROVSKY: It's a choice of miracles it seems to me.

CHERNOV: With all this perfection you see in her I will remind you of one glaring failure. There must

ACT TWO

be an interpreter present if she talks to a witness who can only speak Russian.

PETROVSKY: And yet the Russian accent is unmistakable.

CHERNOV: It's the reason she failed with Plouvitch.

BOUNINE: Plouvitch won't matter if only the old woman accepts her. Everything depends on that.

PETROVSKY: Mightn't it be enough if the Prince is convinced?

BOUNINE (*shaking his head*): The Prince is not enough: a society idler, a bit of a gigolo, musician, dreamer—above all, a Russian. But the Empress is Danish, with no romantic nonsense about her.

PETROVSKY. What time will they be here?

BOUNINE: Five o'clock.

PETROVSKY (*looking at his watch*): Perhaps I'd better send away the remaining witnesses and we'll get out the albums and give her a last minute drilling. (*He makes a move towards the door.*)

BOUNINE: No. It would only confuse her mind and make her nervous. . . . We'll have to trust to her instinct. Of course it is ten years since I've seen the Empress. It's not likely her own memory is what it was. She's nearly eighty, remember.

[*Sergei enters left.*]

SERGEI: Pardon, Excellency, there is a phone call from a newspaper.

BOUNINE: Which paper?

SERGEI: *Die Nachtausgabe.*

PETROVSKY (*to Bounine*): They called before asking for an interview.

[*As Petrovsky makes a move to go:*]

BOUNINE: Not you. *You* had better talk to them, Chernov.

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CHERNOV: I think so too.

[Chernov nods and goes left to Sergej.]

PETROVSKY: Why did you send him?

[Bounine turns to Petrovsky as Chernov exits followed by Sergej.]

BOUNINE: You're not capable of dealing with these newshawks.

PETROVSKY (*sulkily*): Oh, that's it? I've told you why—

BOUNINE (*cutting in*): I don't care why. Giving them her photograph to publish was the act of an idiot.

[Antonia enters from the curtained doorway. She is of early middle-age, grim-faced, but of superior class.]

ANTONIA: Pardon, Excellency, her Highness is ready to receive the witnesses.

PETROVSKY (*calling through doorway*): Sergej!

BOUNINE: Who are they? Anything will help to swell the numbers of her supporters.

[Sergej enters left.]

PETROVSKY: A blind sleigh-driver, a palace sentry and some sort of charwoman—people of no importance.

BOUNINE: Do they all speak German?

SERGEJ: Yes, Excellency.

BOUNINE: You explained to them why her Highness prefers to conduct these interviews in the language of the country?

SERGEJ: Yes, Excellency, I told them it was so that the records of what was said could be read by her legal advisers.

BOUNINE: Good. We'll take the woman first.

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SERGEI: The blind man and the woman are friends. They ask if they may come together.

BOUNINE: Very well. (*Makes a dismissing gesture.*)

[*Sergei turns.*]

Are you sure this man is really blind?

SERGEI (*turning back*): Quite sure, Excellency.

[*Sergei exits left. Antonia remains, standing stiffly beside the curtained archway*]

BOUNINE (*to Petrovsky*): One must be careful of blind men. It was a supposed blind man who threw the bomb with such deadly aim at the carriage of Alexander the Second.

PETROVSKY: Sergei examines everyone before they are admitted. There is no chance for anyone to be armed.

SERGEI (*appearing in doorway*): Come this way.

[*The Charwoman and the Sleigh-Driver enter. She holds the blind man's arm guiding him into the room. The old man has a white beard, wears a long black overcoat, green with age, and carries a cap. The Charwoman is a middle-aged Russian peasant, with a scarf about her shoulders over a brightly coloured dress. Her eyes are taken by the ikon. She does an awkward curtsey to it and crosses herself. Antonia goes to the blind man.*]

PETROVSKY (*crossing to them*): Now, my good people, her Royal Highness is about to receive you. You are to talk to her and examine her attentively. After the audience you will be taken to the chief secretary who will register your opinion in writing and obtain your signature.

[*They do not answer.*]

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ANTONIA (*who has taken a position beside the steps and facing the audience*): Her Imperial Highness, The Grand Duchess Anastasia Nicolaevna.

[*Anna enters through curtained archway, centre, a figure transformed and with an air of incontestable distinction. She wears a tailor-made dress that is extremely chic and she has a heavy "choker" necklace of Russian amber on her neck. Her face, though pale, is no longer haggard. She seems to be infused with an extraordinary calm and all her movements are graceful and measured. She halts on the last step and stands there. The Sleigh-Driver drops to his knees, and shuffles nearer. Sergei guides him to take Anna's hand. Anna steps down the remaining step bringing herself immediately in front of the Sleigh-Driver. He raises his hand, moving it in the air gropingly. She extends her hand to his; he seizes it and puts it to his lips.*]

DRIVER: Yes, it *is* you, Little Mother. I know you as my own dog knows *me*. You were like four flowers, you and your sisters, and for each of you there was a different scent.

ANNA: Dear Wassievitch! Do you remember that Christmas at Gatchina when I had sprained my ankle on the ice and you had to carry me to and from your sleigh in your arms?

DRIVER (*brokenly*): Yes, it is your voice. I would know it anywhere.

[*Petrovsky smiles and, turning his head, winks at Boumine.*]

ANNA: I remember how you used to kiss each of your horses good morning. It always made me laugh and I remember the big blue silk net that was spread over their backs to keep the snow they picked up with their hooves from falling on the people who rode in the sleigh.

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DRIVER: Yes, yes, Little Mother. I see you have not forgotten those old days.

ANNA: My sister Tatiana took a photograph of us, you and me. I have it in an album. Would you like to see it?

DRIVER: I am blind, Gracious One.

ANNA (*compassionately*): I didn't know.

DRIVER: A double cataract. But I do not mind. It was a beautiful world that I saw in those old days. I like to pretend I am still living in it.

CHARWOMAN: You would be glad of your eyes today. Our Princess is beautiful.

ANNA: You have knelt to me long enough, Wassievitch. It was not like that at Gatchina. Then we threw snowballs at each other—only I knew you always threw them so that they should not hit me.

DRIVER: You loved the snow. I called you "Snow Princess" and you said you liked the name.

[*Bounine gives a signal to Sergei and he comes forward and, taking the old man's arm, helps him to rise. Anna goes to the chair o.p. centre. Bounine steps forward.*]

ANNA: Place chairs for my visitors.

BOUNINE: I must inform your Highness that other visitors are coming. . . .

[*She looks at him questioningly, but doesn't speak. The two servants, who have each gone to a chair to execute her order, stop.*]

Prince Paul—and the Empress Mother.

ANNA: *She* is coming here?

BOUNINE: Yes.

ANNA: These two have come to me from a long way. (*Turning to the servants.*) Bring them chairs.

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[*They do so, and Anna seats herself. The Charwoman starts forward, then halts hesitatingly. Anna beckons her with the full arm gesture peculiar to royalty. Boumine turns back and rejoins Petrovsky giving a slight shrug of the shoulder as he does so. The Charwoman drops in a deep but awkward curtsey in front of Anna. The woman Antonia goes to the Sleigh-Driver and takes his arm, standing beside him.*]

(*Indicating chair to Charwoman.*) Sit here.

[*She turns her face to Antonia who, interpreting the unspoken order, brings the blind man down and helps him into the other chair. She addresses the Charwoman.*]

What is your name?

CHARWOMAN: Annouchka, Highness.

ANNA: And have you come here all the way from Russia, Annouchka?

CHARWOMAN: No, Highness. I have lived here in the colony since nineteen twenty-one.

ANNA: You know me, do you, Annouchka?

CHARWOMAN: Of course I know you, Little Mother.

ANNA: Where was it that I met you, in Peterhoff, Iivadia, or was it in Spala during the war?

CHARWOMAN: At Ekaterinburg, Little Mother.

ANNA (*incredulously*): You saw me *there*? But nobody was allowed in the town except the soldiers.

CHARWOMAN: I lived there. My dead husband and my dead son were both miners. I was sent into the house of Ipotieff, the accursed house with the two wooden fences about it, with the closed windows and the darkened panes. . . . The soldiers said to me, "You are to wash the floorboards," so I went in.

ANNA: And you saw me there?

CHARWOMAN: Sitting in a half-dark room all alone. I had my pail, my cloths, my brushes. Yourovski,

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the assassin, gave me a push and said, "Hurry." I fell on my knees on the threshold of the room as one does in church. The vile one thought it was in order to scrub the floor but you knew it was for you that I knelt.

ANNA (*softly*): For me——?

CHARWOMAN: You smiled and gave me a good wish, but then you forgot I was there. Your thoughts were in the clouds flying like wounded birds.

ANNA: I *do* remember. I remember the swish of your cloth as you wiped the floors reminded me of the frou-frou of the women's trains as they walked about the polished floors of the Winter Palace. . . . And I thought of the wonderful balls that were given there. The great staircase. And on every step a huntsman in green, his gloved hand on a gilt cutlass.

CHARWOMAN: One of the soldiers had traced on the floor a sketch of Rasputin all naked. I washed it out and as I did so, the sun must have come out, for a little beam came through the shutters and there, on the floor, was your shadow. . . . I stooped and kissed it.

[*Anna grips the arms of her chair until her knuckles whiten. She leans back, her chin thrown up, her eyes closed.*]

And—afterwards, came that dreadful day when the shots were heard, and the sun darkened so that a July evening seemed like the blackest hour of winter . . . but even then, at that time, it was whispered that there was one who was *not* dead. And, as the months passed and we gathered round our stoves, the story was told of the Princess who was carried away in the night in her blood-stained dress, heavy with all the diamonds and pearls sewn together; of the bribing of the sentries and the tale of him who

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had exchanged for ten big diamonds the droshka and the horses.

BOUNINE (*sharply, coming forward*): Enough! Her Highness must close the audience. You were brought here to attest that this is indeed Anastasia Nicolaevna. You both agree?

DRIVER (*chantingly*): Anastasia Nicolaevna, the Snow Princess, risen from the tomb.

ANNA: Good-bye dear Wassievitch and God's blessing.

CHARWOMAN: In Ekaterinburg there is a deep wood of pine trees and in it through the night shadows are seen moving, some say seven, but I know now there can only be six.

[*The woman Antonia has again come forward and taken the blind man's hand. She leads him off. The Charwoman walks backward a step. Sergei goes to her, taking charge of her. Anna opens her eyes, which she has kept closed through the end of the scene.*]

ANNA: Good-bye, Annouchka, Annouchka of Ekaterinburg.

[*She makes the Russian sign of the cross and kisses her thumb.*]

CHARWOMAN: Bless your Highness.

[*They are led off on prompt side.*]

PETROVSKY: Thank heaven! I'm dying for a cigarette.

[*He takes one out of his case and puts it in his mouth. Anna with a sudden gesture snatches the cigarette from between his lips and throws it on the floor.*]

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ANNA (*blazing at him*): How dare you! How dare you light a cigarette in my presence without my permission.

[*Petrovsky stares at her in amazement.*]

PETROVSKY: I beg your Highness's pardon.

[*Bounine gives a little laugh, but Petrovsky's gaze is rivetted on Anna, who returns his almost hypnotised stare with an imperious sternness.*]

If you'll excuse me, I'll—— (*He breaks off and gives a little nervous laugh.*)

[*He murmurs the last word, takes a backward step, turns, and exits.*]

BOUNINE: Good. I told you to try and *think* of yourself as Anastasia. You see how effective it can be.

ANNA (*holding out her hand*): A cigarette, please.

[*Bounine laughs and, picking up a box from a table, offers it to her. She takes one.*]

BOUNINE (*smiling*): Have I your Highness's permission?

[*Anna gives a contemptuous shrug. Bounine takes a cigarette for himself then, picking up matchbox, lights first her cigarette, then his own.*]

And that was good just now with those two peasants. If you do as well with the old Empress the prize is in sight.

[*She turns her face to him enquiringly.*]

I mean the money.

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ANNA (*indifferently*): The money?

BOUNINE: The Tsar sent abroad millions of pounds to buy munitions but most of that is gone, spent in buying guns that arrived too late.

ANNA: Surely the Soviet lays claim to what is left?

BOUNINE: Naturally. But, in addition to that, Nicholas deposited in those same banks two million pounds for each of his children. Ten million pounds which now belongs to his only surviving daughter—to *you*.

[*Anna gives a dismissing wave of the hand as if the subject bored her.*]

ANNA: You say the Empress is coming this afternoon?

BOUNINE: The Prince is coming too. He is already on your side. He fancies he is in love with you.

ANNA (*with a faint laugh*): What are my orders? Am I to lead him on?

BOUNINE: He won't require leading. I fancy he is only waiting for the old lady to accept you to remind you that he was your girlhood sweetheart.

ANNA. And am I to marry him?

BOUNINE: It may sound a little over ambitious.

ANNA: Yes, doesn't it?

BOUNINE (*his voice hardening*): I am talking to you seriously.

ANNA: And am I to have children at your command? And must they be his? Or will you allow me the liberty of my famous ancestress and let me choose my Orloffs or my Potemkins?

BOUNINE: Don't speak to me in that mocking tone or you will get your face slapped. Your success with these moujiks has gone to your head. If you are clever it is with the cleverness of me and my two companions.

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[*She looks at him with a faintly scornful smile but without speaking.*]

The point I have been leading up to is this: if you get the money the Prince will want to marry you, but if he will marry you *first* it will help us in getting the money.

ANNA: So, it is the money he wants?

BOUNINE: He is poor, dependent on rich snobs.

ANNA: I see.

BOUNINE: But he is a romantic, a sentimentalist. He will persuade himself he is in love with you—if that is of any moment.

ANNA (*repeating*): “Of any moment”? Why should it be? Can a poor outcast expect everything?

BOUNINE: Poor outcast is right, and don't ever forget it. . . . But I have come to realise something that was not evident at our first meeting: you are a lady, quite well educated and refined. . . . Who are you? What family do you come from?

ANNA: My father was a toymaker, my mother his assistant who painted the faces of his dolls. Could you ask for a better ancestry for a puppet?

BOUNINE (*with a half laugh*): You hate me, don't you?

ANNA: Despise would be a better word.

[*Sergei appears in doorway.*]

SERGEI: Pardon, your Highness. What of the last witness?

BOUNINE: Who is it?

SERGEI: The sentry. He was one of the guards in the palace of Peterhoff.

[*Oblenski appears beside Sergei.*]

OBLENSKI: The—Princess will see *me*.

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SERGEI (*barring entrance with his outstretched arm*): You can't come in here.

OBLENSKI (*protesting*): She saw the others.

ANNA: Let him come in.

[*Sergei drops his arm. Felix Oblenski enters. He is a typical Russian of the working class with peaked cap, short heavy-looking coat and trousers tucked into his boots. He is in his late thirties, early forties.*]

BOUNINE: What is your name?

OBLENSKI: Felix Oblenski.

BOUNINE: How is it you speak German?

OBLENSKI: I was a prisoner of war for two years.

BOUNINE: I see. (*To Sergei, with a dismissing gesture.*) Her Highness will give him a brief audience.

[*Sergei bows his head and withdraws.*]

OBLENSKI (*addressing Anna*): Well, don't you know me?

BOUNINE (*sharply*): That is not the tone in which to address her Imperial Highness.

OBLENSKI (*with a grin*): Oh, pardon. . . . Do you remember me, Imperial Highness?

[*He stresses the title with a faint hint of mockery. Anna gazes at him without replying. Bounine steps in front of him as he moves a step nearer her. Chernov re-enters up right.*]

CHERNOV: What is this—another witness?

BOUNINE: Yes. (*To Oblenski.*) Peterhoff was full of sentries. You can't expect her Highness to remember them all.

OBLENSKI: I didn't meet her Highness in Peterhoff. . . . I met her in a hospital.

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CHERNOV: A hospital she visited with her mother?

OBLENSKI (*shaking his head*): No, she was a patient there—same as I was.

BOUNINE (*with growing sharpness*): Where was this hospital?

OBLENSKI: In Moscow. We were both there after the factory explosion.

BOUNINE (*repeating incredulously*): Factory explosion? And what had her Highness to do with——?

OBLENSKI (*overlapping*): We used to sit in the big sun-room together. Her head had been hurt and it was all bandaged so's I couldn't tell whether she was pretty or ugly as sin. (*He makes a move to pass Bounine.*) But I liked her voice.

[*Bounine pushes him back roughly.*]

BOUNINE (*angrily*): I'm beginning to understand. Those were lies you told about being a Peterhoff sentry.

OBLENSKI: No they weren't. I was in the Guards, the Izmailofsky regiment. . . . But that wasn't when I met Tania.

[*Anna turns her back as if the argument has no interest for her and stands with her hands on the mantel looking down into the fire.*]

CHERNOV: Tania?

OBLENSKI: Tania Ivanovna—that's her name.

CHERNOV (*to Anna, addressing her back*): Do you know this man, your Highness?

[*She makes no sign of having heard the question.*]

BOUNINE: Of course she doesn't. I see your little

game. You're obviously a Bolshevik agent who has been sent here to try and upset her Highness' claim to recognition.

OBLENSKI: I don't care anything about her claims. I've come to take Tania home with me. We had a quarrel and she ran away, but she's my wife—or much the same thing.

BOUNINE: One has only to look at you standing there to see what stupid lies you are telling. Do you think any decent woman would go to live with you in the kind of stinking hovel where you belong?

OBLENSKI: It's a good house I live in—I've got the honour medal. (*Addressing her.*) Aren't you going to speak to me, Tania? I've come a long way.

BOUNINE: Keep your eyes on me, you Bolshevik dog. I'm talking to you. Who gave you the permit to leave your job?

CHERNOV: And the money for your ticket? And the marks you need here in Berlin?

OBLENSKI (*trying to speak*): If you've got the medal—

BOUNINE (*talking through his line*): And for that you were to tell this rubbish to anyone who'd listen—

CHERNOV: The newspapers especially.

OBLENSKI: Rubbish is it? Tania's the one who's being paid and that's why she won't speak to me. (*Again trying to speak round Bounine.*) They've dressed you up like a grand lady and taught you how to act—

BOUNINE: That's enough! Now get out—go! Or I'll have my servants kick you down the steps.

CHERNOV (*calling*): Sergei!

OBLENSKI: All right. There's too many of you. But I'll see you again, Tania.

BOUNINE: You'd better keep your nose out of our business if you don't want to get hurt.

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OBLENSKI: Stir up your memory, Tania. See if you don't remember the little house on Merchant Street and my sister Luka, and my old Uncle Fedor. . . . Yes, and that evening in the field of sunflowers, where you hid and I caught you and you lay with your head on one of the broken sunflowers like a pillow and the moon shone on your face.

[*He turns and goes out. Sergeï following.*]

BOUNINE (*turning to Chernov*): Tell one of the men to see him clear of the place.

CHERNOV: I'll take care of him, Excellency. (*He exits.*)

[*Bounine turns back to Anna.*]

BOUNINE (*with bitter sarcasm*): Revolutions make strange bedfellows, don't they . . . only it wasn't a bed—a field of sunflowers, the raw earth, like animals.

ANNA: You sound shocked. Don't tell me your moral sense is offended?

BOUNINE: I notice you don't deny it. Perhaps you found his charming reminiscences nostalgic.

ANNA: Why are you so concerned?

BOUNINE: Were you this moujik's sweetheart? I want the truth.

[*He takes a step nearer her. She doesn't move.*]

ANNA: And if I was, is that any concern of yours?

BOUNINE: That amounts to an admission. Now your halo is off you won't be able to give yourself such airs.

ANNA: Is that a warning that I must be careful to keep my door locked?

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BOUNINE (*with a faint smile*): You may read it as a suggestion that you leave it open.

ANNA: You flatter yourself, my dear Prince.

[*He catches her by the arm and gives it an upward turn, holding it.*]

BOUNINE: I want the truth, was this fellow your lover?

ANNA: Is this quite the moment to twist my arm? The Empress is coming, remember. The success or failure of your precious swindle will be in my hands.

[*They stand eye to eye through a tick of silence.*]

ANNA: Let go of me, you swine.

[*He drops her arm.*]

BOUNINE (*covering his defeat*): Yes, perhaps that can wait.

[*Chernov re-enters.*]

CHERNOV: Listen. That man is standing outside in the road. Shall I send for the police?

BOUNINE (*recovering his poise*): The police? . . . They might start to dig up records—your own among them.

[*Petrovsky appears.*]

Ah, here's the man we can thank for all this. (*Turns to Petrovsky.*) One of your witnesses, the Peterhoff sentry, turns out to be a Bolshevik, who saw the photograph you so stupidly gave to the paper. He claims this lady is his sweetheart.

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PETROVSKY (*staring at Anna*): Her—his sweetheart?

ANNA: Yes, and Prince Bounine is inclined to believe it.

PETROVSKY (*staring at Bounine*): You don't?

ANNA: Oh, it's quite a convincing story. According to this man my real name is Tania Ivanovna. He met me after the explosion in the Moscow factory where we were both workers. (*She moves toward the curtained archway and turns.*) That was at the time that I got those scars.

BOUNINE: Bitch!

PETROVSKY (*staccato undertone*): Does she mean that? Is that the truth?

BOUNINE (*with a shrug*): Who is to say?

SERGEI: Her Majesty's car is here.

BOUNINE: Quick, Piotr, get out there. Stop that Russian dog from getting at her.

PETROVSKY: If I can.

[*Exit.*]

BOUNINE (*turning to Chernov*): Go up and tell the girl to hurry.

CHERNOV: Does she know what she is to wear?

BOUNINE: Yes, that is all arranged.

[*Chernov exits. Bounine gives a quick glance round. He moves the framed picture of the Russian Royal family, so that it can be more plainly seen. Voices are heard off.*]

EMPRESS (*off*): So you're in the Imperial livery? They're not wasting much time, are they?

[*Enter the Empress, followed by her lady-in-waiting, Baroness Livenbaum. The old Empress, the Danish mother of Nicholas II, is erect and queenly, dressed all in black*]

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and wearing a mourning bonnet without veil. She is eighty-four years old but is incomparably well-preserved and her eyes, for all the tears they have been called on to shed, are sharp and critical. Baroness Livenbaum is a woman in her late sixties, a vague, fluttery creature who exists only as the shadow of her royal mistress.]

EMPRESS: So this is the audience room?

[*Bounine enters from up right. He bows low.*]

And Arcade Arcadieitch. I thought you were dead. Don't they shoot traitors nowadays?

BOUNINE: Let your Majesty be reassured. The tradition has been observed. I was sentenced to be shot twice.

EMPRESS: By whom? The Whites or the Reds?

BOUNINE: By both.

EMPRESS: And you're still here? But there, I remember. You were always a man who, when you came to a parting of the ways, took both ways.

BOUNINE (*smiling unruffled*): It seems to me that our cause has had enough martyrs, your Majesty. . . . What it has chiefly lacked are men with practical minds who know how to gauge an opportunity and seize it when it appears.

EMPRESS: As you are doing here. . . . The effrontery of using the name of Romanov to create a business like the Royal Dutch or Lloyds Insurance—with shares and salaried officers—and a promise of handsome dividends! My compliments, Bounine. You're a scoundrel on the grand scale.

BOUNINE: Either that, or, possibly, a loyal servitor of a Princess too long denied her rightful heritage.

EMPRESS: You have certainly come some distance since those days when you were *aide-de-camp* to my

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elder son, gambling to the small hours with the Grand Dukes and winning ten thousand roubles a night—so I was told—with suspicious regularity.

BOUNINE: It's not necessary to cheat opponents who pour their brandy out in goblets.

EMPRESS (*paying no attention to him and overlapping his speech*): I remember one of your mistresses from the Marienskaia theatre—oh, yes, you went in for actresses even in those days. (*She waves her hand, indicating the room to make clear her meaning.*) She created a scandal in your rooms and my husband called you to account.

BOUNINE: Alas, your Majesty! The lady *acted* when off the stage and *behaved* when on it—an unfortunate reversal.

EMPRESS: She conveniently disappeared so that you were free to tell whatever story you liked. You made women disappear in those days and now you make them appear. . . . Quite a talented magician.

[*She holds out her hand to Livenbaum who, opening her bag, produces a smelling-bottle.*]

BOUNINE: The Grand Duchess asked your Majesty to grant her an interview at which you might judge better than anyone living, the truth of her claim. She had relied, as had we, on your coming with an open mind.

EMPRESS (*sniffing the bottle*): My dear Bounine, I have already been shown two Alexis, an Olga and a Tatiana. I am a little weary of these spectral Romanovs.

BOUNINE: Your Majesty must surely realise that this time there is a difference. From the very beginning there have been persistent rumours of the Princess Anastasia's survival. And these stories were sufficiently plausible for a group of our Russian kinsmen to subscribe a fund to be used in making a search.

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EMPRESS: With yourself as searcher-in-chief? The whole thing reeks of money, Bounine.

BOUNINE: There is certainly money at stake, the contribution the Tsar made to support the war effort. The Kremlin has laid claim to it——

EMPRESS (*interrupting*): Yes, I know all about that. My son was ready to beggar himself in defence of his country. Unfortunately he waited as usual until it was too late.

BOUNINE: True.

EMPRESS: The Tsar was like a man riding backwards on a train; he never saw anything until he was past it.

BOUNINE: This money, if recovered, will, of course, belong to her Highness.

EMPRESS: Oh, come, Bounine. You're not doing all this out of loyalty to your late sovereign or his alleged daughter——

BOUNINE: I can assure your Majesty——

EMPRESS (*holding up her hand, stopping him*): Save your protests, I'm not here to spoil your little game——though I'm not here to help it either. . . . I've come, if you must know, because my nephew has plagued me into it.

BOUNINE: I am grateful to his Highness.

EMPRESS: But I warn you, Bounine, don't try my patience too far. I have lost everything that I ever loved; my husband, both my sons, my five grandchildren, my home, my position, my country. . . . I have nothing left but my memories. Don't lay your hands on those . . . they are sacred. Not to be corrupted for your profit, nor to be used to bolster up your puppet's claim to recognition.

[*Bounine bows in silent acknowledgement.*]

Now you may go.

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BOUNINE: Thank you, your Majesty.

EMPRESS: I see you hesitate. Perhaps you are afraid to let your artist perform without a prompter?

BOUNINE: Not at all. I will go and tell her Highness you are ready to receive her. . . . I think your Majesty is about to meet with some surprises.

[He draws back and bows as he speaks and then goes up the stair, disappearing behind the curtains.]

EMPRESS: Impudence! A poisonous insect that should have been crushed by a Romanov boot while where was still power in the foot that wore it.

LIVENBAUM: But he's attractive; so masterful and ruthless. A blow or a kiss, or perhaps both.

EMPRESS: I find your voluptuous fancies quite disgusting. To a woman of your age, sex should mean nothing but gender.

LIVENBAUM (*unabashed*): Did he really murder his actress friend?

EMPRESS: I didn't say he murdered her—she conveniently disappeared. . . . (*She makes a little movement of distaste with her shoulders.*) It is when I meet a man like Bounine that I understand why the revolution happened.

PAUL (*off*): Where? In here?

EMPRESS: Ah, here is Paul.

[She turns to the door. Prince Paul enters, a fair, handsome man, half Russian, half German. From them he inherits a romantic-mystical strain to which the dramatic reappearance of his childhood sweetheart makes a strong appeal. His manner is warm and pleasant. Despite his makeshift existence he is not at all of the gigolo type.]

PAUL: You're here before me. I'm so sorry.

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[*He goes to her as if to kiss her. She puts out her hand, he bends and kisses it.*]

I had to borrow a car. It's a nuisance not having one of your own.

EMPRESS: Yes, I'm afraid your ancestors hadn't foreseen a world in which royalty might have to work for a living.

PAUL (*looking round*): Hasn't anyone received you?

EMPRESS: Oh, yes, the Kerensky satellite was here. He succeeded in rousing in me a nausea and in Livenbaum an amorous yearning.

PAUL: Don't hold Kerensky against him. There are plenty who made that mistake. The Bounine of nineteen-eighteen and Bounine today are two different men.

EMPRESS: You think people change? How naive you are! My husband used to say if you want to reform a man start with his grandfather.

PAUL (*with a laugh*): Well, anyway, don't quarrel with the dinner because you don't like the cook.

[*Baroness Livenbaum laughs.*]

EMPRESS: Run along, Livenbaum, we're discussing family matters.

LIVENBAUM (*her face falling*): I'm not to see her?

EMPRESS: You'd only insist on giving me your opinion and you're never right about anything. . . . Go and find this Bounine you hanker after. You may get the blow but I'll be surprised if he gives you the kiss.

[*Baroness Livenbaum giggles and does a perfunctory bob. She exits, stopping and peering myopically as she goes.*]

PAUL: Does Anastasia know you are here?

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EMPRESS: I believe the lady has been notified.

PAUL: Do try and keep your mind open.

EMPRESS: They've gone out of their way to put my back up. Look at that photograph, the eagles on the frame, the servants' liveries.

PAUL: Yes, I agree it's overdone, but——

EMPRESS: If your Anastasia were genuine she'd revolt against it.

PAUL: Please don't make up your mind before you meet her.

EMPRESS: You're gullible, Paul. You always were. You had reached your teens before you stopped believing in Santa Claus.

PAUL (*with a laugh*): I'm not as easy as you think. The first time I came here it was in no mood of eager expectancy. . . . I was all prepared to denounce and expose. I had heard about Bounine and his company and thought the whole thing a disgraceful fraud.

EMPRESS: And then came your conversion from prosecutor to prime upholder. Quite in the manner of your sainted namesake.

PAUL: I didn't recognise her immediately. One hadn't made enough allowance for the years, or for all she had gone through.

EMPRESS: She answered your questions, I suppose—what do you expect? Bounine has taught her her lessons.

PAUL: Bounine doesn't know everything.

EMPRESS: There are many sources he can draw on here in Berlin; old friends, old servants, ghosts from our royal past, each with his stock of personal anecdotes.

PAUL (*musingly*): It isn't only what she knows, and it isn't the evidence of her wounds. No, it's more an atmosphere she creates, a quiet assurance, a fineness that you feel is above question.

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EMPRESS: You sound as if you've fallen in love with her.

PAUL: I think perhaps I have.

EMPRESS: You're quite mad. I suppose it's only to be expected. Your mother, poor Eudoxia, when her husband died, wanted to marry the Pope.

PAUL (*with a laugh*): She was always religiously inclined.

EMPRESS: It's no laughing matter. So you're in love with this sleeping beauty?

PAUL: Shouldn't I be? Don't forget, she *was* to have been my wife. Why, we actually went through a ceremony of our own devising, a child betrothal. It was held on the Chinese Island. She was twelve and I was fourteen.

EMPRESS: And does she recollect it all clearly? Who was with you? What she *wore*? That's the thing a woman remembers the longest.

PAUL: She hasn't mentioned anything about it. It seems to be one of her blank spots.

EMPRESS: She doesn't remember a thing like that? And yet you still believe in her? Preposterous!

PAUL: You're wrong. I've spoken to the doctors, to Lessing for one. There's no greater authority. He says some degree of aphasia would be almost inevitable. The head wound was a serious one—quite aside from the shock. When you think what she saw happen in that cellar—

EMPRESS (*stopping him with a hand on his arm*): Please—I've done enough thinking about that. I feared at one time my mind could never leave the subject even for an hour. . . . Do you know what my refuge has been? As I sit at my tea, you'd hear me say "take that chair Nikki" and he takes it—and again "three lumps Tatiana, you'll get fat if you eat so many sweets and then the English Prince won't want to

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marry you." Livenbaum thinks I'm one of the mad ones of the family but that is the way I keep my beauty—by forcing my mind away from July the sixteenth, nineteen-eighteen.

PAUL: My poor dear one, perhaps I should have realised what a strain I was putting you to, making you come here.

EMPRESS (*with a half shrug*): One can't complain of old wounds being reopened when the wounds have never healed.

PAUL: I too had a feeling of repugnance when I first came here. I was sitting waiting for her, as we are doing now, and I thought of my last visit to Tsarkoie-Selo. I kissed them all good-bye. I was going off to war, and the Emperor went with me to the door. We crossed the Marble Parade Hall, the Hall of Catherine the Second, the Portrait Gallery, the Black Cossack's Hall. Behind us everything entered into the shadows, and I felt that it was there, among those shadows, that they should remain . . . in their fairy palace, with the black eagles, and the mighty ancestors looking down from the walls.

EMPRESS: Wrapped in the dignity of death, undisturbed by controversy or upstart claimants.

[As she speaks the curtains on the stairs are parted and the "claimant" the Empress refers to stands there. She has changed to a black skirt and white blouse and her hair, now parted in the middle is drawn into a bun worn low on her neck. She is unseen by them for a moment, then, as if he felt her presence, Paul turns.]

PAUL: Anastasia!

[He rises and goes to her. The old Empress sits unmoving and does not even turn her head.]

Are you feeling better today?

ANNA: Yes, thank you. My cold is almost gone at last.

PAUL: Dressed like that you make the past come alive. . . . (*With a crooked smile.*) Oh, dear, oh, dear—the pathos of distance! But I won't talk about it now. This is your grandmamma's moment. (*He smiles and says in a low voice.*) Have confidence.

[*He turns and goes off up right. Anna comes down and turns facing the old Empress, a yard or two away from her. The old Empress raises her head slowly and inspects her from under hooded lids.*]

EMPRESS: Yes, I can see why the others have believed, even my romantic-minded nephew. The likeness is good enough for a waxwork gallery.

ANNA: I haven't cared whether *they* recognised me or not. But you—don't you know me?

EMPRESS: Where were you born?

ANNA: In Peterhoff.

EMPRESS: Child, no doubt, of Nicholas the Second and Alexandra, his queen?

ANNA: And *grandchild* of Maria Feodorovna.

EMPRESS: You have taken a long time in coming to comfort my bereavement.

ANNA: For many years I did not know who I was.

EMPRESS: But now you are quite sure?

[*Anna doesn't answer.*]

How long have you been an actress?

ANNA: As in your own case, your Majesty, from earliest childhood.

EMPRESS: Yes, to be a Princess is to be an actress—but not necessarily a good one.

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ANNA: Perhaps I should have learned to be a better one if the curtain hadn't fallen so early.

EMPRESS: You are being flippant about a subject which you must realise is, for me, a great personal sorrow.

ANNA: Forgive me, I forgot for a moment you would be regarding that tragedy as more yours than mine.

[The Empress doesn't answer. She pulls the stopper from her scent-bottle and sniffs it. Anna looks at her appealingly.]

I am trying to keep my courage. But you are making it very hard for me. . . . I have been without love for so long.

EMPRESS: Come, have there been no men in your life? I thought the story of your rescue included a Bolshevik guard who had fallen in love with you and who carried you from the charnel house where the bodies were awaiting burial?

ANNA: Yes, he rescued me and took me to Rumania, but he soon decided that a crazy girl was no great prize.

EMPRESS: A rescue from the very edge of the grave. Years of lost memory in an asylum. Excellent material for melodrama.

[Anna shakes her head.]

ANNA: Long empty days in which the consciousness of living came only through pain. Hardly melodrama, grandmamma.

EMPRESS: Did I give you permission to call me that name?

ANNA: I'm sorry, it slipped out. I will try to guard my tongue.

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EMPRESS: You think my answer should be to grant you that privilege? A lonely old woman should be glad to hear someone call her "grandmamma", glad to clasp a young head against her empty bosom.

ANNA: My loneliness has been as bitter as yours. And the blow fell on me when I was sixteen. It came to *you* after you had known years of happiness.

EMPRESS: You ask me for recognition, for love. And you do it well; your eyes are moist, your voice full of feeling. But I can only reply that the love you beg for belongs to one who is dead. . . . You have chosen to deck yourself in the robes of a spectre, mademoiselle, and, so doing, have managed to win endorsement from a few poor sentimentalists, dreamers, self-deceivers—but I am none of those things. The shell that was once my heart is not easily pierced.

ANNA: And so you thrust me from you? I was told you would ask me difficult questions. But you are not interested enough to ask me *any*.

EMPRESS: Oh, I was going to catechise you, was I? That is what your business associates told you?

ANNA: They mean nothing to me, these men. Neither they nor the millions about which they dream.

EMPRESS: But they've told you about those millions?

ANNA: Oh yes, they have told me.

EMPRESS: And did you reply that a Romanov may be butchered but is not to be bought? That should have been your answer. For if your blood was truly Romanov you would not let yourself be made a catspaw by Bounine and his crew.

ANNA: Tell me to whom this money should be given and I will give it. Then perhaps you will believe me.

EMPRESS: Easily said and rather clever. You cannot give the money away until you have it. And you cannot get it without first obtaining my recognition.

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ANNA: Yes, you are hard. And you are showing me your fighting face, the wounding words, barbed like arrows. . . . I remember hearing father say you were the toughest . . . fighter the family has known since Peter the Great . . . that was at the time you and my mother quarrelled over a necklace. . . . Some emeralds, part of the Imperial treasure, but you wanted to keep them for your lifetime.

EMPRESS: Who told you this? Oh, but there were plenty who must have known about it. Rasputin as a beginning. Alex aired all her grievances to *him*.

ANNA: I remember your wearing them. It was with your last court dress, the red velvet one with the long train.

EMPRESS (*sharply*): Where did you see my portrait, or did someone describe me.

ANNA (*dreamily*): It's strange. I only remember the large outlines or the little details.

EMPRESS: It was the worst of our quarrels . . . the Winter Palace, my private rooms, the snow falling outside the double window-panes. . . . Alex had herself announced by one of the lackeys: "Her Imperial Majesty!" Thinking to awe me with a title that had been my own for thirteen years. . . . I was sitting by the fire with my jewel-box on my knees, and, after *that* pompous nonsense, I didn't even trouble to get up— (*She breaks off on a sudden realisation of who she's speaking to.*) I don't know why I'm telling all this to you.

ANNA: My father took the side of my mother, they even brought in the Chancellor. They were all lined up against you—but you kept Figgy's jewels.

EMPRESS: You know that too, do you? And you've learned to call the great Catherine "Figgy"?

ANNA: We always called her that. And sometimes we'd give the same nickname to Olga because she

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had such an eye for the men. Tatiana used to tease her and——

EMPRESS (*agitated, rising*): Stop. . . . I forbid it. I forbid you to bandy those names.

ANNA (*roused*): They're my sisters. I can speak of them if I choose.

EMPRESS: Impostor!

ANNA: *You* call me that?

EMPRESS: Yes. If you had any decency you would stop this masquerade. . . . I will pay you, give you more than these scoundrels will, I warrant, once you tell them I'm not letting you mount my shoulders to gather your golden plums.

ANNA (*turning from her*): Go away. Leave me.

EMPRESS: I'm offering you money.

ANNA: Go away, please.

EMPRESS: You're giving up, are you?

ANNA: So it wasn't enough to have suffered all that, the cellar, the asylum, the horror, the cruelty, the emptiness? . . . It was also necessary that I should meet *you* again—like this.

EMPRESS: The tragic scene of despair. You're forgetting nothing.

ANNA: Say what you like. I am no longer able to struggle. Oh, how can anyone who has suffered so much have so little heart for suffering?

EMPRESS: I am sorry if your failure to win me over is such a cruel disappointment, mademoiselle. (*She turns and goes towards doorway on prompt side.*)

ANNA (*crying out*): Don't go!

[*She runs and places herself between the Empress and the doorway.*]

EMPRESS: But you just told me to.

ANNA: Not yet. I'll say nothing more about *them*. Nothing to try and convince you.

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EMPRESS: Then what do you want of me?

ANNA: Just a moment or two longer. Let me touch your dress. Put my hand for a moment in yours.

[She drops on her knees beside the old woman and clasps her dress. The Empress makes a movement to disengage herself.]

No, just a moment more to hear your voice, to close my eyes and fancy we are on the terrace at Livadia with the smell of the sea, and an echo of laughter from the tennis courts where father and Tatiana are playing. You called me little one, "Malenkaia". It was your own special name for me. You used it for no one else. *(She breaks off with a slight attack of coughing.)*

EMPRESS: Are you ill?

ANNA: No, just a cough. Nothing serious. I am not bidding for sympathy.

EMPRESS: But you have seen a doctor—a good one?

ANNA: Oh, yes, I am well acquainted with doctors. But it is kind of you to ask. And I am not after all, surprised that you do not recognise me. I know I have changed very much indeed.

EMPRESS *(moved)*: Let me go, please. I must go home.

ANNA *(unbeeding and perhaps unbearing)*: What is strange is that you have changed so little. And after all that you have gone through too. . . . You still seem to me as you did that day that my finger was pinched in your carriage door and you told me to try not to cry because there were people there and I was the daughter of a king.

EMPRESS *(faintly)*: Let me go.

ANNA *(holding it up to her)*: Look, it is still not quite straight, that finger. Or can't you see the difference from the others?

EMPRESS (*gasping*): You are too clever for me. . . . I don't know how you know these things, but, please, mademoiselle, I am an old woman. . . . I have not the strength—

ANNA (*releasing her, but still on her knees*): Very well, go, if you must. And you'll never come back again, I know it. We two have met again after all the years, the only two left of our family.

EMPRESS: I will come back. I will see you once again, mademoiselle, when my mind is clearer. Now I—I am feeling upset.

ANNA: No, perhaps you had better not come again. You are kind now. You have softened toward me. But later you will get your balance. You will say, "It was all acting. She is some sort of cheap little actress hired for money." And it is true, grand-mamma, they did hire me for money. I was starving after I ran away from the asylum. I had nowhere to go, I even went down the steps to the canal. . . . Perhaps I should not have let him stop me—

EMPRESS (*going to doorway on prompt side*): Good-bye, mademoiselle. Tell Paul I didn't need him. I must be alone.

ANNA (*crosses to the doorway*): Good-bye, dear grand-mamma, I will try not to be lonely or frightened. Lonely or frightened—why did I say that? Where have I said those words before? . . . Oh, now, I remember, it was on board the *Standart*. I had waked and found a storm raging, the big waves breaking against the hull. And I cried out. And you came to my cabin.

[*The Empress stands staring at Anna, who rises as she speaks and takes an unsteady step to the sofa. She drops down on it, her head bowed forward as if half fainting. The Empress takes a step towards her, then stops, then another,*

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then another pause, moving thus as if dragged against her will by some invisible force. She stands over Anna, who leans against the back of the sofa with closed eyes.]

EMPRESS (*a low cry*): Malenkaia!

[She drops down beside Anna on the sofa, and as the younger woman opens her eyes, looking at the old lady with an expression of half doubting joy, she opens her arms to her. With a choked sob Anna drops her head and the Empress presses it against her bosom.]

Malenkaia! Malenkaia! (*She kisses the top of the bowed head.*) I couldn't believe it at first. You've come from so far away, and I've waited so long for you. Don't cry, just rest yourself. There is no need to tell me any more. . . . You are warm, you are alive, that is enough. I can stand no more for now. Can't you hear how that weary old heart of mine is thumping? I must go, but don't be afraid. I shall come back. . . . I need you.

[She disengages herself and rises. Anna reaches out, clutching at her dress.]

No, let go of my dress. That is what you used to do as a child. . . . Be sensible, Malenkaia, I'll go as I used to, speaking to you as you lay in your little bed.

[She speaks soothingly, as if to a child as she crosses slowly to doorway on prompt side.]

We will go, tomorrow if you like, to my old palace in Finland. It is still there and still mine though I have not seen it for years. . . . There is a very old man there, our lamplighter. Each evening he goes

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from one room to another lighting the empty lamps until, for him, the great, dark rooms are ablaze with light. The other servants take no notice. They realise that he is childish. And perhaps that is true of us all, and we are lighting dead lamps to illumine a grandeur that is gone. . . . Good-night, Anastasia Nicolaevna, and please, if it should *not* be you—don't ever tell me.

[She exits. Anna rises. There is the sound of applause and as she looks toward the stair, a pair of hands are thrust out between the curtains and applaud, without revealing the identity of their owner. With a swift gesture Anna snatches up a book and hurls it at the curtains. The hands disappear. A moment later Prince Paul re-enters up right.]

PAUL (*stopping and looking round*): So she's accepted you?

[Anna plays the early part of the scene as if her mind was on what has gone before.]

ANNA: Then you were listening——

PAUL: No, Chernov told me. It is splendid news. If the old Empress recognises you so must everyone.

ANNA: Even yourself?

PAUL: I? I was one of the first to come to your support.

ANNA: You weren't too sure.

PAUL: There were stumbling blocks; the fact that you didn't speak Russian, or said you didn't.

ANNA: Yes, of course.

PAUL: I understand that now. I realise now that the mind, after a sufficiently devastating shock, will shut a door on all associated ideas.

ANNA: And that made you feel safe in giving me your friendship?

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PAUL (*taking her by the shoulders*): More than friendship. You know that I have been in love with you since our childhood.

ANNA: I know that a marriage had been arranged.

PAUL: It was not like the important marriages planned for your elder sisters. We chose each other.

ANNA: And the love that you felt for that happy, care-free child has survived the years, the long period when you thought me dead?

PAUL: It has. My desire to marry you is as strong as ever.

ANNA: There was a Russian workman here this afternoon who also believed that I was his long lost sweetheart.

PAUL: What? But that is absurd.

ANNA: Suppose I say it's true? Suppose I tell you that these scars of mine are the result of an explosion in a Moscow factory where I was a worker? Would you still love me?

PAUL: It isn't true. Why are you trying——? (*He breaks off breathlessly.*)

ANNA: I'd be just the same woman, except for a name. Would you still want me for your wife? Or is your love the exclusive property of the girl with whom you used to walk hand in hand in the gardens at Tsarkoie, beside the lake with the black swans?

PAUL (*reassured*): Ah, *that's* better. (*He draws a relieved breath and smiles.*)

ANNA: What's better?

PAUL: Only one who was there would know that the swans were black.

[*Anna bursts into a peal of discordant laughter.*]

ANNA: That is wonderful! The cloud leaves your brow because I remember that the swans were black.

There's a picture of them, my dear Paul, in one of the photograph albums. . . . I'm supposed to have taken it myself. . . . Do you think I did? (*She laughs again.*)

[*Bounine enters up left. Almost simultaneously Chernov parts the curtains on the stairs and comes down.*]

Ah, here are my keepers. . . . They heard me laugh. That's the best way to recognise a mad person, by their laugh. I know—— I've heard quite a lot of that kind of laughter.

BOUNINE: Her Highness is overwrought. The strain of the interview with her grandmother has been very severe. Naturally. It means everything to have her Majesty's acceptance.

ANNA: Yes, it will help with the bankers, won't it?

BOUNINE: There is something that will help possibly even more. (*He looks at Paul.*)

PAUL: Prince Bounine thinks that our marriage would clinch the matter.

ANNA (*with building irony*): Yes, what stamp of identification would be stronger than your marrying me? It's a trump card for you, Bounine. Think of it, Paul. Ten million pounds—it's a handsome *dot*, you must admit? Worth marrying for, worth the effort of stirring up those old romantic embers.

PAUL (*trying to check her*): Please.

ANNA: And worth it for me too. As Prince Bounine says I not only get the money but a Prince Charming as well. Quite a triumph for Tania Ivanovna.

PAUL (*repeating under his breath*): Tania Ivanovna?

BOUNINE (*low voiced, soothingly*): Pay no attention, your Highness.

[*She laughs again, and goes towards the stairs. As she*

ACT TWO

mounts the first step she suddenly clutches her head, sways, spins round and collapses in a faint. Chernov makes a movement to catch her but she slips from his grasp, and lies, a crumpled heap, at the foot of the stairway. Paul hurries to her, kneels by her side.]

BOUNINE: Sergei! Antonia!

[Sergei appears from door up right.]

Brandy, Chernov. . . . Sergei, the doctor, the nearest one is Steinmetz. Lay her on the sofa.

[Sergei hurries across and exits prompt side. Chernov goes to a small cabinet and gets a bottle of brandy. Paul bends over her, pushing back her hair.]

Brandy.

PAUL: That scar is unquestionably a bullet wound.

BOUNINE: Unquestionably, Highness.

[The two servants, Sergei and Antonia, enter, sent in by Petrovsky. They go towards the figure on the floor. Paul rises and stands aside as Sergei and Bounine pick up Anna and carry her to the sofa.]

PAUL: We must have her with us. The Empress would wish it.

[As he speaks Chernov comes down with the brandy and with the assistance of Bounine, who raises her up, he pours some between her lips.]

BOUNINE: We can take good care of her here, Highness. And it is better that she should not be moved.

PAUL: Nonsense! Her proper place is in her family's care.

ANASTASIA

ANNA (*murmuring, half conscious*): *Chto sluchelos Grtia, Grtia.*

BOUNINE: Listen! Listen . . . she is speaking Russian!

ANNA: *Grtia Hastalneyu, Olga, Tatiana—Moi syostré, noi syostré.* (*Her eyes open. She stares up at them.*)

Curtain

ACT THREE

The scene is the same. Two weeks later.

It is about eight o'clock at night. A reception is to be held at which the investors in Bounine's syndicate are to be presented to Anastasia, and she, in turn officially presented to the world. The lamps and chandelier are lighted and there are huge bowls of Russian lilies. The furnishings are augmented by a throne which is placed in front of window, curtains of which are drawn, furnishing it with a background. Chairs are grouped on either side. On a banquette standing in front of the throne is a crown.

Two other important-looking chairs are placed beside the throne facing audience. These are intended for the Dowager Empress and Prince Paul. Petrovsky, attired in full evening dress, is putting some finishing touches to the room. Trying the effect of a cushion placed in the throne chair, and then, dissatisfied, removing it. Thus pre-occupied he does not see Bounine who enters left behind him. The leader of the conspiracy wears the dress uniform of a General of the Don Cossacks. His breast is bedecked with small-scale dress medals and there is an order about his neck. His appearance is commandingly impressive. He stands in doorway surveying the room.

BOUNINE: Good, good. . . . Not quite the Peterhoff throne room, but since that is not available——

PETROVSKY: I've done my best with what I could find.

BOUNINE: The throne—where on earth did you get that?

PETROVSKY: I rented it for the night.

BOUNINE: From whom, may I ask?

PETROVSKY: The property department of the Opera. It's from "Boris Goudonov".

BOUNINE (*with a laugh*): Couldn't you have got

Chalapin as well? That would have made the evening a real success.

PETROVSKY (*pointing to them*): Russian lilies?

BOUNINE: Excellent. . . . (*With a gesture indicating the room across the hall.*) And how about the seating arrangements in the Ballroom?

PETROVSKY: I've given Sergei his instructions. The generals and court dignitaries are to have the front seats. The uniforms should make quite a show despite the bald heads and the weak knees—reds, light blues, yellows—and the grey and white of the Cossacks.

BOUNINE: Quite an historical pageant and to think that only a few years ago it was part of one's everyday life! But, never mind, Piotr, our fortunes are on the turn. We are to have two guests tonight more important than all the others. (*He pauses, smiling.*)

PETROVSKY: Who?

BOUNINE: Councillor Krefting and Baron Stromberg.

[*As Petrovsky stares at him not recognising the names.*]

The heads of the Svenska-Handel Bank.

PETROVSKY (*wonderingly*): The Swedish bankers!

BOUNINE: Exactly! I spent an hour with them in their suite at the Adlon. They are most impressed. The Empress being Danish still carries weight in Scandinavia and the romance of the reunited sweethearts is, as the councillor remarked, a page out of Hans Christian Andersen.

PETROVSKY: Wonderful!

BOUNINE: You may still have a chance of fulfilling your destiny as a painter, Piotr.

PETROVSKY: And you will be able to restore your stable of race-horses—not to mention your even more attractive stable of mistresses.

BOUNINE (*shaking his head*): I shall go to America.

ACT THREE

It's the only country left with a proper respect for wealth.

[*Chernov enters. His business suit and rather untidy appearance are witness of his concern. He carries a newspaper.*]

CHERNOV: Here you are, both of you.

BOUNINE: Why aren't you changed?

CHERNOV: Have you seen this? (*He holds out the paper.*)

BOUNINE: What is it?

CHERNOV: *Die Nachtausgabe.*

BOUNINE (*taking paper*): Another of their veiled attacks?

CHERNOV: The veil is off. They call us swindlers. They use the word.

BOUNINE: They do, do they? They'll pay for that—pay handsomely.

CHERNOV: *Will* they? Wait till you've had a look at it. There's a photograph of Tania Ivanovna, a police-card photograph. It bears the official stamps.

[*Bounine spreads the paper, examining the picture, then carries it over to the light, Petrovsky follows, looking over his shoulder.*]

CHERNOV: Don't worry, it's Anna right enough—no mistake about that. The article is an interview with her ex-lover Felix Oblenski!

PETROVSKY: We should have dealt with the swine the day he came here.

CHERNOV: Dealt how?

PETROVSKY: An accident—he was hanging about in the road—

BOUNINE (*breaking in*): You're to blame—that damned photograph.

ANASTASIA

CHERNOV: Yes, that's what brought the fellow here.

BOUNINE: More than that—take a look at this. Look closely. It's been made up from the one that you gave out. (*He thrusts it in front of Petrovsky.*)

CHERNOV: True. The pose is identical.

PETROVSKY (*recovering*): So—it's a fake?

BOUNINE: Yes, but a fake that plenty of people will find convincing.

CHERNOV: Some of tonight's visitors will have this paper in their pockets.

PETROVSKY: What does it matter?

BOUNINE (*sharply*): What do you mean—"What does it matter"?

PETROVSKY: A faked photograph to be weighed against the endorsement of a royal fiancé, an Imperial grandmother?

BOUNINE: How do you know we'll *have* their endorsement? This may be just the thing to turn them against her? (*He raps the paper.*)

PETROVSKY: I don't believe it. They insisted on having her with them. The Empress has nursed her through this illness.

CHERNOV: That only adds to the danger. Anna may easily have said something, made some blunder that has already raised doubts in the Empress's mind.

PETROVSKY: She'd have been back before this if the Empress disowned her.

BOUNINE: Was the Empress at her fitting yesterday?

PETROVSKY: Worth's woman says she was alone—but she came in the Empress's car.

BOUNINE (*nodding as he weighs it*): Yes, yes. . . . I would call that fairly reassuring. (*He turns to Petrovsky.*) How is the dress?

PETROVSKY: A dream in white and gold—wait till you see it.

BOUNINE: And the tiara?

ACT THREE

PETROVSKY: It's over there on the table. I kept it for you to pass on.

[*Bounine goes to console table and picks up the case which lies there.*]

CHERNOV (*cynically*): You are true Russians, both of you. Grim realities never disturb your dreams for long.

BOUNINE (*ignoring him*): Yes, it looks like real Russian workmanship. . . .

CHERNOV: Yes. Hired for the evening. (*Picking up the paper from where Bounine has left it.*) *Die Nachtausgabe* points out that the lady who is to wear it is denied by her former tutor; and that a still more important sceptic is the family dentist.

BOUNINE: Yes, it's humiliating to think that royalty, like horses, should be judged by their teeth.

CHERNOV: In the face of disaster you make jokes.

BOUNINE: I am a soldier. . . . It is the first principle of warfare—never expect defeat.

[*Sergei appears in the doorway left.*]

SERGEI (*announcing*): Her Imperial Highness.

[*All three men turn to the door. Anna enters left. She is in quite simple travelling attire. She seems completely recovered, calm and self-assured.*]

BOUNINE (*with a mocking emphasis*): Good evening . . . Imperial Highness.

ANNA: Good evening.

[*He bows. The others do not. Sergei withdraws.*]

CHERNOV: You are alone?

ANNA: Yes.

ANASTASIA

BOUNINE (*anxiously*): But the Empress is coming?

ANNA: I don't know.

BOUNINE: You don't know? But she must come. It's essential.

ANNA: She was expecting the Prince. She wanted to have a talk with him.

PETROVSKY: *He is coming?*

ANNA (*with a faint smile*): Yes, I fancy you can be reasonably sure of Prince Paul.

BOUNINE: You know of no reason why the Empress might not be coming?

ANNA: Reason?

BOUNINE: Did you make any slips in the two weeks you spent at Haraldeberg?

ANNA: I'm afraid I can't say. I was ill—in a delirium.

CHERNOV: And so you might have said anything?

ANNA: Yes, anything.

BOUNINE: It's of vital importance she should be here.

[*He pauses for a second, but she makes no reply.*]

The Prince is not enough. They may say it's the money he is after, and you are his means of getting it.

CHERNOV: Which is the exact truth. At any rate you made no conscious blunders?

BOUNINE: And the Empress continues to be kind to you? We know how fond she is of the Prince. She must be coming to support him.

PETROVSKY: She knows this is the important night. . . .

ANNA (*with a faint smile*): The night I am to be presented to my people.

BOUNINE: That's right, think of them as your people. I have told you that before.

CHERNOV (*eying her ironically*): From a homeless out-cast to Tsarina of Russia—quite a rise!

ACT THREE

PETROVSKY: And a Prince for a husband: it's Cinderella outshone.

BOUNINE: Now pay strict attention: two Swedish banks will be here tonight.

CHEKHOV (*surprised*): What?

BOUNINE: Oh, yes, I haven't told you, have I? Krefting and Stromberg are coming. (*Turning back to Anna.*) You must be gracious but do not appear to curry favour. Complete self-confidence with them, as with the Russians.

ANNA: The conspiracy is prospering. I congratulate you.

BOUNINE: We have drawn up a list of our more important subscribers. There's a list of the guests, somewhere. . . . Where is it, Piotr?

[*Chekhov waves his hand, indicating Petrovsky.*]

PETROVSKY (*to Anna*): It is in there on your dressing-table.

CHEKHOV: The top ten are the important ones. They knew Anastasia personally.

PETROVSKY: You will find certain details about these personalities—you have, I know, a photographic memory, and so. . . .

BOUNINE (*cutting in*): If a question is awkward, pretend not to hear. We have given out a story that you were deafened by a blow on the head from a rifle-butt. (*He places the case containing the tiara in her hands.*) Here is your tiara. Petrovsky will come and look you over before you appear. Now go.

ANNA: You do not say "now go" to the Tsarina of Russia.

BOUNINE (*mockingly*): I beg your pardon, your Imperial Majesty.

ANNA: You speak of my memory—how good is your memory, I wonder.

ANASTASIA

BOUNINE: What do you mean?

ANNA: You said, "Pretend, even to yourself, that you are Anastasia". . . . Very well, Prince Bounine, I will pretend.

[*Bounine stares at her, not knowing what is coming. She continues in a different tone, higher in pitch, light, rapid.*]

It was a lovely autumn morning at Krasnoie. There was a gymkhana, and Marie and I were taking part in the jumping contest. You helped me mount and, holding my hand, said something too personal. I raised my riding whip. . . .

BOUNINE (*softly*): God!

ANNA: Was it I? If not, how did I learn it? Not from your books. (*She turns on Petrovsky.*) And you, the artist, you saw two candle-flames reflected in my eyes, standing in a dark church in front of the ikons. And, lying *beneath* the ikons, was a bunch of wild flowers that some poor person had placed there.

PETROVSKY (*whispering, awed*): It is true!

ANNA: Our Russian yellow lilies and some blue flowers— (*She turns to the curtained archway.*)

PETROVSKY: Yellow and blue flowers. How did you know about that? Did I speak of it?

ANNA (*gently, with an enigmatic smile, her hand on the curtains*): Perhaps you did. . . . You must try and remember. (*She exits.*)

PETROVSKY (*staring at the spot where she had stood*): Blue and yellow—no one could have told her.

BOUNINE (*also deeply impressed*): It is possible . . . and yet—how did she know?

CHERNOV: Well it's obvious the Empress must have mentioned some incidents the real Anastasia told her.

[*Antonia appears in doorway.*]

ACT THREE

ANTONIA (*announcing*): Her Imperial Majesty.

BOUNINE (*softly*): She is here!

[*All three men turn to the door. Chernov, taken aback and forgetting for a moment to bow, is reminded by seeing Bounine and Petrovsky bent over ceremoniously. The Empress appears, followed by the faithful Livenbaum. The Empress is, as always, in black, but she wears the Catherine-the-Great emeralds that Anna talked about. She has on long black gloves and carries an ebony cane. The Baroness is in white and displays a modest décolletage, to which she has pinned a sunburst "order" with a huge inappropriate safety-pin.*]

EMPRESS (*raising the quiz glass she carries on a chain*): Ah, the entire syndicate! (*She drops the glass and reaches out her hand to Livenbaum.*) I think you'd better give me my smelling-bottle, Livenbaum.

BOUNINE: Your Majesty is early. May I offer that as my excuse for not being at the door?

EMPRESS: Save your apologies; pomp without power only makes deposed royalty ridiculous. . . . Is my nephew here?

BOUNINE: Not yet, your Majesty. (*He speaks over his shoulder to Petrovsky.*) Go. People are arriving.

PETROVSKY (*murmuring*): Yes, Excellency. (*He exits.*)

BOUNINE: You too, Chernov.

CHERNOV: Yes, Excellency.

[*He does another bow directed at the Empress's back, and follows Petrovsky off.*]

EMPRESS: I see you school your associates in the old traditions. Your overbearing manner is quite feudal. (*She again raises her glass.*) What is this, a throne?

BOUNINE: Rented for this evening's ceremony.

ANASTASIA

EMPRESS: And is it your idea to present a Romanov on a hired throne, and one, unless I am mistaken, made of papier maché?

BOUNINE: May I remind your Majesty that the realities are now in a museum?

EMPRESS: Yes, our actual state robes are to be seen in London—at Madame Tussaud's.

BOUNINE: I trust her Highness will soon be able to provide herself with more suitable furnishings.

EMPRESS: You are speaking of my son's foreign deposits? I understand you have caused my granddaughter to sign certain documents concerning these monies, their handling and division.

[*Livenbaum, as if embarrassed, patters up to doorway and hovers there.*]

BOUNINE: I admit the share we ask may sound rather a large one, but my two associates and I have taken a lot of trouble—

EMPRESS (*with an indignant sniff*): A lot of trouble indeed!

BOUNINE (*with a half laugh*): And . . . well, your Majesty, a man must live.

EMPRESS: In your case I fail to see the necessity.

LIVENBAUM (*in a shocked tone*): Oh!

EMPRESS (*turning on her*): Did you speak?

LIVENBAUM (*in doorway*): Such a lot of old friends arriving. To think they're still alive—quite a miracle!

EMPRESS: Only half alive, most of them.

LIVENBAUM (*with a vague gesture*): Countess Zelin-skaya—may I go and embrace her?

[*Empress waves her hand impatiently, in a gesture of dismissal. Livenbaum bows a crippled curtsy and exits.*]

ACT THREE

BOUNINE: May I ask your Majesty, did your granddaughter confide anything else to your Majesty regarding me and my friends?

EMPRESS: Not deliberately. But that night my nephew brought her to me I sat by her bedside for many hours until the attack had abated. . . .

BOUNINE: I still don't understand what caused that sudden seizure.

EMPRESS: Don't you? Then you don't realise the relationship between a sick body and a tortured mind.

BOUNINE (*with assumed carelessness*): Her Highness was in a delirium?

EMPRESS (*fixing him with a stern gaze*): Yes, a delirium whose fires were very illuminating . . . it was then I learned that you found her by a canal.

BOUNINE (*taken aback*): A canal?

EMPRESS: A canal where a poor, broken creature met a cynical brute who bargained with her in the coinage of food and shelter.

BOUNINE (*dry-throated*): I see — your Majesty knows. . . .

EMPRESS: I know *everything*, the whole dirty swindle.

BOUNINE (*bewildered*): And yet you are here?

EMPRESS: Yes, odd, isn't it?

BOUNINE: Prince Paul persuaded. . . . (*Breaks off.*)
Or have you come to—to—

EMPRESS: Denounce you? That would be merely to condemn your scapegoat. I am sure if your droshky were in danger of being overtaken, you would not hesitate to throw your lady passenger to the wolves.

BOUNINE (*relieved*): I see . . . *noblesse oblige*. The Romanov gesture.

EMPRESS: You say it with a sneer? What else should one expect from the author of this impudent conspiracy? Kings and Queens are nothing in themselves, you are right there: a museum for our symbols

ANASTASIA

of power, a Madame Tussaud's for our clothes. . . . And it is quite easy to get rid of us, a bomb or a plebiscite does it. But you've made one mistake, Bounine; there is a tradition that is in our blood. We have pride, not in our position but in our behaviour.

BOUNINE: Your Majesty seems to threaten something?

EMPRESS: The threat is not from me and it is not I who will defeat you. But I have a firm conviction the tradition will beat you, Arcade Arcadieitch Bounine.

[*Enter Prince Paul. He is in dress uniform and wears several orders.*]

PAUL (*he bows to her*): How are you, dear grand-aunt?

EMPRESS (*with satisfaction*): Feeling better, thank you.

PAUL: Good evening, Bounine.

BOUNINE (*bowing*): Good evening, your Highness.

PAUL: What a gathering you've got in there! (*He makes a gesture to doorway.*) Have you seen them?

[*The Empress, whom he addresses, shakes her head, sniffing her scent-bottle.*]

PAUL: Where did they dig up all those diamond dog-collars, those jewelled kokosnoiks?

BOUNINE: Good evening, Prince. I would like a word with your Highness.

PAUL (*turning to him*): Certainly.

[*The Empress turns away distastefully.*]

BOUNINE: It's about the wedding. If you could decide when it is to take place, we might make an announcement here, tonight.

PAUL: Tonight?

ACT THREE

BOUNINE (*in slightly lowered tone*): The Swedish bankers are coming—two of them.

PAUL (*also in confidential tone*): And you think the effect—? Yes, I see. (*Thoughtfully.*) When is Easter this year? It must be in about seven or eight weeks.

BOUNINE: Our Russian Easter—that is an excellent idea.

EMPRESS (*rounding on them*): And is the bride to have nothing to say about it?

PAUL: Her Majesty is right. Anastasia must be consulted.

EMPRESS: I should hope so.

BOUNINE: Of course if her Highness vetoes Prince Paul's suggestion— But I hardly think she will.

PAUL (*to Empress*): Let us settle it at once.

BOUNINE: I will tell her Highness you are here.

[*He moves towards the curtained doorway. Before he can reach it the curtains part and Anna appears.*]

ANNA: You needn't trouble, Prince Bounine . . . you have forgotten how well one can hear behind these curtains.

PAUL: Good evening, Anastasia.

ANNA: Good evening, Paul. (*She turns towards the Empress.*) And dearest Grandmamma. . . . My heart curtsies to you.

BOUNINE: Prince Paul would like to make an announcement tonight—your marriage date.

ANNA (*coming down the steps*): I will discuss the matter with the Prince—in private.

BOUNINE: Certainly, your Highness.

EMPRESS: Shall I. . . ?

ANNA: Please stay, Grandmamma. A date for our marriage? You would like to name it tonight?

PAUL: If it is agreeable to you.

ANASTASIA

ANNA: You feel it will impress the bankers?

PAUL: That is one thing—but the other—

ANNA (*overlapping*): Marrying my sweetheart cousin? A most convincing touch don't you agree, Grand-mamma?

EMPRESS: A very strong card for Bounine and Company.

ANNA: Yes, no one would suppose that Paul would marry a woman who claimed to be his long lost sweetheart unless he were quite, quite sure.

PAUL: You know you have completely satisfied me—as you have the Empress.

ANNA: Good. . . . There is one thing you have never mentioned, and it's strange that you haven't: our boy and girl betrothal at Krasnoie, the ceremony on the Chinese Island.

PAUL: I was waiting to see if you would remember. I thought you would be bound to speak of it—and you have.

ANNA: Ah, that was to be your final proof, was it?

[*She drops the Empress's hand that she has been holding with linked arms.*]

PAUL: It was a secret between us and your three sisters. (*To Empress.*) No one living could have told her of it, because no one knew.

ANNA: No? (*She laughs.*) You, yourself, told me the day you brought the Empress to see me. You spoke of it to her. I was standing behind those curtains, listening. (*She points.*)

PAUL: My God, what are you saying? Do you want to shake our faith, make us believe this is all trickery?

ANNA: But it is tricks that you have asked for, tricks of remembrance. You could find nothing of personality, nothing of character by which to identify me.

ACT THREE

Animals know their kind by scent, but, it seems, I am not endowed with the rare odour of the Romanova.

EMPRESS (*watching her*): You have their spirit—no doubt of that.

PAUL (*recovering*): You're wrong. I recognised you almost at once—and by instinct, if you want to call it that. These "tricks" are merely the proofs I like to have ready at hand for those who still have doubts.

ANNA: Such as the bankers?

PAUL (*with a touch of impatience*): All right—the bankers.

ANNA: Supposing there were no bankers, no money? Would you still be as sure that I am the girl to whom you pledged your love?

PAUL: Of course.

ANNA: Now it is I who ask for proofs. I suggest that we marry with no reference to bankers or bank-accounts, that we make no claim for this money, that we work for our living, both of us.

PAUL: But why? Why should we?

[*Chernov appears in doorway. He bows.*]

CHERNOV: Your Highness: the gentlemen from Sweden would like to be presented. May I bring them in.

PAUL (*with a glance at Anna*): No; I will come and meet them if you have a room where we can talk privately.

CHERNOV: Certainly, Highness. Their chief concern is what the Tsar's money would be used for. I assured them nothing political.

PAUL (*to Empress and Anna*): If you'll excuse me.

[*He exits, passing Chernov, who bows and follows him.*]

ANASTASIA

ANNA (*ironically*): Even royalty bows its head to the bankers. (*She takes a step toward door, as if watching Paul off.*) And look across the hall to the ballroom—those pathetic exiles in their faded finery. It's like a medieval *danse macabre*.

EMPRESS (*smiling*): I am waiting quite breathlessly for the prima ballerina to perform.

ANNA (*she also smiles*): So I am once again the actress?

EMPRESS: As you said what else have we ever been—are we ever anything else?

ANNA: I'm afraid my performance tonight may disappoint you.

EMPRESS (*eyeing her with warm affection*): Somehow I don't think so. . . . I feel a prophetic tingle as one does when some great event is impending.

[*Oblenski enters.*]

OBLENSKI: Tania, I thought I might find you here. I got a couple of newspaper friends out there, they passed me in.

EMPRESS: Who is this man?

OBLENSKI: Felix Oblenski. (*Turns to Anna.*) Did you see your photo in the evening paper? Your police photo. This will finish your little game so you'd better be ready to pack and come home with me.

ANNA: If I deny I was your Tania what would you do? Try to drag me away like a stray animal?

OBLENSKI: No need for that, all I've got to do is to tell them in there.

EMPRESS: This lady is Her Imperial Highness, the Grand Duchess, A.N. I was in the palace of Peterhoff the night she was born.

[*Oblenski turns, facing her enquiringly.*]

EMPRESS: I am her grandmother. Do you think they'll take your word against mine?

ACT THREE

ANNA: You are in the presence of Her Majesty, the Dowager Empress of Russia.

EMPRESS: I thought he might be aware of that fact since he keeps his cap on. A Republican gesture no doubt.

OBLENSKI: So you're the one they call the old ikon? Why are you helping those crooks? But there, I suppose you're all in it together, backing her up and then sharing the money all round? All right, suppose you *are* the Grand Duchess. What are you going to be queen of? A country you daren't put your foot in, and a people who don't want you? Won't you get sick of living this pack of lies, with all these old ghosts bowing and scraping pretending to be something that's over and done with? What kind of life is that for a girl like you, Tania?

[*Enter Paul.*]

PAUL: I've talked to the bankers—who is this man?

ANNA: A Russian.

EMPRESS: A more up to date version than the rest of us.

PAUL: How did he get in here? Where are the servants?

ANNA: Wait, don't call anyone, he's under my protection.

EMPRESS: Come my man, do you really believe this is your Tania?

OBLENSKI: Of course she is, but what is the truth against what people want to believe. Seems you win, Tania, I can pack up and go. What do you mean to these people? You're only a way of getting money and you needn't feel too sure about that. You should have come home with me. You may have beaten me but you haven't beaten those who sent me. Good-bye, Tania. (*He exits.*)

ANASTASIA

PAUL: What does this mean, Anastasia?

EMPRESS: It means that the White Russians have at last won a Victory.

PAUL: Who is this Oblenski?

EMPRESS: He's a Ukrainian for one thing, you can tell by those high cheek bones.

ANNA: The People of the Steppes.

EMPRESS: The Steppes that we shall never cross again.

ANNA (*dreamily*): A gold green sea with star-thistles, broom and the white flowers of the wild flax. . . . And the good Russian air, bitter to the taste with the smell of pines that the winds bring from the frozen forests of the north.

[*She turns and goes.*]

PAUL (*bursting out*): Why did she want to protect him? All those things he said to her. Why didn't she deny them.

EMPRESS: So she was right—you are not sure?

PAUL: Are you?

EMPRESS: No, I shan't help you. . . . This is a thing of too much moment to her—as well as to you.

PAUL: Don't say that. It will make no difference in my attitude, I've accepted her, I shan't go back on that. But for the sake of my future peace of mind. . . . (*He breaks off.*)

EMPRESS: What is it you want to know?

PAUL: In those hours you sat by her bedside, did she say nothing that was a certain proof?

EMPRESS: At such times it is hard to say which is fancy and which reality. . . . Oh, there was a mingling of realities: people who befriended her, an old doctor in Bucharest who fought a long, slow battle for her life—some woman, a Russian refugee,

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who sheltered her, sharing what little she had. I'm afraid I can offer you nothing really tangible.

PAUL: I was so sure—her first convert. But now after all that fellow said . . . if she only had some sign, some token. . . . Those jewels that were sewn in Anastasia's dress, a single one would suffice.

EMPRESS: Yes, it seems that was an oversight on the part of the brilliant Bounine.

PAUL: Will we ever be sure?

EMPRESS: Well, at least if *she* isn't real the Tsar's money is. Isn't that enough?

PAUL: I don't know. It may be I have more pride than you think.

[*Chernov enters behind Bounine.*]

BOUNINE: The bankers are convinced that her Highness is indeed the Grand Duchess Anastasia Nicolaevna. She only has to meet them.

CHERNOV (*excitedly to Paul*): We have won, we have won. . . . It is a moment of triumph.

BOUNINE: You must all three enter together with the Imperial Anthem playing.

EMPRESS (*drily*): You are giving orders, Prince Bounine?

BOUNINE (*bowing*): Pardon, your Majesty. . . . I am rather carried away.

CHERNOV (*eagerly*): But your Majesty will surely agree? It is, as his Excellency says, the supreme moment—

BOUNINE: They will fall on their knees.

CHERNOV: And the bankers. . . .

[*The sentence gets no farther. He breaks off, repeating "The bankers" automatically as Anna enters. She is dressed as she was on her entrance (in this act). That is to say she*

ANASTASIA

wears the same travelling coat, but some of the accessories are different. Her hat is simple and tight-fitting, her shoes those in which a woman might embark on a journey. She wears black gloves that are serviceable and not new. She carries a handbag and also a small travelling bag of continental appearance that is a trifle battered. About her throat there is a woollen scarf. This costume is described in detail because it is important. It must proclaim at a glance that she is leaving. It must not be too shabby: it must not be too smart. One must visualise her taking a train to Bucharest, then still outside the Iron Curtain.]

BOUNINE (*he breaks off*): God!

ANNA: No—I am not wearing that charming dress you provided for this occasion? It is a pity isn't it?

PAUL: What does this mean, Anastasia?

ANNA: It means for you that I am setting you free. . . . And it means for you, my employers, that I am setting *myself* free.

BOUNINE: You surely are not throwing it all over? Your claim to recognition? To your father's fortune?

ANNA: I am sorry, Prince Bounine, but that is it exactly.

CHERNOV (*with laboured breathing*): Oh no, no, please . . . don't you realise, they are all ready to accept you without question.

ANNA: Then I have at least saved you—gentlemen—from a charge of fraud. That should amply fulfil my obligation.

CHERNOV (*hoarsely*): But the bankers. . . . Ten million pounds. . . . Ten million—

ANNA: An impressive sum but one for which I do not care to barter my liberty.

BOUNINE: You are ill again, you must be.

ANNA: I am quite well, Prince Bounine. Quite well

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and quite able to go on playing your game—if I wanted to.

[As if by a master stroke of irony the band in the ballroom starts to play the march from Glinka's "A Life For The Tsar", the opera which celebrates the founding of the Romanov dynasty. Petrovsky enters as she speaks.]

PETROVSKY: Excellency, please, they are getting impatient. General Drivinitz— (Breaks off as he sees Anna.)

ANNA: Ah, here is your scene-designer. Pack up your throne, Petrovsky, your carefully chosen Russian lilies.

PETROVSKY (*bewilderedly*): What is it? What is happening?

ANNA: Your puppet-master is in difficulties: one of the marionettes seems to be in the wrong costume.

BOUNINE (*bitterly*): You've certainly picked your moment, haven't you? When we've got them all here, the opposers beaten, the doubters silenced—

ANNA: All the doubters? Does that include yourself, Prince? If I have convinced you it is my final triumph.

EMPRESS: I warned you, Bounine, that tradition would beat you.

BOUNINE: Tradition? The Romanov tradition? Peter the son-murderer, and Paul the sadist. Mad Nicholas, Mad Theodor, and that other Peter, a grown man sitting playing with dolls.

ANNA: And now, finally, a mad Romanov who has no desire for a crown of paste and a make-believe throne. . . . Madder still, she doesn't want that splendid fortune and all that goes with it, the pathetic band of loyalists who cling to deposed royalty, the childish intrigues and dreams of restoration.

ANASTASIA

BOUNINE (*his anger breaking out*): Very well, Anna Broun, I will myself tell them you are a swindler and a cheat . . . of how you came to us with your story of escape, with your wounded head and your pierced hands. . . You had better consider. This *ex-band of Loyalists* will not be easy with anyone who has first fooled and then flouted them.

EMPRESS (*quietly*): You are forgetting me, aren't you?

[*Anna turns to her with a smile.*]

BOUNINE: Yes, your Majesty, I had forgotten you. And I should have remembered the strength of your enmity. I saw it triumph the night Rasputin died. Now you have honoured *me* with your hate and, whether you really believe in this lady or not, you will stand with her so that I may be humbled. . . . Very well, the house of cards falls—cards of paste-board kings and queens. . . . Only fools use them to build their castles. (*Exit.*)

CHERNOV (*following*): You must have had another breakdown, that is what we must say . . . her great sufferings—

[*The sentence trails off as he exits. Petrovsky hovers uncertainly in the doorway. He murmurs as he shakes his head. Without a bow or a good-bye he moves away—disappears.*]

ANNA (*turning to Paul*): It is true what he told you. I was schooled by these men to play the role of Anastasia Nicolaevna. In the room behind me are albums of photographs, scrapbook after scrapbook filled with data they told me I must learn. . . . So comfort yourself, my dear Paul, Perhaps, after all, you have been saved from marrying an impostor.

PAUL (*with a gesture of waving her words aside*): I don't

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understand what it is you want. You say you set me free—but why? You explain nothing.

ANNA: That music answers you, all the old Russian airs, the past, always the past—meaningless titles, childish attempts at Majesty. Echoes from a lost, dead life that has vanished forever.

EMPRESS (*quietly*): My life.

[*With an impulsive gesture Anna holds out her hand. The Empress gives her hand to her and she holds it as she speaks.*]

ANNA (*to Paul*): You wanted me as I was. . . . Very well then, dear Paul, keep me as I was, a yellowing photograph of a girl in a white dress waving goodbye from the bridge of the Chinese Island.

[*There is another clamour of voices off.*]

PAUL: I still don't understand. Those people in there are your loyal supporters, ready to die for you, if need be.

ANNA: Why should they die for me? I am not their Joan of Arc, and, if I were, they're not looking for someone to lead them forward—only to lead them back. A queen should reign in the hearts of her people—but I can have no hope of that.

[*Paul turns to the Empress.*]

PAUL: When your Majesty is ready to leave I will take you home.

[*He exits.*]

EMPRESS (*with a gesture toward the door*): You can't blame them for wanting the old life again. It was strangely beautiful.

ANNA: Was it? (*She smiles indulgently at the old lady.*)

ANASTASIA

EMPRESS: In the summer the royal parks, vast as forests, or on the seas among the Finnish islands, cruising in the *Standart*. And in the winter we lived in immense hot-houses filled with strange flowers and from whose windows the snow-draped landscapes looked quite incredible, the landscapes of fairyland.

ANNA: Yes, the figures move gaily, charmingly; they laugh; they sing and dance; they make jokes. . . . But behind them hangs a painted backdrop of the final scene in their comedy. . . . A Cellar in Ekaterinburg.

EMPRESS: I have tried to live as if that horror had never been. I had places set at the table for my dear phantoms and talked to them as if they were there.

ANNA: I might well be one of them, loving to be there beside you turning my back on reality.

EMPRESS: And is reality to be so greatly desired? To me it has meant sadness, suffering and tragedy.

ANNA: I know and no one can blame you for living with your phantoms. But so much of my life, even from the beginning, has been spent in a shadow world. I must try to find the things every woman longs for . . . a life of my own.

EMPRESS (*sadly*): So it seems I have found you only to lose you again.

ANNA: Oh, no, we will not be parted for long.

EMPRESS: Can't you stay now?

ANNA: I am taking a night train, I am going to help some people who helped me. (*Shaking her head.*) I am grateful that you have made their rescue possible.

EMPRESS: What I gave you is pitifully little.

ANNA: It is enough. And you have given me so much beside: my sanity, my desire to live.

EMPRESS (*anxiously*): You will be careful? I know where you are going and it is close to danger.

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ANNA: Yes, I will be very careful.

EMPRESS: My darling—my darling, I can't bear to let you go. (*She sits. She is close to breaking down.*)

ANNA: Let us not kiss or embrace, it makes partings harder—and I remember what you told me when my finger was pinched: "Princesses must never be seen to cry."

EMPRESS: Thank you for reminding me.

[*Anna crosses a couple of steps toward the door, then turns back impulsively.*]

ANNA: Dear, dear, Queen Grandmamma.

EMPRESS: That is what you used to call me. Now it is only Grandmamma.

ANNA: If there had never been a queen before, my darling, they would have had to call you one.

[*From off comes the strains of the Russian Imperial Anthem. Anna turns her head toward the door. The Empress slips her bracelet into the bag.*]

How absurd! It's the Imperial Anthem. Does it mean anything any longer?

[*She goes to the Empress and gives her her arm, helping her to rise. They stand side by side for a moment, listening.*]

EMPRESS: It still sets my blood tingling, as it did when the massed bands of the Guards Regiments played it in the square outside the Winter Palace.

[*The Empress must not smile on this line. It breaks the tragic mood.*]

ANNA (*going to the door left*): Now is the moment—
They are all in there standing with bowed heads . . .
"God preserve our noble Empress!"

ANASTASIA

[She gives a little laugh at the incongruity of the situation. The music swells up, voices singing in Russian. Anna moves round below the Empress and does a deep curtsey. Then she exits right. The old Empress stands looking after her. She raises her arm in a gesture of farewell.]

Curtain

THE RETURN

by

BRIDGET BOLAND

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Applications for the performance of this play by amateurs must be made to Samuel French Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2. Applications for the performance of this play by professionals must be made to Christopher Mann Management Ltd., 140 Park Lane, London, W.1. No performance may take place unless a licence has been obtained.

The Return was presented by the London Mask Theatre at the Duchess Theatre, London, on November 9th, 1953, with the following cast:

SISTER AGATHA	<i>Flora Robson</i>
CHAPLAIN	<i>Ernest Jay</i>
THE PRIORESS	<i>Enid Lindsey</i>
ANGELA SWITHIN	<i>Ann Walford</i>
PETER SWITHIN	<i>Peter Martyn</i>
CYRIL PLUMMER	<i>Roy Malcolm</i>

Directed by Michael MacOwan

Settings by Fanny Taylor

CHARACTERS

SISTER AGATHA
THE CHAPLAIN
THE PRIORESS
ANGELA SWITHIN
PETER SWITHIN
CYRIL PLUMMER

SCENES

ACT ONE

- SCENE 1. *The Convent Parlour of an Order of enclosed nuns*
SCENE 2. *The same*

ACT TWO

- SCENE 1. *The Living Room of the Swithins' Flat in London*
SCENE 2. *The Living Room of the Swithins' Flat. Some months later*
SCENE 3. *The Living Room of the Swithins' Flat. Some weeks later*

ACT THREE

The Convent Parlour

ACT ONE

Scene I

The Convent Parlour of an Order of strictly enclosed nuns, in an English Midland town. There is no suggestion of Gothic Revival about the architecture—this was probably the study or library of a large house which the Order took over about 1830 and have never had enough money to improve too much.

In the back wall stage left a French window opens on to a tiny garden court, across the end of which can be seen the side wall of the Chapel (once the stables). In the wall left is a door opening into the "Lodge"—the entrance to the Convent and to the public end of the Chapel. (The side wall of this "Lodge" or entrance hall can be seen as the left wall of the little court.)

Down-stage left is an immense cold fireplace, furnished with the smallest portable electric fire. In the wall right is the door to the Enclosure (the nuns' quarters). This door is kept locked on the inside, and the sound of a key turning can be heard whenever an entrance is made from this side.

In the back wall right is the grille. This is in the embrasure formed by what was once a doorway into a little room the side wall of which forms the right side of the little court. The lower part of the doorway has been sealed up, but in the upper part is a large fine-meshed wire grille, behind which is a wooden shutter, normally kept closed.

The walls are bare except for a large Crucifix over the grille, a photograph of the Pope, and a large Arundel print of a sacred subject. There is a big highly polished table, with a couple of huge books, of the illustrated-suitable-for-waiting-rooms variety, carefully disposed on it. There are

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

a couple of chairs at the table, and one with arms by the grille; others are disposed severally against the walls. Everything is exceedingly clean, and looks as if it smelt of beeswax.

Across one corner of the table is laid a small cloth at which the Chaplain sits eating his breakfast and reading his morning paper. He is a burly, middle-aged man, with something of the air of a country doctor. There is a slight rattle behind the grille. The Chaplain shrinks, looks out of one eye at the grille, and hastily raises his paper between it and his face. The shutter behind the grille is removed for a moment, but the inner room is in pitch darkness and nothing can be seen. The shutter is replaced. The Chaplain drops his paper, hastily brushes the crumbs from his waistcoat, wipes his mouth carefully, and goes through the clerical equivalent of straightening his tie. . . .

There is the sound of a key turning, and the door right opens to admit the Prioress. She is an ageless woman with an alarming capacity for absolute stillness, and a manner of effortless dominion. She bows to the Chaplain, who jumps up effusively.

CHAPLAIN: Ah! Mother Prioress! Good morning, Reverend Mother.

PRIORESS: I'm not disturbing you, Father? You have finished your breakfast?

CHAPLAIN: Thank you, yes, yes. I'm ashamed to say, I have. Yes. Bacon and eggs, and salt and pepper, and marmalade—all forbidden fruits, aren't they? You people feed your Chaplain like a fighting cock simply to show your contempt for the secular clergy.

PRIORESS: Nonsense, Father: a parish priest has a heavy day's work to do.

CHAPLAIN: But how you despise us for doing it on a

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full stomach! Oh, I know. And not just the humble parish priest, either. You despise me with an egg, but you despise the Bishop with a chicken.

PRIORESS: Do sit down, Father, won't you?

CHAPLAIN: Yes. . . . Oh, thank you, Reverend Mother.

[They both sit down, the Prioress without leaning back, and yet with an air of complete relaxation, the Chaplain lounging, yet continuing to look uncomfortable.]

CHAPLAIN: Well, and how's everything at home, eh, Reverend Mother? All the Sisters fat and fit, I hope?

PRIORESS: Thank you, the Community are very well.

CHAPLAIN: I sometimes feel I ought to stick my head through that grille of yours every morning, and bawl out "Any complaints?" . . . Well—er—is there anything—?

PRIORESS: Just one or two things, Father. Since we have to have Mass so late in the mornings—

CHAPLAIN: Oh, now, hold on a minute, Reverend Mother. Six-thirty a.m. is not late.

PRIORESS: All these things are comparative, of course—

CHAPLAIN: This is a big industrial parish that has grown up round your tight little island here, and there are only two priests to look after it. Mass here at the Convent a moment earlier than six-thirty is out of the question. As it is it's too early to be any good to anyone except a few Irish labourers and holy old charwomen.

PRIORESS: There is always the Community, of course.

CHAPLAIN: . . . I beg your pardon. Yes. There is the Community. Thirty-six souls. You must forgive me, Reverend Mother. One's work gets a little on top of one, sometimes, and—your souls here are so almost aggressively saved.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

PRIRESS: Only from one moment to the next, Father, even if that is so.

CHAPLAIN: Yes, yes—there's nothing the matter with your theology, either. (*Jumps up, and paces about.*) Look, I know the Community is obliged by its rule, made in twelve-eighty-six, to rise at four. But this pagan age can't afford you a resident Chaplain, and most of the labourers in this town start work at eight and the clerical staffs at nine. If they're good enough to want to go to Mass on their way to work, they're still human enough to stay in bed as late as they can. And nowadays it isn't the Lady Prioress that I serve—it's Patrick Donovan the builders' labourer, and Mary Johnson the typist and old Mrs. Corelli the char.

PRIRESS: And of course there are the boys' clubs and so on that have usually kept *you* up late the night before, Father. . . .

[*There is a moment's pause, then the Chaplain spins round, stung, and then suddenly bursts out laughing.*]

CHAPLAIN: Reverend Mother, you're the limit. Oh, well, I don't suppose you could hold down the job you do if you weren't more than a bit of a psychologist. All right, I give in, and you can impute the lowest motives you like to me.

PRIRESS: You're distressing yourself quite unduly, Father. I was only going to ask if the Community might receive Communion before Mass. It need make no difference to the Communion during Mass for the congregation at the public end of the Chapel; and Mass could still start at six-thirty of course.

CHAPLAIN: You know, you worked me up into a rage on purpose, so that getting here quarter of an hour earlier in the morning would seem like nothing at all, when we got down to it, didn't you? All right,

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don't answer me. I should hate to be an occasion of sin to you, Reverend Mother. Six fifteen it is. Next, please.

PRIORESS: It's extraordinarily good of you, Father. Then there was the question of Confessions. During the winter months, I see no reason why the Community should not use the grille from the ante-room into the parlour, here, instead of the one from the Choir in the Chapel; because of course the Chapel is quite unheated, and in here you could have the electric fire turned on.

CHAPLAIN: You don't feel it would contravene your own Rule that forbids heating of any kind?

PRIORESS: Oh, no. I don't imagine any very appreciable difference would be felt in the ante-room.

CHAPLAIN (*curtly*): Thank you, Reverend Mother, I prefer to hear Confessions in the Chapel.

[*The Prioress bows slightly.*]

Anything else?

PRIORESS: Then there was just the little matter of Sister Agatha.

CHAPLAIN: Quarter of an hour here or there in a morning's devotions, that's an important item on the agenda. Way down at the bottom among any other business is just the little matter of Sister Agatha.

PRIORESS: Poor Sister Agatha! But then there is, after all, only one of her, Father; the other matter affects the whole Community. One has to try and preserve one's sense of proportion.

CHAPLAIN: Heaven preserve me from ever developing one. How long is it that Sister Agatha has been a nun?

PRIORESS: Thirty-six years, Father.

CHAPLAIN: Thirty - six — forty - nine — nineteen thirteen. That year of years.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

PRIORESS: Nineteen thirteen? Why, Father—what was there about nineteen thirteen?

CHAPLAIN: It was the year before nineteen fourteen, Reverend Mother, remember? The year before the end of the old world. It was the last year of security in the old order, it was the last year that the aeroplane was a stunt and the motor car was a freak, the last year of—sitting on the lawn under the cedar drinking tea, the last year in which no one questioned the existence of a ruling class or that a gentleman was more likely than not to be a man of honour.

PRIORESS: Was it?

CHAPLAIN: Well, don't you agree?

PRIORESS: I had been a nun sometime already, Father. I entered in nineteen hundred and four.

CHAPLAIN: You——?

[For the first time the Prioress smiles.]

PRIORESS: I imagine I am quite an old woman.

CHAPLAIN: God bless my soul! I beg your pardon. But—well! D'you know, Reverend Mother, now I know you're that much older than I am I shan't mind your getting your own way so often? Well!—We were going to talk about Sister Agatha.

PRIORESS: She is fifty-eight.

CHAPLAIN: You must have known her as a novice.

PRIORESS: Oh, yes. I remember her coming. I was interested, because I had known her as a child, and— young nuns still have a lot of curiosity and——

CHAPLAIN: And common humanity; don't apologise. What was she like?

PRIORESS: As a child? I can see her now! A boisterous little thing, always getting her elder sister into trouble—Cecilia was at school with me, then, though of course a great deal younger. She was the one you'd have thought should be the nun. It was a

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huge house, you know, in Norfolk, but you could hear Agatha's voice from one end of it to the other. I was very shocked at her running so wild. But they were a strange family. My father frightened me when I first went to stay at Brattesleigh. "The Fosdykes?" he said. "Mad as hatters. No one to marry in Norfolk, of course, except each other." It gave me most alarming ideas.

CHAPLAIN: And when she came as a novice? As a postulant, before she got her habit?

PRIRESS: Oh, that—that's so long ago. I don't remember so well. Yes, I do—awkward—ungainly. I remember thinking she would never learn how to move without striding, and swinging her arms like a windmill. For years, even without raising your eyes—which, of course, we don't do unless we have to—you could tell Sister Agatha in a file of nine by the way she moved.

CHAPLAIN: I'm finding out as much about you, Reverend Mother, as I am about Sister Agatha—Why had she entered?

PRIRESS: She had a vocation.

CHAPLAIN: No unhappy love affair, for instance? Family crisis?

PRIRESS: I was not even Mistress of Novices, then, Father.

CHAPLAIN: Well, but you knew the family—

PRIRESS: I had known them. One is allowed letters from home once a year . . . while people still trouble to write.

CHAPLAIN: Yes. Yes. . . . And after thirty-six years she wants to leave.

PRIRESS: She has discussed it all, of course, with our spiritual director. But Father Augustine is a Carmelite, of an enclosed order like our own; it was he who said it was time to consult you.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

CHAPLAIN: I've made the enquiries you wanted, about what's left of her family, and I've talked to the bank and your solicitor, and so on. But she mustn't do it, Reverend Mother.

PRIORESS: Of course, when all the enquiries are complete, and she knows what she's facing, if she still wants to we must submit the case to the Bishop and eventually to Rome.

CHAPLAIN: She mustn't do it.

PRIORESS: She is older, of course, than a dispensation from vows is usually allowed, but I imagine——

CHAPLAIN: It isn't that.

PRIORESS: On the spiritual side——

CHAPLAIN: I'll leave that to you and Father Augustine. It isn't that.

PRIORESS: What is it, Father?

CHAPLAIN: It's—it's too long since nineteen thirteen!

PRIORESS: Is it? . . . Father, you think we despise the secular clergy who continue in the world. We don't. You've chosen the harder road. You've chosen the harder road. Haven't you?

CHAPLAIN: No.

PRIORESS: You say that because you tried your vocation as a monk and failed.

CHAPLAIN: I never told you that. Father Augustine—no, he wouldn't know. What a whispering gallery for gossip a convent is!

PRIORESS: You tell me, yourself, Father, every time you laugh and joke about the privations of our life—to cover up the hurt. You think it was because you hadn't the strength or the courage that you left the monastery.

CHAPLAIN: I——

PRIORESS: It wasn't. You hadn't the vocation, or you'd have stayed. So your going there wasn't a positive thing. It was negative. It was escape. For

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you the cloister would have been escape from the atmosphere of vice that revolts you, from the sight of poverty that you can't relieve, from the whole world gone wrong that you can't do anything about. You envy us our life. We don't envy yours.

[*There is a moment's pause.*]

I will send for Sister Agatha, now; I want you to talk to her. If you'll be good enough to ring the bell——

[*The Chaplain, glad to have something to do, goes to an electric bell push and presses it.*]

I should like you to explain her family situation to her, whatever it is, and anything else you think she should know.

CHAPLAIN: I—look here, Reverend Mother, I rang the bell automatically because you told me to. I'm sorry, I honestly don't think I could cope; it's still only half-past seven in the morning.

PRIORESS: I'm so sorry, Father. Of course. I just thought it would save another journey for you across the town.

CHAPLAIN: All right. Sooner or later, of course—I don't know why the idea should be so alarming, anyhow.

PRIORESS: No, not more than usual, really.

CHAPLAIN: "Open just a little wider, please—this isn't going to hurt"? How do *you* know that I loathe every human problem I come up against, in a parish teeming with more human problems every day than all the modern novels yet written?

PRIORESS: Do you, Father?

CHAPLAIN: But you don't suffer from Sister Agatha,

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

and you know the woman. You'd take the lot in your stride, wouldn't you?

[*The shutter behind the grille is opened.*]

PRIORESS: Oh, Sister, would you be good enough to tell Sister Agatha the Chaplain would like to see her now? Thank you.

[*The shutter closes.*]

CHAPLAIN: You've talked to her, and Father Augustine too, about the significance of her vows—all that?

PRIORESS: For some months.

CHAPLAIN: Good. You know her: do you think she could be happy, now, in the world?

PRIORESS: Happy? I'm not sure that that would matter so very much. But she might well be. Women of her age seemed pretty happy, when I was a girl.

CHAPLAIN: Yes. Yes. . . . I see what has been left out of the discussions so far. . . . Funny thing, I must have heard her Confession every week for several years, I must know her innermost soul, and yet I've no notion which of you she is. I wouldn't know *her* from Adam.

PRIORESS: Since the question of her leaving has arisen she has been confessing only to Father Augustine when he comes once a fortnight for spiritual counsel.

CHAPLAIN: Quite right, avoid conflicting advice for the poor woman. Tell me; she's perfectly normal?

PRIORESS: Oh, I should say so.

CHAPLAIN: Not neurotic, hysterical?

PRIORESS: No.

CHAPLAIN: Why not?

PRIORESS: I beg your pardon?

CHAPLAIN: In the name of fortune, why not? Here's

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a woman who shut herself up from the world at the age of twenty, who's lived on cabbage-water soup and vegetables cooked without salt and slept on a bed of planks and got up at four in the morning and not laid eyes on a human being outside the Community for thirty-six years, and when she finally tells you she can't stand it another moment you tell me she doesn't seem at all unusual. Why not? What's the matter with her? What's the matter with her?

PRIORESS: She hasn't got a vocation.

CHAPLAIN: And how long has she been finding that out?

PRIORESS: Eight or ten months, I think.

CHAPLAIN: She wasn't suffering the tortures of the damned for a moment before that?

PRIORESS: Why should she be? I fancy she wrestled with her conscience for perhaps two years before she would admit it to herself. Not longer. The confessional is a useful safety-valve for such feelings as soon as they become conscious.

CHAPLAIN: All right, then—give it thirty-three years. Why not before that?

PRIORESS: Because before that she had a vocation for the contemplative life. People change, Father—or at any rate women do. One gets out of the habit of thinking in terms of years, but some of course will have developed intellectually and emotionally as far as they ever will, by the time they are twenty. Very few, I should say, reach the end of their possibilities of spiritual development before they are fifty. Some seem to lead all their lives at once, all warring for the upper hand together, till one wins and they settle into it. The lucky ones—like Sister Agatha—lead their different lives one after the other, each phase succeeding the one before like different people coming into a room.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

CHAPLAIN: Reverend Mother, how old were you when you came through that door for the last time?

PRIORESS: Nineteen, I think.

CHAPLAIN: And all you've learned, you've learned inside these walls.

PRIORESS: Yes, Father, you're right—there's a whole world I can't help Sister Agatha about. That's why she is to talk to you.

CHAPLAIN: For once you're wrong. That isn't what I meant.

[The shutter behind the grille is opened.]

PRIORESS: Ah, Sister Agatha—

AGATHA *(off)*: Yes, Reverend Mother.

PRIORESS: Father Blake has been making enquiries for us, Sister, about your family and what your financial situation would be, and so on, if you decided to appeal for a dispensation from your vows. Would you like to discuss it with him?

AGATHA *(off)*: Thank you, Reverend Mother.

CHAPLAIN: Er—good morning, Sister—I hope you won't feel it impertinent of me to have been poking among your private affairs—eh?

AGATHA: No, Father.

CHAPLAIN: I fancy I know more about them than you do now—eh? Look here, Reverend Mother, I can't go on like this. She must come in here.

PRIORESS: Oh, no, Father. It's against the Rule.

CHAPLAIN: Bother the Rule. Her life and perhaps her soul are at stake. This is impossible.

PRIORESS: But you give advice in the confessional under just these conditions.

CHAPLAIN: I'm sorry. It's not spiritual advice you're asking me to give. I'm playing her lawyer and her bank manager and her go-between with her family,

THE RETURN

and I am not going to do it through that meat-safe.
PRIORESS: Sister, open the door into the passage, will you? . . . And come back to the grille.

[There is a pause. A shaft of light, not very strong, appears on the grille, and Sister Agatha moves back into it slowly. She is scarcely visible.]

CHAPLAIN: She might as well be in Mexico. Look, they see the doctor in here, don't they, and the dentist if they need one?

PRIORESS: That's provided for in the Rule. It's inside the Walls, though it's outside the Enclosure.

CHAPLAIN: There you are, then. Sister Agatha, you feel you want to go out into the world again after all these years. Do you not feel you ought to be able to try your wings, at least as far as this room?

AGATHA *(after a moment)*: As Reverend Mother thinks fit. . . .

PRIORESS: It has simply not been legislated for. . . . Come round, Sister. Yes. Come in here.

[After a moment's pause Sister Agatha closes the shutter.]

CHAPLAIN: I will say you can make the large decisions, too. I wish I hadn't stayed here for breakfast this morning.

PRIORESS: I suppose the Refectory Sister could not very well come in to clear away, since I have kept you here.

[The door right opens to admit Sister Agatha. She moves correctly, her feet not showing beyond her skirts, her hands when not in use folded in her sleeves, her eyes not raised, but coming through this door is an important moment, and a straightening of her shoulders shows it. She bows to the

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

Chaplain and to the Prioress, and waits. The Prioress watches the other two for a moment.]

I was just saying how disagreeable Father Blake's breakfast was beginning to look, Sister. Perhaps you will give me a hand with it.

[Sister Agatha hurries forward and they clear the things on to a tray together.]

No, no, don't you bother, Father. *(To Agatha.)* I was telling Father Blake that I remember your sister Cecilia at school. She was a dear little girl, very quiet and pretty. I hope she is still alive. That is the sort of thing Father Blake and you are going to talk about.
CHAPLAIN: Reverend Mother, I can't have you waiting on me like this.

PRIORESS: Nonsense. It's my breakfast, anyhow, now I come to think of it—the bacon, anyhow. The rest of the Community are all registered as vegetarians, of course, but we keep the book that is in my name for the chaplains and guests. Everybody has Ration Books, you know, nowadays, Sister. Now the cloth. . . .

[They fold the cloth together.]

Not that we need very much off ours, and there must be very few people who find them inadequate. Ordinary life in the world, that is what Father Blake can tell you about. *(She puts the cloth on top of the tray, which she lifts)*

AGATHA: Let me, Reverend Mother.

PRIORESS *(smiles at her)*: Oh, Sister, panicking so soon? Would you be good enough to open the door, Father?

THE RETURN

[*Sister Agatha gets to the door first and opens it.*]

Now, I'll leave you together. Take as much time as Father Blake can spare, Sister.

[*Sister Agatha bows as the Prioress goes out. She closes the door and turns slowly, but does not raise her eyes.*]

CHAPLAIN: We have now been put at our ease, Sister. Only, personally, I hate being put anywhere, even at ease, don't you?

[*Sister Agatha relaxes a little, and laughs silently.*]

Come and sit down. She's an amazing woman, the Prioress. She makes you understand those great mediaeval abbesses who dominated the life and politics of a province from their cells. I told the Bishop one time I believed she was descended from a long unbroken line of Napoleon's aunts. What do you make of her yourself? Come on, now—I never knew the nun yet that wasn't the better for a little uncharitable gossip about her Mother Superior.

AGATHA: She makes a magnificent Prioress. She was a great Mistress of Novices.

CHAPLAIN: But you don't think she's much of a nun. All right, all right, I said it. . . . Why do you want to come out?

AGATHA: . . . I think I'm wasting my time—and God's.

CHAPLAIN: Hm, hm. God, of course, has plenty; but you're getting on for sixty. Is there something you specially want to do with the years that are left?

AGATHA: No.

CHAPLAIN: Listen. The spiritual aspect of your problem isn't my concern just now. Father Augustine is a saintly man of your own way of life and you've

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

talked to him in your language. I am to talk about—not what you may be leaving but what you may be going to. You must help me—it's a large subject. If you were a young woman I should suppose it was the call of the flesh, or loneliness of heart. If you were middle-aged I should say dissatisfaction was your lot for a time in any case, and that it would pass. What are you looking for outside? Or are you running away from something here?

AGATHA: I think they're wrong.

CHAPLAIN: Yes?

AGATHA: Wrong. The world—the sins of the world. . . .

CHAPLAIN: Prayer, and penance for the sins of the world. Yes?

AGATHA: I don't believe it any more. I don't mind. I don't mind at all.

CHAPLAIN: I see.

AGATHA: I don't believe God minds.

CHAPLAIN: Yes, man has always made God in his own image. If you were God, you'd forgive the world——?

AGATHA: I don't believe there's anything to forgive. It's good, it's good, Father. Oh, stupid, if you like, and mad sometimes, with war, but you'd never say a child was bad, wicked, sinful—you'd say the poor little thing was tiresome and badly brought up and you'd have patience with it. Why shouldn't God have patience with men?

CHAPLAIN: Yes. You had a happy childhood, a happy girlhood, Sister?

AGATHA: Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Perhaps I was spoilt. I was certainly happy. I found people good, kind—lovable.

CHAPLAIN: And yet you entered an enclosed Order, as strict as the Carmelites or the Poor Clares——?

THE RETURN

AGATHA: It was the contemplative life. My soul was too big for my body, in those days, and it's only in a life like this that it has room to grow and lose itself in the things that are bigger still.

CHAPLAIN: And you were happy?

AGATHA: Very. Until my soul—me—I—seemed to shrivel up to the size of a pea and to be not worth bothering about.

CHAPLAIN: That next, yes, of course.

AGATHA: Oh, I've read the lives of the Saints, Father—but I wasn't lost in the Infinite. I had just stopped *wanting* to be.

CHAPLAIN: Well, not to trespass on Father Augustine's territory: some people are capable of intellectual mysticism. You turned out to be a different kind of cake, that's all. Forgive the simile—but you look as if you might have made a good cook. Well, then?

AGATHA: Then Father Augustine directed me from contemplation for a time, and advised me to meditate on our other purpose in being here—expiation for the sins of the world.

CHAPLAIN: And you didn't really know any to meditate on.

AGATHA: What?

CHAPLAIN: Never mind. All right, I'm in the picture and I particularly don't want to discuss the spiritual side of things. Now, then: tell me about your sister, Cecilia.

AGATHA: Cecilia?

CHAPLAIN: Cecilia. Your parents are dead, your only brother was killed in the Great War. Tell me about Cecilia.

AGATHA: She married.

CHAPLAIN: Yes?

AGATHA: All right: she married a man—an atheist,

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

divorced. She went and lived with him till his wife divorced him. They had a child before they were married. Who was there to marry at home? You know what Norfolk is like. We were brought up among Protestants, we played with them as children, hunted with them in the holidays, danced with them when we came out, but we mustn't marry them. Cecilia—she wasn't beautiful, hardly even pretty. She had a season or two in London but she hated them. The brothers of the girls at school—she got engaged to one for a bit, my father arranged it, but she broke it off. She hardly knew him, and she'd known—this other man—all her life.

CHAPLAIN: Yes?

AGATHA: I prayed for her, but I didn't blame her. I couldn't.

CHAPLAIN: Your family cut her off, wouldn't see her even after she married. You were a nun already—Did they tell you?

AGATHA: No. They were only allowed to write once a year. They just didn't mention it, and Cecilia didn't write.

CHAPLAIN: Who told you?

AGATHA: Mother Prioress. She became Mistress of Novices about then. Her people had written. It was her brother Cecilia had been engaged to. She knew I was hurt at Cecilia's never writing year after year, but in time one gets not to mind, and it's only for their sake you read the letters that do come. I'd rather not have known. I hated to have to pray for Cecilia. I was very young.

CHAPLAIN: And you hated the Prioress for telling you. And you've never been able to feel oppressed by any sense of sin.

AGATHA: Cecilia is the only wicked woman I know.

CHAPLAIN: Did you know she died?

THE RETURN

AGATHA: . . . She was older than I, of course. Only a few years. . . . Cecilia. . . .

CHAPLAIN: She died many years ago. Sister Agatha, the only close surviving relative you've got is her son. He has answered my letter, and said he would give you a home, at first at any rate. He has a young wife who seems to agree. He says it would give him considerable satisfaction to pay your dead family back for the way they treated his mother.

AGATHA: Cecilia's son! What's he like?

CHAPLAIN: I'm no judge of character from handwriting—but if he were not a generous young man he'd be more likely to pay them back by refusing to have anything to do with you. Your capital is held in trust and the interest paid into the Convent's bank. It would bring you in a couple of hundred a year, though I fancy your trustee would agree to buying you an annuity. Your old home in Norfolk is now a branch of the Ministry of Co-ordination.

AGATHA: *A what?*

CHAPLAIN: A sort of enormous filing cabinet for the records of government departments.

AGATHA: A waste-paper basket? Oh, well, at least it's something funny.

CHAPLAIN: Hm. Perhaps you'd do all right after all.

AGATHA: I don't mind. I don't mind how I do! I tell you, I want to go! Perhaps I had something different once, I don't know, I think I had. Perhaps it was only youth. But it's burned itself out, it's dried itself up—I told you, it's shrivelled away. I am an old woman, an ordinary old woman, ordinary, ordinary, and none of it means anything to me any more.

CHAPLAIN: "But I know where'er I go that there has passed away a glory from the earth." Only it was a saint you were trying to be and not a poet, so it's heaven and not earth that's lost its glory. Sister. . .

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

AGATHA: Yes?

CHAPLAIN: Don't do it.

AGATHA: I can do it—I can try. I can write to the Bishop, I can see him when he makes his annual visitation, no one can stop me. I can appeal myself to the Mother Provincial of our Order in England. If she won't help me I can appeal to Rome. . . . I can! I can!

CHAPLAIN: Sister, open that door.

AGATHA: What door?

CHAPLAIN: That door into the Enclosure. Do as I say. Open it. Open it wide.

[Sister Agatha obeys.]

Where is the key? Take it out. Well? Which side of the door was it on? Come on.

[Sister Agatha puts back the key and closes the door gently.]

AGATHA: The inside.

CHAPLAIN: Now go to the other door. Do as I tell you.

[She crosses to the door left and opens it without looking.]

And down that passage is the front door. That has to be opened from the outside with a yale key, of which there is only one, which is kept at the local Police Station in case of fire; but it can be opened from the inside at any time of the day or night by any who cares to turn a handle. So there is no need for dramatics, is there?

AGATHA: I meant—my vows. Till death. I'd stay.

CHAPLAIN: My dear child, there are more ways than one of dying. There were two women, once—

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Siamese twins, joined back to back by a bond of flesh. Then one of them died. Surgeons weren't what they are, and for three days the other one lived with a dead woman on her back. . . . You'd get your dispensation. The woman who made those vows has died on your back.

[There is a moment's silence, and then Sister Agatha covers her face with her hands and sobs.]

And still I say don't go. You don't know and I can't give you any picture of what you're facing. If you were a young woman who had somehow skipped the time of our two wars and the dragging years between, I should say: go out and find your level. If you had said to me, even being the age you are, that you knew now your vocation was for active good works—that you wanted to serve the poor, or prisoners, or children or, God help us all, lost dogs, I'd say: "If sin and suffering call to you, go out and join the battle, veteran." But they don't.

AGATHA: I could—

CHAPLAIN: No, they don't. You don't believe in sin and you don't know what suffering is. You! Born into your watertight little world of the old Catholic aristocracy. You, who heroically refrain from judging your poor little sister, the only wicked woman you know. You, who knew only good, kind, happy people in your childhood, and were a sweet earnest young novice at twenty, and have hated ever since the woman who spoilt the only illusion you've ever lost! You, to go out at sixty into a world that is ashamed only to hide its vices. Men are cruel and women are lascivious—oh, they were in your day, too, but they had manners or conventions to protect them or at the worst to hide behind. Governments

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

don't disregard the poor now—they bribe them for votes, and then leave them to rot in their slums. Czechs and Poles don't break their hearts decently in Central Europe any more; they come and do it openly on English farms. We let shiploads of Jews just sink with their own weight into the calm, lovely Mediterranean where you used to bathe. There isn't any sand you can bury your head in now. How are you going to look at such people and *see*, and learn to love them again in the few years you've got left, you poor old fool?

[Sister Agatha is looking at him with a smile.]

In the name of fortune, what have I said that's funny?
AGATHA: I'm sorry, I wasn't really listening. Your voice reminded me so of old Father Mostyn, at home, when my father told him off to persuade me against becoming a nun.

CHAPLAIN: . . . And you didn't listen to him, either. Did you hear a word I said?

AGATHA: Oh yes, about the few years I had left. My great grandmother lived to be ninety-six. At that rate I might live out of the convent two years longer than I've lived in it, and I really don't see why I shouldn't. Do you?

Curtain

Scene 2

The Convent Parlour.

Peter Swithin, a good-looking young man of about thirty-five, stands at the window with his back to the room, and his wife, Angela, tiptoeing about the room, is examining everything with enormous interest. There is a suitcase on the chair, and a cardboard hat-box.

ANGELA (*whispering*): I say, Peter! Peter!

PETER: What?

ANGELA: Sh.

PETER: Darling, it's not a church!

ANGELA: Well, as good as. Look, Peter, I'm sure this is where they keep them. It's locked! Peter, I'm sure there's a squint-hole in that grille thing.

PETER: I don't want to look at it, it makes me sick.

ANGELA: Oh, dear, does it give you your prison phobia? It does look like the Zoo—but if they didn't like it, they could all get out, I suppose, like your aunt's going to

PETER: After two years of hullabaloo, poor creatures—if they had the guts.

ANGELA: Peter, it's years since the war. You *must* get on top of it.

[*He turns back to the window. Angela studies him with absentminded thoughtfulness for a moment, and then turns to the table and opens one of the books of views on it. The door left opens and she jumps and shuts the book guiltily. The Chaplain comes in.*]

CHAPLAIN: Ah! The Sister Portress told me you

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

were here already. Mrs. Swithin? How do you do? How do you do. Have you seen the Prioress?

PETER: We didn't know how to get hold of her—

CHAPLAIN: So they left you languishing. (*He rings the bell by the grille.*) All convents are the same—what's an hour or two, compared with eternity? They stopped walling up nuns ages ago. They wall up visitors now instead. Ah, you brought the clothes?

ANGELA: Yes—I do so hope they're all right. It was terribly difficult to get anything sort of cheerful and—and courageous for her, you know, but really suitable for someone with a mind like a nun.

[The shutter opens. The Swithins both start. Angela moves forward, dropping the hat-box she had picked up.]

Oh!

CHAPLAIN: Sister, would you tell Mother Prioress and Sister Agatha that Mr. and Mrs. Swithin are here? Thank you.

[The shutter closes.]

ANGELA: But *we're* in the Zoo! I mean, she could see *us* if she wanted to, lit up, like an aquarium!

[The Chaplain picks up the hat-box.]

Yes, her hat—I drove the assistant mad, because of course they all looked terrifying on me, but—I really thought this one would look all right for someone who died in nineteen thirteen. Do you think it'll do?

CHAPLAIN: In very good taste, I'd say.

ANGELA: I *do* want her to like everything, clothes are

THE RETURN

such a help to hold on to, you know. And shoes—they don't wear heels, do they, and it hurts the back of your leg and your instep like hell, I mean fun, if you're not used to them. I turned the town upside down, because I would *not* have her go out in those awful lace-up things. Women in her day always had very pretty feet, you know, and they were fearfully proud of them, and even if hers have spread a bit from flapping about in those sand-shoe things they're going to look as nice as we can make them. Look!

[She has been routing in the suitcase, and now reveals a neat pair of shoes with a low—perhaps a Louis—heel.]

CHAPLAIN: You've taken a lot of trouble.

ANGELA: I expect she'll be a bit scared, you know. There's nothing like feeling you've got the right clothes on, anyhow. The underclothes I am worried about still. I read somewhere they always wear wool, prickly on purpose, and of course you can't leave off wool suddenly, but——

PETER: Darling, Mr.—Father Blake is a priest.

[The door right is unlocked and the Prioress comes in. She and the Chaplain bow to each other.]

CHAPLAIN: Mr. and Mrs. Swithin, Reverend Mother. The Mother Prioress.

PRIORESS: How do you do?

PETER: How do you do?

ANGELA: Oh, How do you do?

[They do not shake hands.]

PRIORESS: You are being very generous, Mr. Swithin, in giving your aunt a home.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

PETER: I'm very glad to be able to. It's only a pokey London flat, about two by four, I'm afraid.

CHAPLAIN: Mr. and Mrs. Swithin have both been extraordinarily thoughtful and kind.

PRIORESS: And they are quite aware of her financial situation?

CHAPLAIN: Er—yes——

[*Peter laughs pleasantly.*]

PETER: It's all right, we know she's only got four-pence and it's an annuity. We shan't murder her for her money.

PRIORESS: I knew your grandparents very well. They were most kind to me as a young girl.

PETER (*curtly, ready to take offence*): And my mother, then?

PRIORESS: Yes, indeed; though she was still a schoolgirl when I became a nun.

[*Peter relaxes.*]

Sister Agatha was in the Chapel, I know. They can't have found her, or she'd be here by now. Excuse me a moment.

[*She goes out right.*]

ANGELA: Whew!

CHAPLAIN: No, your aunt isn't like that a bit. She is, though. I'd be less worried if I thought you knew how.

PETER: How what?

CHAPLAIN: How remote her world was from yours, when she had one.

ANGELA: I know—I've been reading it up and

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looking at pictures and things. The novels of E. F. Benson. I'd rather have liked it, myself.

CHAPLAIN: You can't read it up, it's never been written—the tiny, self-contained world of the old English Catholic aristocracy. You're going to think her a fabulous snob—you'll have to try and think of it as period, like her probable taste in hats. As remote and as self-contained as Mars, her world. If it weren't so likely to be tragic, it would be sensationally interesting, like reviving an Egyptian mummy and turning it loose in the world today.

[*The door right is unlocked and Sister Agatha comes in. She slowly raises her eyes and looks at Peter. He stares for a moment and then hurries to her and takes her in his arms.*]

PETER: Darling Aunt Agatha, you're going to be free and yourself again. I'm going to look after you till you find your feet, and then you're going to do whatever in the world you like.

AGATHA: It's so good of you—so——

PETER: Oh, come on now, you're not crying?

AGATHA: No, I——

PETER: You are—— She's not. She's *laughing*. (*Aside to Chaplain.*) Hysterics?

CHAPLAIN: Sister——

AGATHA: It's all right. But it seemed so silly. We've always spoken of you as—Cecilia's son, Cecilia's boy. It's only just occurred to me—I'm afraid I don't even know your Christian name.

PETER: Peter. Peter. . . . Oh, and this is Angela, my wife.

ANGELA: How do you do? (*She does not move.*)

AGATHA: How do you—do. Father——

CHAPLAIN: Yes?

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

AGATHA: Nothing. My dear, you must forgive my staring, I haven't seen a woman in—ordinary clothes—since the last time my mother came here, thirty years ago.

ANGELA: It's all right. *Absolutely* all right.

PETER: I've got my car parked round the corner, and we're driving straight down to London. We're rather broke, you know, and we can only give you the sort of loose-box they call a spare room in our flat—I don't believe you're listening.

AGATHA: I'm sorry. I was, really. But you see, you're older than Cecilia was, years older, and so much more sure. It's ridiculous of me, you would be.

CHAPLAIN: Sister, Mrs. Swithin has brought your clothes. You ought to go and change, now. You've a long drive ahead.

AGATHA: Yes. Yes, I suppose so. . . . To London, you said? Yes, quite far. But *drive*? Only to the station, of course.

PETER: I wonder if we ought to have gone by train? No. A car is quieter than a train, and more private. You'll like it, and you can see the real England from the window—country roads.

AGATHA: England!

CHAPLAIN: Go and change, now.

AGATHA: Yes, Father.

[*She moves obediently. Angela comes forward with the case and hat-box.*]

Thank you.

CHAPLAIN: Mrs. Swithin has tried very hard to choose the right clothes for you. She hopes very much you're going to like them.

AGATHA: Oh, you shouldn't have gone to any trouble—anything would do. It was very good of you.

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[Peter holds the door for her, and she goes out right. Peter closes the door.]

CHAPLAIN: Well! You're very quiet, Mrs. Swithin.

PETER: I hope it doesn't mean you're going to decide you don't like her.

ANGELA: No—it's all right, I'm going to like her. It's just that it's so terrible.

CHAPLAIN: Terrible?

ANGELA: So huge for her, this—all this. I don't know how any of you can talk, talk to her as if it was every day. I'm quite old, a woman, and since years before I was born she's been in there. It's not a day, there aren't words, there ought to be a different language, or trumpets, or gongs and drums and so much noise that you can't hear, throbbing and blaring in your ears, so that you can't think. People oughtn't to see such things!

CHAPLAIN: Why don't you sit down, Mrs. Swithin? We shall have some time to wait.

ANGELA: How listeningly quiet it is! What on earth is Aunt Agatha going to make of a London flat—particularly *our* London flat?

CHAPLAIN: Is it a particularly noisy one?

ANGELA: It's particularly small.

PETER: You see, sir, I am in a particularly small way of business.

ANGELA: Peter, I didn't mean that. I merely said it is physically a small flat.

PETER: Morally, it's even smaller.

CHAPLAIN: What is your work, Swithin?

PETER: Jute. What you make linoleum out of, when you can get any. One of the principal exports of our late-lamented Indian Empire. Filthy stuff.

CHAPLAIN: You don't sound as if you'd found your vocation, either.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

PETER: A good-natured cousin of my wife's found it for me, poor man. Oh, I fancy one business is much like another. The people who naturally buy and sell cleverly will have their fun, whether it's a "cargo of ivory, topaz and cinnamon", or peanuts off a barrow. I just haven't the knack.

CHAPLAIN: But you catch the City 'bus every morning with pious resignation——

ANGELA: And come home every night in a worse temper. You're going to have to watch your language, darling, with Aunt Agatha around.

PETER: And you're going to have to snap out of the glooms, my sweet, and be Little Susie Sunshine about the flat all day.

ANGELA: Oh, dear, I do hope we are going to be able to make it happy for her. We've been concentrating on the idea of just getting her out. It's going to be just too funny for words if she finds she was better off inside——

CHAPLAIN: Oh, well—if you work hard enough on keeping her happy, you may find you've cheered yourselves up by mistake.

[The Prioress comes in right.]

PRIORESS: Sister Agatha is in her cell, dressing. I wanted to warn you, Mr. Swithun. She is distressed. The clothes, I think made it real rather suddenly. When you have lived with an idea for some time it takes on a dream-quality, and the realisation is always a shock.

PETER: We'll look after her.

PRIORESS: I believe this morning she'd elect to stay here.

PETER: Have you been talking to her? Persuading her?

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PRIRESS: No—— She's coming.

CHAPLAIN: Swithin, were you taken prisoner at all, during the war?

PETER: Yes. And you're quite right—I don't like prisons or anything that resembles prisons. And I have very little confidence in the way my mother's family arranged the lives of either of their daughters.

ANGELA: Peter, you—d'you think you ought to bring the car round to the door? They won't let you park there because of the traffic, I know, but if *you* stayed in the car——

PETER: It's all right. It's only on the corner. (*To Chaplain.*) Sorry.

PRIRESS: I'll leave you, then. Goodbye, Mrs. Swithin, Mr.——

CHAPLAIN: Where are you going?

PRIRESS: I——? To the Chapel, Father.

CHAPLAIN: And Sister Agatha?

PRIRESS: She's no longer in my care.

CHAPLAIN: You stay and wish her "Godspeed". That woman leaves this house with the sanction of the Church. She leaves it with the honours of war!

PRIRESS: Of course, Father; as you wish.

ANGELA: What does she like?

PRIRESS: I beg your pardon?

ANGELA: I mean, what's she interested in, to talk about and so on? We're going to be alone together a lot all day—I thought I might get some books and read up whatever she's interested in.

CHAPLAIN: You've set the Prioress a teaser. You see, the nuns don't talk to each other, except for half an hour a day, and then only in general conversation, not in ones and twos. They don't read books. Only the Prioress is compelled by her office to have some contact with the outside world, to read the newspapers, for instance. Reluctantly compelled. You'll

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

find your aunt's mind virgin soil—it's not just that she hasn't any secular interest, she won't even know what there is to be interested in in your world. She's spent the first half of the century lost in childhood and contemplation. You're going to find you've got an adult mind to deal with that was only born this morning.

ANGELA: It sounds rather a frightening idea.

CHAPLAIN: It is.

[There is a moment's chilled silence. Then the key is heard turning and the door right opens slowly. Agatha comes in. She is wearing the clothes that Angela brought with the hat at an unbecoming angle and the silk scarf tied over it like a motoring veil. But more strikingly still, under the coat (which is of course "New Look" length) she wears the skirt of her habit. She moves with the short gliding step of the convent and carries her habit and veil in a folded pile, with the cross and rosary on top. Her face is streaming with tears, but she does not sob and her voice is low but steady.]

PETER (*gently*): Aunt, darling, the scarf——

[Angela puts out her hand quickly to stop him, but he goes on gently.]

The scarf goes round the neck——

AGATHA: Oh, does it? I thought as we were motoring—— But then, there's my hair—I think I'll keep it like this. I had to keep the skirt of our habit, Reverend Mother. The other was very short. (*Quickly to Angela.*) I am a little taller than you expected, I'm sure. (*To Prioress.*) I'll post it to you, Reverend Mother.

PRIORESS (*comes forward and picks up the cross*): This is yours. It would have been buried with you.

THE RETURN

AGATHA (*takes it slowly, kisses it automatically, as part of the daily habit of putting it on, and slips the cord over her head. Then she slips the cross out of sight in her blouse. As she does so she notices her hand, and the ring catches her eye*): But now this, now— (*Tugs at it.*)

ANGELA (*whispering*): But it's a wedding ring—on her left hand!

CHAPLAIN (*whispering*): A nun is the Bride of Christ.

[*Agatha can't get the ring off, and there is an agonised silence as she tugs at it.*]

ANGELA (*muttering, barely audible*): Stop it, stop it.

PETER (*ditto*): Oh, God.

[*The ring comes off, and Agatha puts it on top of the pile.*]

CHAPLAIN: Now then! Look here, when you took that habit, the Bishop blessed it, didn't he? Well, I don't see why I shouldn't bless your new clothes.

[*The Chaplain raises his hands and Agatha falls on her knees. The Prioress bows her head.*]

(*Quietly.*) Benedicat te omnipotens Deus, in nomine (*makes the Sign of the Cross over Agatha—not dramatically, but simply, as one does it a dozen times a day*) Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen. Go in peace.

[*Agatha gets up and goes straight to door left, but the Prioress is between her and it. The Prioress takes her by the shoulders and gives her the Kiss of Peace (same gesture as that of a French General conferring the accolade). Agatha goes out quickly left followed by Angela and Peter.*]

CHAPLAIN: I'm torn between the prayers for an

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

infant and valediction for the dying—"Go forth, Christian soul"—Ah, well, I'm due at the hospital at eleven. . . . What did you make of the young people, Reverend Mother? The girl?

PRIORESS: My experience is very limited.

CHAPLAIN: If she'd come to you as a postulant, say.

PRIORESS: She's not the type ever to imagine that she had a vocation.

CHAPLAIN: But——? An odd stable companion for Agatha Fosdyke.

PRIORESS: Oh that, certainly. But the girl, I should say, would be more susceptible to other people than Agatha.

CHAPLAIN: I wonder what on earth they're going to make of each other, the three of them. I must look them up in a month or two, if I can wangle a reason for going down to London.

PRIORESS: Yes, I dare say you would find it very interesting. Now, if you will excuse me, Father——

[The door left bursts open, and Angela comes in followed by Peter supporting Agatha. The Chaplain swings forward the armchair and the Prioress, after one glance, hurries out right.]

ANGELA: Just a moment. You'll be all right. A chair—quick. We were hardly outside the door——

[Agatha is sobbing and shuddering convulsively.]

Peter, go round and get that car and bring it to the front and wait, and damn the police.

PETER: I give you five minutes. If you're longer I'll leave the bloody car and come in for her.

[Peter goes out left.]

THE RETURN

ANGELA (*to Chaplain*): She just took a few steps, and then stood and shook, and stared, and trembled. And when she tried to walk again her ankle gave. Those damn shoes had too much heel, after all.

[*The Prioress returns, right, with a glass of water.*]

PRIORRESS: Drink this, all of it. . . . Drink this, Sister.

[*Agatha automatically reaches out her hand for the glass.*]

CHAPLAIN: That's right. Better?

AGATHA: I can't! I can't do it! I—— Reverend Mother, I can't do it!

CHAPLAIN: What was it? Tell us.

AGATHA: I can't do it, I shouldn't have thought I could do it. Let me back, Reverend Mother! Let me back! I'm an old woman, I'm too old!

ANGELA: You mustn't! Oh, you mustn't take her back, Peter couldn't stand it! (*To Agatha.*) He's got this prisoner-of-war thing about people being shut up. I know it's terrible, it would be peace and quiet and heaven to stay, but you mustn't, it would haunt Peter. Oh, you shouldn't ever have told anyone you wanted to get out if you weren't going to be able to do it!

CHAPLAIN: Mrs. Swithin, you're going to have to trust me. Go out into the garden for a few minutes. Leave us to handle this.

ANGELA: But Peter——

CHAPLAIN: You must leave her with us for a moment. Don't worry. Look, you can watch us through the glass!

[*He leads Angela out, and closes the French window behind her. She can be seen, leaning against a statue in the court as though her forehead were burning.*]

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

Now then, what was it? Tell us. Come on.

AGATHA (*quieter*): Everything. The noise, and things blundering past, huge things, and the noise! It's like a great clanging blanket over your head. I can't stand it, it's no good, I knew this morning I couldn't stand it!

CHAPLAIN: And what did you see?

AGATHA: Blundering and swirling and smelling.

CHAPLAIN: Traffic. God bless my soul, I thought you'd at least seen an atom bomb going up.

AGATHA: The women! The whole *street* was full of—of harlots with painted faces and bare legs and no skirts. And a huge woman, as big as three houses, naked—

CHAPLAIN (*to Prioress*): Corset advertisement on a hoarding opposite.

AGATHA: A poster, of course, but *naked*—

CHAPLAIN: Agatha Fosdyke, you are being an ass.

AGATHA: . . . Father, that girl, poor Peter's wife—she's a harlot, how can I live with her? I mean, I don't judge her, I don't, but what could I do if she— if she—

CHAPLAIN: You're even more of an ass than I thought. Poor little Mrs. Swithin, who probably spent a couple of hours working out the quietest get-up in her wardrobe so's not to startle you, and only put on as little make-up as she possibly could and still face the light of day—

AGATHA: I told you, it's—it's not the sin, it's—it's the embarrassment!

CHAPLAIN: There! . . . Well, I hope you don't find anything worse to put up with than embarrassment. Now, there's nothing whatever the matter but strain and shock and—I'll be bound, an empty stomach! (*Flings out an arm at the Prioress.*) Breakfast, Reverend Mother?

THE RETURN

PRIORESS: I—I am afraid I was not thinking of her. The cold lentils we always have——

CHAPLAIN: Half a saucer—never mind. If we keep her to feed her now we'll have young Peter pulling the place down to get her out. They must feed her on the way.

AGATHA: I——

CHAPLAIN: Be quiet. And don't you call that child a harlot.

AGATHA: But I——

PRIORESS: You were never at Trente-et-Un, in the Rue de Varennes—the finishing-school of the Order where we were educated. There was an old nun there, she must have been ninety when I knew her, in a bath-chair. Her mother had been a lady-in-waiting to Marie Antoinette. Some of the girls used to use the *papiers poudrés* which were sold in those days. One day when they were forbidden I saw her smile. I asked her why, and she told me the world came full circle. Her grandmother used to scold her mother, she'd been told, because the Queen and the younger ladies took to going without paint or powder, and with their own unpowdered hair. It was Rousseau's dangerous philosophy, the worship of Nature and the loosening of manners and morals, and it brought about the Revolution. . . . I shouldn't worry about little Mrs. Swithin's face—or her legs—if I were you.

AGATHA: I do think it was partly that I didn't eat my breakfast——

CHAPLAIN (*calling*): Mrs. Swithin! Miss Fosdyke's ready to go now, and I'm coming with you, if I may. I want to tell you about buying some sandwiches——

PRIORESS: Goodbye, Agatha.

AGATHA (*going to Prioress and kissing her in an ordinary, affectionate way*): Goodbye, Margaret. Goodbye.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

CHAPLAIN (*to Angela*): And I'd be glad if you'd drop me off at the hospital on your way out of town——

[*Angela and the Chaplain follow Agatha out left. The Prioress looks after them for a moment, and then looks at her watch (the turnip kind, worn in the waist-band). She shakes her head as at an appalling waste of time, collects the pile of the habit, and goes out right. The key can be heard turning in the lock.*]

Curtain

ACT TWO

Scene I

The living room of a small, inconvenient-looking London flat. Doors open from it to two bedrooms and a kitchenette, and there is a "front" door on to the landing. It is early evening. The room is empty. A radio is playing dance music stridently. After a few moments the "front" door is opened by Peter. He flings his coat and hat untidily down.

PETER (*calling*): Angela? Home, darling.

[*Angela hurries in from kitchen.*]

ANGELA: Peter, darling, she's. . . .

PETER: For God's sake, Angela, why must you keep that infernal thing blaring like that. . . .

[*He switches off the radio.*]

ANGELA: Because I can't hear it in the kitchen otherwise.

PETER: You know she can't stand it. No wonder she shuts herself up in her room all day. I told you, I won't have it.

[*He goes to the door of Agatha's bedroom and raises his hand to knock.*]

ANGELA: She is *not* in her room.

PETER: Out on her own? Good. Oh, evening, darling.

[*He drops on Angela the habitual "home from work" kiss he omitted and goes to the cocktail cabinet.*]

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

Though I suppose she's only nipped round to the church. Drink? What's the matter? She *is* all right?

ANGELA: I doubt it. She's gone to see her old home at Brattesleigh.

PETER: Angela! Are you mad? Brattesleigh! Don't you realise what a shock the place is going to be for her?

ANGELA: If you'd let me get a word——

PETER: Open-cast coal-mining where the gardens used to be, the house crawling with civil servants, all the things she had to love and remember all these years. . . . You've got about as much imagination as——

ANGELA: I've got enough to have sat here all day waiting for the 'phone to ring, to say she'd collapsed somewhere.

PETER: Why didn't you stop her?

ANGELA: Why didn't you? She went before either of us was up.

PETER: You said she'd gone out to Mass.

ANGELA: Well, I supposed she had. I didn't find the note on the mantelpiece till after you'd gone.

PETER: Well, you should have 'phoned me at the office.

ANGELA: And given you the excuse to take the day off. It's not much of a job, but such as it is you may as well keep it.

PETER: There we go again. Oh, never mind the job——what did she go for? We've told her she'd hate it.

[*Angela produces note.*]

ANGELA (*reading*): “. . . early train to Brattesleigh. I just want to look round and see if there is not some useful work I could do among the poor in the village,

THE RETURN

as I am sure that will be the best thing, if I can find rooms or a cottage on the place." And she says she'll be home for dinner.

PETER: "Useful work" at her age. Couldn't you have found *something* she liked doing, and kept her amused?

ANGELA: Oh, Peter, I have tried! I'm fond of her, too. You want to make up to her for being shut up all those years; but I admire her so for having had the guts to come out.

PETER: There must be something——

ANGELA: I've tried everything. It worries me as much as it does you when she sits in her room, with the silence fairly flowing out under the door. I've dug out all Mummy's old friends from private hotels in South Kensington and asked them to lunch with her. She just seems sorry for them.

PETER: I'm not surprised.

ANGELA: I've taken her to matinées, cinemas, hair-dressers. I tried manicures, facials, and even a Turkish bath. She's perfectly charming about everything, but I honestly believe the only thing she enjoys is helping to cook and char the flat. The only thing I haven't tried is a psychiatrist.

PETER: I did so want her to be happy.

ANGELA: She doesn't seem *unhappy*, somehow. She just looks as though she were waiting for it to start.

PETER: "It"?

ANGELA: Life, or something. She has this amazing strength—not *busy*, you know, but latent. When I stop to watch her cleaning, I almost feel I could enjoy scrubbing and polishing myself: quiet, steady and methodical, rhythmical. And then she just sits. She doesn't like novels, much, and she seems to know all the religious books they've got in the Public Library. She does acres of plain sewing——

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

again, almost rhythmically—and then she does just sit. . . . Well, I suppose I'd better start laying the table, anyhow.

[She busies herself during the ensuing lines with opening out the dining-table in a corner, etc. Peter does not help her.]

PETER: Can't you get her to play chess, or something?

ANGELA: Chess, Canasta—she'll play something I teach her, if she thinks I want someone to play with.

PETER: Can't you get her talking, and find out what she wants.

ANGELA: I don't believe she wants anything. I don't know whether it's because she died in nineteen thirteen, or because she lives on a different plane, but she doesn't seem to have the same reasons for doing things or the same problems as we do.

PETER: Rot. It's no use going all mystic about it. She's a perfectly normal human being. That's why I can't bear the idea of her going to Brattesleigh. All these years, she'll have lived with one picture of the outside world in her mind: Brattesleigh before the first war, dignity and leisure, and lawns and cedar trees. You don't know how people hang on to things in prison—particularly illusions.

ANGELA: Oh, God, I so hope she can take it. I know it matters to you that she can get over all those years shut up. But it matters to me too—that she can take real life the way it is. It's a selfish way to look at it, I suppose, but for us it's like a test—if she can take it.

PETER: Sorry I blew my top at you, darling. You've been awfully good about having her. She's not *your* aunt.

ANGELA: I was just ordinarily sorry for her in the beginning. Now—it's a symbol, almost; a challenge. Besides, I see more of her than you do. I rather love

THE RETURN

her. Peter, it's getting awfully late. Someone would have 'phoned here, wouldn't they, if she'd—you know, like that first time we got her out into the street?

PETER: *If she had the number on her.*

ANGELA: Oh, Pete, don't—she wouldn't lose her memory.

PETER: Shock does funny things. Sh!

[They listen towards the "front" door. A key is heard in the lock.]

ANGELA (*relieved*): A key—it's her. (*Worried.*) Oh, Peter. . . .

[She puts her arm in his. They wait anxiously. The door opens slowly and Agatha comes in. She looks extremely tired and moves slowly.]

PETER: Come in, Aunt darling. That's right.

AGATHA (*flatly*): Good evening, Peter. Angela, dear.

[Peter closes the door, removing the key that Agatha has left in it, as Angela leads Agatha to a chair.]

ANGELA: That's right. Come and sit down. You've had a long day.

[Peter takes her bag and drops her key back into it.]

PETER: How about a drink? Spot of brandy. Do you good.

AGATHA: Oh, no, thank you, Peter.

PETER: Doctor's orders.

[He pours brandy.]

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

It's all those hours in trains, that's all.

AGATHA: I'm really quite all——

PETER: Come on. Drink up.

[She takes the brandy. The other two exchange looks over her head.]

AGATHA: Thank you, dear. I was a little tired.

ANGELA: Of course you were. I loathe trains, too. Whenever I come back from a holiday I need another holiday to get over the journey.

[There is a noticeable blank silence.]

Well, now, how about some supper——

PETER *(at the same time)*: Would you like to get straight off to bed, and—sorry, go on.

ANGELA: Nothing.

AGATHA: You are both looking at me very oddly. I hope you didn't mind my just leaving a note for you, Angela. You never knew Brattesleigh in the old days, did you, Peter?

PETER: No. My mother wasn't—accepted any more, you know. Aunt, darling, forget about it. It was lovely, and all that's gone. But it was cruel, too; and everyone's dead, it would have been over for you anyhow. This is home, where Angela and I want you. Forget all about it.

AGATHA: About Brattesleigh? Oh, no. I'll always remember it. I was very happy there. It's satisfactory to have seen it now. It's confusing to carry about a memory of the past as if it were a picture of the present. I've seen it, and—buried my dead.

ANGELA: You don't want to go and work there, do you?

AGATHA *(laughing a little)*: Oh, my dear, all that's

THE RETURN

changed too. The old almshouses our family founded in the village are a hostel for the girls who work at the house—clerks and secretaries, very well paid. The cottages about the place have all got electric light and most peculiar little paved gardens, and they tell me the directors and senior officials live in them, and that they all have plumbing and central heating and are quite expensive. Everyone was very kind but I think they were rather amused at my looking for drunks and ne'er-do-wells and people with too many children. I wonder what's happened to them all. No, there's nothing to be done at Brattesleigh.

PETER: Good.

AGATHA: But, Peter, I talked to the director there. They keep the records of all the Ministries, and he showed me round and explained, and I found out the most extraordinary things. India is independent. Ireland is a republic. There are no Kings in Spain, Italy, Rumania, Portugal, Bulgaria, I forget where else. No Austro-Hungarian empire, no Turkish empire, practically, I gather, not really a British empire. And all in my lifetime—while I wasn't looking! Why didn't you tell me?

PETER: It never occurred to me you didn't know. No wonder you look a bit shaken. You've had a social revolution and lost an empire since breakfast.

AGATHA: He told me they'd had a revolution in Russia, too! Isn't that wonderful? The serfs freed after all those hundreds of years! I remember a charming Prince Zermantoff, a refugee after the Students' Revolt in nineteen hundred and five, who was a friend of my father's. He'd quite given up hope. And now Russia's a republic.

PETER (*softly*): I don't believe it. Well, then there was the Chinese empire—or was that over already

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

in nineteen thirteen—and the Jews have a government of their own in Jerusalem.

ANGELA: Peter, that's the Holy Land, she——

PETER: Sh——

AGATHA: The Jews in Jerusalem. "For I will give you a name, and praise among all the people of the earth." How strange—in my own time, and not to know it. I'm sorry, my dears: it must seem odd to you, but I believe that is more real to me than all your history. All these years, singing the Divine Office every day—you know how much of the Bible is taken up with the lamentations of the Jews for Jerusalem—— Lately, when prayer has been difficult for me, and the Choir the sort of torture that easily drives you mad, I've tried to concentrate just on the words, the words themselves and their meaning in the time when they were written. Choir—have you ever heard Office sung in a convent? Just occasionally you have. (*She chants in plain-song.*) "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, convertere ad Dominum Deum tuum." But all the year round it's (*she chants on one note*) "Aedificans Ierusalem Dominus, Dispersiones Israel congregabit"—for a couple of hours on end; according to the weather or how long you've been fasting it goes sharp or flat after a bit, and the Choir Mistress strikes a tuning fork and you pitch it right again. The words, the words: I used to hang on to the meaning of the words, till I suppose the Jews several centuries B C. are nearer to me than you people with your two wars. "And I will bring back the captivity of my people Israel and they shall build the abandoned cities and inhabit them: and they shall plant vineyards and drink the wine of them, and shall make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their own land, and I will no more pluck them out of their land

THE RETURN

which I have given them. . . .” What times you have lived in!

ANGELA: Yes . . . if you can look back at them with that—that——

PETER: Historical perspective. Perhaps it's not such a bad thing to be dead and buried for a time, after all.

ANGELA: . . . But, Aunt Agatha, it *has* been a day, and you do look all in. Suppose you went off to bed, and I brought you some supper on a tray?

AGATHA: Nonsense, my dear. I'll go and have a wash and change and be quite refreshed in time for dinner. I was just a little tired at the idea of having to think of something else. I'd taken it for granted I should be making myself useful up at Brattesleigh as soon as I'd found my feet. . . . But—there'll be something else.

[*She goes into her bedroom and closes the door.*]

PETER: Whew! They sure did breed 'em tough in them there days.

[*Peter pours drinks for both, which they take with relief.*]

ANGELA: Oh. I've been so scared all day! I've been feeling if anything went wrong we ought to be shot—we should never have taken on the responsibility.

PETER: Up the Fosdykes!

ANGELA: The Fosdykes. They can take it.

[*She kisses him lightly.*]

All of them. . . . Funny to think if you'd inherited Brattesleigh she might even now be able to carry soup and jelly round the village, like she'd planned.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

PETER: If I'd inherited Brattesleigh . . . we should none of us be pigging it in two bed one recep. in the Fulham Road.

ANGELA: Oh, darling, I didn't mean that. Besides, we probably should anyway. There evidently wasn't any money to keep the place.

PETER: And I could never have made any.

ANGELA: Pete, I never said that.

PETER: My dear girl, every damn thing you say has one thought behind it: *we* shall never have any money.

ANGELA: Oh, darling, let's not fight tonight. I'm sorry if I set you off. I do so try not to.

PETER: And you sit there looking as if you're trying not to, too. I told you I'd be no damned good at making money. If you'd let me take a Regular commission when I had the chance at the end of the war—

ANGELA: So that you could sit back happily for ever because your pay was fixed and there was nothing you could do about it either way.

PETER: Except work for promotion in a job I liked and was good at.

ANGELA: Promotion? Did you bother about it in the war?

PETER: No. I was too busy.

ANGELA: . . . Pete! Look, I only fight you back when you get on to that because—I don't know, I worry about whether I was wrong to get you to give it up. I thought you'd had as much army as was good for you, and I knew you'd got about as much ambition as a tram line, and—

PETER: And your soaring ambition on my behalf has achieved *this* for us, with me blissfully running up and down the two bottom rungs of the ladder from nine till six in Big Business.

THE RETURN

ANGELA: All right, darling, the whole thing has been a mistake. Only it's a bit of a strain putting on an act for Aunt Agatha about the Brave New World when——

PETER: Putting on an act. Pretending to be happy in spite of your dreary lot.

ANGELA: Oh, Peter, really——

PETER: I bet you use her as a sympathetic confidante, poor creature—what have you told her? Have you told her that I won't let you have a baby?

ANGELA: No. I haven't.

PETER: Just the tight-lipped little martyr with the secret sorrow. It must be a temptation to sob your heart out about your wasted life and your chronic flop of a husband.

ANGELA (*goaded into shouting at him*): Yes, it is!

[*They glare at each other for a moment or two; and then Peter bangs out of the "front" door. Angela, automatically, to drown her feelings turns the radio on full blast, just as Agatha comes in looking anxiously about. Angela switches the radio off at once.*]

AGATHA: Angela, did you call out? What's the matter? I thought I heard——

ANGELA: You heard me yelling at Peter, and Peter banging out to the pub. You'll hear Peter banging back around closing time.

AGATHA: Oh, my dear, I'm sorry. How stupid of me. Of course.

ANGELA: Of course?

AGATHA: Well, I mean of course young couples are liable to shout at each other from time to time, I expect.

ANGELA: Aunt Agatha, you *are* amazing.

AGATHA: I do hope my being here hasn't been

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

stopping you. I always felt as a child one ought to be allowed to shout.

ANGELA: Not the sort of things I shout at Peter. I do try, but when he gets in a mood—when something makes him feel he's no good—he turns every damn thing you say into meaning *you* think he's no good, until you get to the point when you *say* it, to shut him up. And then you've said it.

AGATHA: What has just made him think he's no good?

ANGELA: You, darling.

AGATHA: Angela——!

ANGELA: Bless you. You took Brattesleigh just too well. It made him feel a twerp for the way he can't take things.

AGATHA: But, dear, you'd all told me it had been changed, it wasn't a shock, like that silly business of just first coming out into the noise outside. Brattesleigh doesn't matter.

ANGELA: Just a social revolution.

AGATHA: Yes. Nothing fundamental.

ANGELA: You'd certainly shake them in Parliament.

AGATHA: Poor Peter. . . . Would it help him, do you think, if he knew—one doesn't like to talk about oneself, but—if he knew one was——

ANGELA: What?

AGATHA: Frightened, oneself?

ANGELA: Oh, darling, what of?

AGATHA: Oh, not the things that change and always have, like Brattesleigh, and empires. The things that go on. Suppose one hadn't got them?

ANGELA: What things?

AGATHA: Suppose one had lost, or been born without, the reason for living at all?

ANGELA: . . . You mustn't let yourself have thoughts like that!

THE RETURN

AGATHA: Oh, I haven't. There are answers one has learned—the whole scholastic philosophy of Chustendom. And yet you can be afraid that you might come—not to think, but to feel—that the whole world was about nothing at all.

ANGELA (*relieved*): Oh, that! Darling, you had me scared for a moment. You're tired, and I've made it worse by going on about Peter and me. You won't tell him, will you? That I worried you, I mean?

AGATHA: No. No, dear, of course not. Angela, you don't feel yourself—

ANGELA: That the world makes sense? Of course it doesn't, it's not meant to. But that's quite different from what you said before, about . . . about no reason for living. You're going to be happy. You are, I promise you.

AGATHA: Now, you're not to worry about that. And one thing's certain: I'm going to start being busy, and out from under your feet, as my old nurse used to say. It's just that not being needed at Brattesleigh, I've got to find something else. It'll be quite easy. I just don't quite know where to begin to look.

Curtain

Scene 2

The Swithins' flat. Some months later.

Angela is opening out a small tea-table. There is a slight sound, and she looks up-stage towards the front door of the flat. It is opening with infinite slowness and caution. At last Peter's head appears round the corner of the door.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

ANGELA: Peter! For heaven's sake! I thought you were at least a burglar.

[Peter, having made sure she is alone in the room, comes in. He speaks in a low voice.]

PETER: I thought he might be here already, and I'd just have to sneak off again.

ANGELA: Mr. Plummer's a perfectly harmless little man. Really, anyone would think you were afraid of being shanghaied to his idiotic Youth Club.

PETER: I can't stand the creature, that's all. Nattering on about the Wonderful Work that's being done. And he always wants to get me in a corner and talk about the War—as if he's known one end of it from the other—and what we "ex-army types" can do together for Young People today.

ANGELA: Well, what did you come back for?

PETER: Found I hadn't enough money on me. Now look here, Angela, you've got to see she doesn't agree to take on any more work for him.

ANGELA: I should have thought you'd have noticed by now that what Aunt Agatha wants to do she does. If she thinks it's worth while——

PETER: You know darn well it's a dead waste of time and energy. Why you want to encourage her——

[He goes into their bedroom, taking out his wallet as he does so. Angela talks to him through the door as she unfolds a table cloth. They are careful throughout that Agatha shouldn't hear what they say from the kitchen.]

ANGELA: Because it seems to be what she wants to do. We've got to pretend to take an interest in it. It's horrid if your family just say "Oh no!" and bolt

THE RETURN

out of the house the moment what you're interested in crops up.

[*Peter comes out of the bedroom stuffing money into his wallet.*]

PETER: My dear girl, if you think you fool anybody being fascinated about the spread of synthetic culture in the East End——

[*Agatha comes out of the kitchen carrying a tray. Angela hastily puts on the cloth for her.*]

AGATHA: Oh, Peter, how nice——can you be here for tea after all?

PETER: No, I'm terribly sorry, Aunt Agatha, I do have to meet this man and Saturday's the only day he can manage.

AGATHA: Oh, well, have a nice time, dear.

PETER: You won't let the Plummer talk you into taking on——

ANGELA (*quickly, holding up a milk jug*): Darling, how do you get the silver like this? And you shouldn't have bothered, I did mean to——

AGATHA: Oh, I used to look after the sacristy, I rather miss having big candlesticks to polish, and bells, and——

[*The door-bell rings.*]

PETER: Woops——take cover! I'll hide in the kitchen and slide out when he's not looking.

ANGELA: Peter!

[*Agatha laughs with considerable sympathy.*]

AGATHA: Poor Peter——yes, quick.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

[Angela, glaring at Peter, gives him time to hide in the kitchen and then opens the door. Plummer is a man who still encourages an already prolonged youth. He is worried by silence, and whenever there might otherwise be one is inclined to sing wordless snatches of unpopular opera.]

PLUMMER: Hullo, hullo, hullo.

ANGELA: Hullo, Mr. Plummer.

AGATHA: Well, Mr. Plummer, I do hope you didn't find all the 'bus changes too complicated?

PLUMMER: Not a bit, but Miss Fosdyke—the idea of your doing that journey both ways five nights a week—and right through the rush hour in the City on the way down to the East End!

AGATHA: The business is all rather exciting, when you get used to it.

ANGELA: Do sit down, Mr. Plummer. Cigarette?

PLUMMER: Oh, thanks, no, I daren't start again—we're having to look both sides of sixpence at the Youth Centre with all the redecorations to pay for.

AGATHA: How does the new paint look?

PLUMMER: Very gay. I hate having to close down for a fortnight like this, though. They do slip away, bless them, once they get out of the habit of coming.

ANGELA: I'll just get the tea. I'm dying to hear all about it.

[Angela goes out to the kitchen. In the doorway she nearly collides with Peter about to slip out. Agatha sees out of the corner of her eye.]

AGATHA: Oh, I got that wall map you wanted, Mr. Plummer—I do hope it's big enough.

[She unrolls a schoolroom map of the world while Peter makes his exit.]

THE RETURN

AGATHA: I'm afraid I don't quite understand how you "tie the news in with it" like you said?

PLUMMER: Oh, splendid, yes, bless you. Well, with coloured tape, you see—a drawing pin here, in Australia for instance, and a bright piece of tape from it to the newspaper cutting on the noticeboard alongside saying how they've exploded an atom bomb at Woomera, and another, one, say here in the Greek islands, and another coloured tape to a cutting about the earthquakes. It gives them the picture, you know, the shape.

AGATHA: Oh, I see. And are they interested, do you find?

PLUMMER: They're not! They're not! One just has to keep on trying. I thought we'd get little Shirley Bates to do it for a bit—the whole point is to have them do it themselves.

[*Angela comes back with the tea.*]

PLUMMER: It was a great feature of the Army Education centres during the war. Ah, those were the days.

ANGELA: What, the war?

PLUMMER: In the Army Education Corps. Whatever you wanted for the men, from raffia to documentary films—you just requisitioned it. Gramophone records—do you know, I had three gramophone circles going in one unit? Swing, popular classical, and students. They graduated, Miss Fosdyke, graduated, when they got tired of the records in their own circle.

AGATHA: Milk and three lumps of sugar for Mr. Plummer. (*To Plummer.*) What an interesting war you must have had.

PLUMMER: Well, one had a chance to see what education can do! I had a bunch of Pioneers turning

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

out the most exquisite free-hand brushwork I have ever seen. And the difference it made to those men!
AGATHA: I'm sure it did.

PLUMMER: And talking of that, Mrs. Swithin, I was hoping to ask your husband—I'm starting up a boxing class for the boys—they *will* scrap, you know, and after all it's better than knuckle-dusters and coshes. I was wondering whether Captain Swithin did any boxing in his P.O.W. camp—I know a lot of the boys did, to keep fit, you know. I was going to ask him if he'd give us an evening, now and then.

[*Agatha and Angela exchange the swiftest possible glance.*]

ANGELA: No, I'm afraid—

PLUMMER: Just the odd evening when he'd nothing better on—

ANGELA: Oh, lord, I've suddenly remembered. I'm going to have to dash out as soon as I've had a cup, if you'll forgive me, Mr. Plummer. I've—er—got to get—some fish for tonight before the shops close.

PLUMMER: Oh, I say—are you open here on Saturday afternoons? I must keep an eye on the time, then—I do want to get some enamel, I'm doing the canteen chairs myself.

ANGELA: Couldn't I get it for you?

PLUMMER: Oh, thanks, no, I've got the colour in my eye, but I couldn't describe it. What I did want to talk to you about, though, Miss Fosdyke, is the Club time-table when we re-open. What with the boxing class for the boys, we shall have to lay on something else for the girls on Fridays to correspond, and I wondered if you could just conceivably manage just an hour on Fridays?

ANGELA: Oh, no, Mr. Plummer, that's my aunt's one free night—

THE RETURN

PLUMMER: Only just from half-past six to half-past seven. I've seen you doing such exquisite needle-work while you were waiting to open the canteen after a lecture, and—it's wicked of me to ask you, I know, but—just the one hour for elementary embroidery.

ANGELA: But you're doing three afternoons a week at the Welfare Clinic—

AGATHA (*bushing Angela with a gesture*): Do you really feel elementary embroidery is what they need, Mr. Plummer?

[*The door bell rings.*]

ANGELA: Whoever—?

[*She goes to answer it.*]

PLUMMER: It's so difficult to think of anything else.

AGATHA: I'll come, of course.

ANGELA: Oh, please, Peter'll be so—

[*She opens the door, to reveal the Chaplain.*]

ANGELA: Father Blake!

[*Agatha jumps up, and hurries to the door as he comes in.*]

CHAPLAIN: Mrs. Swithin—

AGATHA: Father Blake! But how unbelievably delightful!

CHAPLAIN: I've been in London all day attending a stupid meeting for the Bishop, and I'd sworn to myself I'd look you up. I do hope you don't mind, Mrs. Swithin—I just had an hour before my train—

ANGELA: It's terribly nice of you. I'll just get another cup.

[*She goes into the kitchen.*]

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

AGATHA: Mr. Plummer, this is Father Blake, the Chaplain of the convent where I used to live. Mr. Plummer is the warden of a settlement in the East End where I help with the Youth Club.

CHAPLAIN: } How do you do?
PLUMMER: }

AGATHA: You've no idea how delighted I am to see you. Come and sit down, Father.

CHAPLAIN: Pity I haven't time to run down and see your club.

PLUMMER: Next time you're in town, Padre. That's a date. We're strictly undenominational, of course, but we're always delighted to welcome other workers in the—er—battlefield.

CHAPLAIN: I just had an hour before my train—Battlefield it is. We've a lot of Irish up in my part of the world. All they want in a club is dancing.

PLUMMER: Folk, or ballet?

CHAPLAIN: Just Yank, I'm afraid. But we give it 'em.

PLUMMER: And you're so right! You're so right! And slip in a tiny bit of something better in between so that they hardly notice, eh? What a racket, eh, Padre?

CHAPLAIN: What a racket.

[*Angela comes back with another cup.*]

AGATHA: Well, tell me all the news, Father.

CHAPLAIN: News? Well, the Bishop made his annual Visitation last month. Sister Immelda in the Convent laundry celebrated her golden jubilee. . . . You know there's never any news.

AGATHA: I know. I never thought I should live to be so anxious to hear some!

CHAPLAIN: Miss Fosdyke's letters tell me you've made a real home for her, Mrs. Swithin.

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ANGELA: We love having her. Milk, Father Blake?

CHAPLAIN: But no sugar. Thanks. And is the club your main interest now?

PLUMMER: Oh, there's the Welfare Clinic, too——

ANGELA (*at Plummer*): And the Hospital Libraries on Wednesdays——

AGATHA: Do tell Father Blake about the club, Mr. Plummer.

PLUMMER: Well, we do our best, we do our best. And Miss Fosdyke is a real *godsend*, Padre, if it isn't poaching on your preserves to say so. I always say it's a wonderful thing for our young people to see real peace in action, they have so little of it in their own dreadful little lives, poor dears; and Miss Fosdyke is so *still*, it's always making me jump when I come on her not expecting to.

AGATHA: Oh, dear, Peter and Angela are always saying that. I do try, but it's difficult to do things like cutting up sandwiches really noisily.

CHAPLAIN: And what sort of fare do you give them, Plummer—apart from Miss Fosdyke's sandwiches?

PLUMMER: Well, we do rather pride ourselves on our handicrafts. And then there's music, and art-appreciation, so vital, and nature films. I'm afraid Mrs. Swithin thinks it's all rather unimportant——

ANGELA: Oh, now, that's not fair——

CHAPLAIN: It sounds most useful.

PLUMMER: In the long run, I do think, you know—in the long run. In our humble way, in a district like that, we're really the final bulwark against Communism. I see the Youth Centre—if you'll excuse a military simile in an ex-soldier—I see it as a fort, defending a treasure of lovely things, and making little sallies to spread the knowledge of them in the desert.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

CHAPLAIN: You put everything you've got into it. I can see that.

PLUMMER: Well, well. One must justify one's existence somehow.

AGATHA (*with impassioned violence*): No!

[*The others turn and stare at her.*]

I'm sorry. Just—just the expression—I'm——

ANGELA: You know what, you two must have lots to say to each other, and if Father Blake's got to get a train—why don't you come out now, Mr. Plummer, while I go for the fish. I'll drop you at the paint shop, and you could come back and talk about the new club schedule without having to rush.

[*She goes to her bedroom as she talks.*]

CHAPLAIN: Oh, you mustn't let me——

PLUMMER: Not another word, it's arranged, it's arranged. You have a cosy gossip about the good old—I mean, a cosy gossip. Me and the Missus'll nip out and do the shopping.

[*Angela comes back pulling on a coat. Plummer offers her his arm with a flourish.*]

PLUMMER: Quite the old married couple. Cheer ho for now, then. Shan't be long.

[*Angela takes him out.*]

CHAPLAIN: That's a good man, Miss Fosdyke.

AGATHA: I know.

CHAPLAIN: I know the type. Humble, sincere, selfless. The kind of fool our fathers used to call

THE RETURN

"Innocent." Of such are the kingdom of heaven. Which is one reason, I suppose, why so many people go elsewhere.

AGATHA: Father, can you remember the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy?

CHAPLAIN: Out of the Catechism? "To feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to harbour the harbourless, to succour the imprisoned, to visit the sick, and to bury the dead."

AGATHA (*joining in at the end*): "To visit the sick and to bury the dead." They're not works of mercy any more. They're the work of the municipal council.

CHAPLAIN: There's no harm in jogging the council's elbow.

AGATHA: Charity is a dangerous drug to hide the symptoms of a disease that it's the State's business to cure.

CHAPLAIN (*whistling softly*): You have been learning fast. But then what, in the name of fortune, are you doing in Plummer's *galère*?

AGATHA: One does the obvious. I failed as Mary, I presumed I was cut out for Martha, but—the virtue seems to have gone out of charity. The poor are entitled to be fed and clothed and housed and hospitalled and buried. It's not the same thing as saying that Christians are under an individual obligation to see it done. Charity is as unreal as Brattlesleigh, Father.

CHAPLAIN: I see.

AGATHA: And it's no good. I can't—I cannot—go on!

CHAPLAIN: The Welfare Clinic——?

AGATHA: A properly run, official place. The professionals can do my work in half the time, and the babies don't cry when *they* weigh them.

CHAPLAIN: Oh, you good women with your spiritual

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

pride! What does it matter if the virtue has gone out of it? What does it matter if two-thirds of it are a waste of time and the rest is probably a mistake? Can't you do the job for its own sake, and forget its significance and yours?

AGATHA: I've wasted so much already—wasted three-quarters of the only life God's ever going to give me.

CHAPLAIN: Is that a good reason for banking so much on your own reactions now?

AGATHA: What else have I got? All right, if I'm wrong—please God I'm wrong! All right, advise me. Oh, what shall I do? Tell me what to do.

CHAPLAIN: You're under no vow of obedience now.

AGATHA: Can't you see I want to be told? I'll do whatever you say—whatever you say.

CHAPLAIN: It's your life, not mine.

AGATHA: You can't say that. I'm too old to find myself with a life of my own and to be expected to plan it for myself. I don't know what to do.

CHAPLAIN: Think how lucky you are only to have found that out now, instead of suffering from it for sixty years like most people.

AGATHA: Atrophied, I suppose—the muscles one ought to be able to arrange one's own life with. Set an old hen loose in the jungle, and expect it to fly. . . . It wouldn't matter, really, whether you were right or wrong—I shouldn't blame you afterwards—if you would be so very kind as just to make some suggestions as to what I should do.

CHAPLAIN: Odd, this. You took the new world as you found it, after the first shock, with more ease than I ever thought you would. I don't believe it's what you've met, out here, that's troubling you: it's something you brought out with you. What is it?

AGATHA: It's knowing I've only got ten, fifteen

THE RETURN

years to do something with, after all; and wondering—wondering if I can endure to live so long.

CHAPLAIN: Time! Shall I tell you there's no such thing? But there is, while it lasts; there is. . . . Forget that God ever gave *you* time to spend or waste, forget that *you* were ever born, that anyone ever christened any baby "Agatha Fosdyke."

AGATHA: Lose myself? But I tried to lose myself.

CHAPLAIN: *You* tried to lose *yourself*! All day and half the night, for years and years, thinking how you could lose yourself, looking for the kingdom within you. Oh great, dangerous doctrine! The kingdom within you.

AGATHA: Don't. Don't. I hadn't the gift, I hadn't the grace—well, but I've left all that behind.

CHAPLAIN: Then look at the kingdom you're in. There'll be time enough for heaven in eternity. Why did that phrase of Plummer's frighten you: "justifying one's existence"?

AGATHA: Because I can't.

CHAPLAIN: Contemplation has lost its consolation for you, and charity has lost its virtue. Forget the virtue, woman: charity remains.

AGATHA: Blind, motiveless, purposeless, probably useless charity.

CHAPLAIN: The dictionary meaning of the word "charity" is "love." Your trouble is that you don't love your neighbour.

AGATHA: Oh, I—

CHAPLAIN: Oh, you've been gently bred, it would distress you to cause anyone a moment's pain. That's not the same thing.

AGATHA: What I meant was that nowadays there doesn't seem—

CHAPLAIN: Bosh. I said bosh, rot, rubbish. "Nowa-

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

days." There's always been a "nowadays" to blame, there always will be.

AGATHA: You said yourself the change since nineteen thirteen had been too great——

CHAPLAIN: I said you've brought your trouble into nowadays with you. And you know it.

AGATHA: It seems more difficult than it did.

CHAPLAIN: Because there's no "merit" in feeding sandwiches and half-baked culture to a State-cared-for and State-educated kid? *You* get no consolation from seeing the one that's lonely in the factory finds some good heartening noise and company here. That terrifying Plummer, wasting his precious years and trying to justify his existence with raffia work, *he's* warmed and heartened every decade or so by some stupid eyes lighting up at the work of their own clumsy fingers, with bright, lovely, human pride—because Plummer loves his neighbours. It's a thing you've never done.

AGATHA: Don't say that. . . . If you think it's that I want the reward, the satisfaction—I don't. I don't. I can work without that, if I only have the purpose—I can! If only I could find it! If only——

CHAPLAIN: You won't find it here, or anywhere like this. You might have known. If you had the purpose *this* life needs, you'd have wanted to teach, or nurse, or serve the poor in one of a hundred other Orders, thirty-six years ago. Character may develop, a temperament doesn't change that much. . . .

AGATHA: So I was born just short of the love of God, and without the love of man? . . . Do you realise what you're saying to me?

CHAPLAIN: Now, you mustn't make too much of that——

AGATHA: Not make too much of it? I who thought everything would be all right if I could just find the

THE RETURN

right thing to do! What does it matter what I find to do? Without the love of God or man. And it's true. It explains the awful, empty, purposeless—it explains why I couldn't put my—*heart*—in anything.

CHAPLAIN: Miss Fosdyke—

AGATHA: Why I shall never find anything to put my *heart* into. I need hardly have bothered to start out on a new life so late. I need hardly have bothered to live so long at all.

[The door-bell rings, Agatha is overwrought. The Chaplain presses her shoulder to keep her in her chair.]

CHAPLAIN: I'll go.

[He hesitates when he gets to the door, looking back at her anxiously; but he opens it, to admit Plummer.]

PLUMMER: Well? Nice chat? Thanks, Padre. I bet you didn't leave the Bishop with a shred of character to his name. Look (*showing paint pot*), terra absolutely cotta. Oh, I never got a brush. Would you believe it. Well, I'll knock off one from the decorators. God helps those who help themselves, eh, Padre?

AGATHA: Mr. Plummer, I'm sorry—I shan't be helping you at the club any more.

PLUMMER: You——? Oh, now, look here, Padre, I take that a bit hard. I dare say you're short of helpers too, but Miss Fosdyke is doing invaluable work at the Centre—

AGATHA: I'm not. I'm wasting—my useless time.

PLUMMER: Oh, now, really, Padre——!

AGATHA: It's not your work that's a waste of time. It's me. I am no use to God or man. Useless, utter waste.

Curtain

Scene 3

The Swithius' flat. Some weeks later.

It is night. In a mixture of moon and firelight, Agatha, in her dressing-gown, is pacing slowly about the room—not in any hysterical agitation, but rather as one might go for a long walk through the streets at night while trying to work something out. Her bedroom door is open, and when her quartering of the living-room brings her opposite it she goes through it and after a moment comes back again with the same measured tread. She is quite unconscious of her surroundings, just as—if she were in the streets—she would find it difficult to tell you where she had been. A clock strikes two without her noticing. Her inability to reach a conclusion is distressing her, and her pacing becomes more agitated. She stops, to take a grip on herself. After a moment she shakes her head with a sigh, fishes a rosary out of her dressing-gown pocket, and kneels down wherever she happens to be. After another moment or two the beads stop slipping through her fingers; and then quite suddenly she breaks down, burying her head in her arms on the seat near her, sobbing.

In a little while we hear stifled laughter approaching. Agatha starts and raises her head, listening.

ANGELA (*off*): No, darling. No. Not out here—

PETER (*off*): Stand still, woman. Angela! I'll sue you—

[Agatha gets to her feet swiftly and hurries to her bedroom, just as Angela gets the "front" door unlocked.]

(*Off.*) For restitution of conjugal rights—

THE RETURN

[They are now both in the open doorway, as Agatha's door softly closes. They are in evening dress, Peter trying to kiss her and she to get him in and the door shut first. They are neither of them at all drunk, but both relaxed and liberated.]

ANGELA: You can't have conjugal rights on the landing.

[He kisses her as she gets the door shut.]

Sh! You'll wake Aunt Agatha!

[Peter makes a very loud kissing noise in the air, and then kisses her again.]

PETER: Kissing my wife.

ANGELA: Uxorious beast.

PETER: Let's elope.

ANGELA: I can't. I love my husband.

PETER: You should have thought of that sooner. You've been leading me on all the evening.

ANGELA: I have, haven't I?

PETER: I've got witnesses. You hardly danced with anyone else all night. You never danced with Desmond.

ANGELA: Desmond has horrid hair.

PETER: He has boatloads of money.

ANGELA: Then he should buy a wig.

PETER: You wouldn't dance with Jock.

ANGELA: Jock was drunk. Ringing up total strangers out of the 'phone book and asking them to dance.

PETER: You drove him to it. Angela, I love you.

ANGELA: The wine, the night, the music?

PETER: It's nearly morning, the bands have all gone home—but it's an idea, we'll have one last drink.

[He goes to the cocktail cabinet.]

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

ANGELA: Oh, darling, no—bed! We'll wake her.

PETER: We'll muffle our oars. I want to drink a toast.

ANGELA: Oh, well. It's been such a lovely party.

PETER: It's still a party. We've got rid of the dead-heads, that's all.

ANGELA: What a new dress will do!

PETER: You can get rid of the dress, too.

[*He brings drinks.*]

A toast.

ANGELA: A toast.

[*He raises his glass, feels foolish, and giggles. She giggles, too. They both take a sip in silence and they draw together, still holding their glasses and dancing very slowly, humming.*]

What a pity—

PETER: Mm? What?

ANGELA: One can't live in sin with one's husband. Sin is such a bond. . . . I've learned such a lot from Aunt Agatha.

PETER: About sin?

ANGELA: About what doesn't matter.

PETER: Nothing matters.

ANGELA: Practically nothing. All the things people get in such a tizz about—"Just history," she says, "very interesting." "Money?" she says. "What the hell."

PETER: In so many words.

ANGELA: In so many thoughts. "Success?" she says. "What for, dear?"

PETER: Of course! (*He stops dancing.*) That's the toast: Aunt Agatha!

ANGELA: Aunt Agatha!

[*They drink towards her room.*]

THE RETURN

PETER: Because, by God, she can take it. Angela.
. . . Know something?

ANGELA: What?

PETER: The way you've mucked in on this . . . bringing her back to life. . . I knew you'd put up with her, I mean, but I'd never have thought you'd make such a thing of it. I—was a bit scared you'd feel she was another flop—another chronic misfit.

ANGELA: Shall I tell *you* something?

PETER: Not if it's horrid, darling—it's been such a good party.

ANGELA: Half this "misfit" nonsense has been my fault. You be the kind of peg you bloody well want and the hell with the shape of the hole.

PETER: As Aunt Agatha would say.

ANGELA: As Aunt Agatha would say.

[*He kisses her.*]

PETER: We could really go to bed anytime, now.

ANGELA: Mm. Let's.

[*They go together towards their room.*]

Oh, lights, darling.

[*Angela goes into her room, Peter puts out the lights. As he passes Agatha's door he blows a kiss.*]

PETER (*very American*): T'anks, pal.

[*He follows Angela, closing the door audibly. There is a moment's pause, and then Agatha's door opens a crack; assured that the others have gone, Agatha comes in in the moonlight and crosses to the seat by which she collapsed,*

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

and retrieves her rosary. She goes back towards her room with it, but as she reaches the door she stops, and suddenly swings round turning her back on it with revulsion. She stuffs her rosary back in her pocket, and looks about her with the panic, claustrophobic boredom of insomnia. She picks up a book and puts it down without looking at the title, and absent-mindedly picks up a silver candlestick standing near it, merely because it is the next thing to hand. Feeling she is holding it she looks at it in surprise, and then an idea strikes her. She puts it down and crosses to the kitchen door. The light goes on in the kitchen for a moment, and then goes out as she comes back with cleaning things. She is about to turn on the light in the living room, but after a glance at the Swithins' door she crosses to the fire instead and gently pokes it up. She collects various silver objects from about the room, and settles down in the firelight to clean them. She rubs rhythmically and becomes more relaxed. Suddenly the telephone rings. Agatha starts and is about to dive for her room when she realises the silver is all over the place. She comes back and stuffs everything she can get out of sight in frantic haste, and at last grabs the telephone.]

AGATHA: Hullo! . . . I beg your pardon? . . . Who did you want—this is Fremantle one nine five three. . . . Angel? Oh, you do mean Mrs. Swithin, yes, just a—

[Angela, in night things, hurries in.]

It's for you, dear, a man. He sounds rather distraught, I hope it isn't—

ANGELA: Darling, I'm sorry. Hullo, who is it?

[She takes the telephone from Agatha's hand as Peter appears. He turns on the light.]

THE RETURN

Jock! My God, Jock, I'll assassinate you. (*To Peter.*) It's Jock, the bloody fool, still asking people to dance with him. Jock! Shut up! Now, you listen to me: that sort of thing stopped being funny three hours ago, it stopped being funny fifteen years ago, I doubt if it was even funny in nineteen twenty where you belong, you great, gay old—gaby! You—
PETER: Here.

[*He takes the receiver.*]

Jock! You—

[*He opens his mouth but his eye falls on Agatha. He stops, hamstrung, trying to think of another word.*]

Some other time.

[*He hangs up.*]

ANGELA: Half past two. Oh, Aunt, darling—

AGATHA: It's all right, it didn't wake me.

ANGELA: You were—oh, Peter!—we *didn't* wake you when we came in? We whispered—

AGATHA: No, no, my dear, I—just happened to be awake, when it rang.

ANGELA: Half past two.

PETER: Lord, how sober one does feel.

ANGELA: A hot drink. That's the thing. The fire's not bad. Fuss it up a bit, darling, and you two cuddle round it while I go and brew something up.

AGATHA: Oh, no, Angela, don't bother—

ANGELA: It's the only thing, now. Otherwise none of us will ever sleep again. Sit down and get warm. It won't take a moment.

[*She goes out to the kitchen. Agatha buries the half-cleaned silver more carefully while Peter puts coal on the fire.*]

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

PETER: When I get hold of Jock. . . . It wasn't that kind of party, anyhow. A little ordinary, human happiness, with things looking as if they made some sort of pattern for once . . . he has to make it look as if we were just all drunk.

[*He clatters the fire-irons viciously.*]

AGATHA: Peter . . . Peter, *you're* not really at all satisfied with *your* place in the shape of things, are you?

PETER (*quickly, for her sake*): Me? Good heavens, yes. Things are pretty good, you know, all round. I'm all right, you don't want to worry about me. Did I sound depressed? Well, it's half past two in the morning, being dug out of bed like that— Anybody's liable to sound a bit cheesed off. Lord, no, I've got nothing against the shape of things. Pretty good, by and large.

[*In his anxiety not to let her find anything depressing he overdoes it so that the gaiety sounds quite grisly and utterly unconvincing.*]

AGATHA: I didn't mean the shape of things in themselves, of course they don't matter, I meant you, you as a person, in them. Or perhaps just you as a person, in a vacuum.

PETER (*brightly*): Lord, no. Oh, I was a bit unsettled, after the war, but that's all over and done. Sound as a bell, bright as a button, merry as a cricket; right as a trivet, whatever that may mean.

AGATHA (*giving it up*): I'm sorry. Sometimes it might do one good to be able to talk about things with someone else who. . . . There, forget about it. It's just the oddness of sitting here together in the middle of the night.

THE RETURN

[*She looks about for something to do with her hands, and takes up some sewing.*]

PETER (*genuinely*): It's true, you know. There's no need to put on the old act for you really. I'm all right. I *can* cope.

[*But the falsity of his original act was too obvious. She doesn't believe him now.*]

AGATHA: Yes, of course.

PETER: I *don't* have to make a nonsense out of everything, any more than you do—things are all right. They're all right.

[*Angela comes in from the kitchen with hot drinks. She is still stirring them as she hands them out.*]

ANGELA: Do you suppose poison acts more quickly if you take it hot?

PETER: What?

ANGELA: I was thinking how nice it would be to take some boiling arsenic round to Jock.

PETER: And I was just thinking how young and innocent you both looked—secret cocoa parties in the dorm., or High Jinks at St. Ursula's.

[*She makes a schoolgirl face at him.*]

ANGELA (*to Agatha*): Not sewing, in the middle of the night!

AGATHA: Oh, just automatically, for something to do.

[*She kicks the cleaning things further under the seat.*]

ANGELA: Funny thing, I never feel the need to *make* things to do. I'm always pretending I want to take a job, but I really only do it to annoy Peter because he likes to play the Breadwinner.

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

PETER: Oh? In that case I think I'll send you out to work tomorrow.

ANGELA (*to Agatha*): I was so glad when you gave up that ghastly youth club stuff, though. That idiotic Plummer character, with his fretwork smile.

PETER: Oh, I suppose they mean well, that type.

ANGELA: Nonsense. They just dream up a crusade for bird-watching or raffia mats or tea and buns for juvenile delinquents because they feel they've got to justify their existence somehow.

[Agatha gets up suddenly, but after a moment gives a purpose to her movement by pretending to take more sugar from the tray behind Angela.]

What's the—oh, sorry, darling. Yes, I suppose you can't expect them to recognise that some people's existence is just basically not justifiable.

[Agatha puts down her cup, because her hands are shaking.]

PETER: Or to realise that there's no need to bother, poor things.

ANGELA: Mm?

PETER: Fretting about trying to justify themselves. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow," or whatever it is. Old Ma Plummer is just as much an Act of God as a lily, or a thunderstorm, if only he'd stop fashing himself and get on with the job.

[The thought strikes Agatha powerfully, but to the audience it is not yet clear how.]

AGATHA: Peter—an Act of God, you said—

PETER: That's right—something that it's just too bad about but it can't be helped. All right, so

THE RETURN

they're like that. There's nothing to be done about it.
AGATHA: I think—I'll—finish this in my room,
perhaps——

[*She takes up the cup, steadying it firmly, staring at Peter.*]

ANGELA: Good idea, darling, get into bed and finish
it then. Sure you wouldn't like a hot-water bottle?
AGATHA: Yes. I mean no, thank you, Angela.

[*She goes, quickly.*]

PETER: Did she look a bit odd? Did I say something?
ANGELA: Did you? No. . . . Well, except that
Plummer was a dead loss.

PETER: I didn't. I said, it was nothing to worry
about if one was.

ANGELA: Oh, she just wanted to get back to bed.
She has been quiet, though, you know, since she
packed in that youth club thing. She hasn't been
out trying to find something else. I was hoping that
was a good sign.

PETER: That priest from the convent. My God,
Angela, do you suppose he deliberately made her
feel——

ANGELA: Of course not. Now, don't be an idiot
and worry, Peter, there's nothing on earth to worry
about.

PETER: They couldn't get her to go back inside,
could they?

ANGELA: Nobody could make her do anything.

PETER: But if she *wanted* to go back, deliberately shut
herself up inside again, in that world . . . all that
silence, remember? and not knowing what was
going on outside, not seeing anyone, doing the same
thing day after day, round and round, month after

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

month, with the same faces going round in circles, and time, and time, and time never going on——

ANGELA: Stop it! Shut up! Now listen, Peter. No one is going back inside anywhere. No one. She was tired, and she may have looked at you a bit oddly. She was probably half asleep. Peter——

PETER: All right, all right, I was only thinking. Of course she wouldn't go back. She'd be more likely to chuck herself in the river. No, she's all right. Look at the way she's taken the world. If there's nothing the matter with the world, hell, there's nothing the matter with anything. She's all right.

ANGELA: Of course she is. Come on, darling: bed.

[She collects the cups and puts the tray inside the kitchen door, plumps up the cushions, tidies away Agatha's sewing.]

PETER: Yes. We've giving ourselves the willies, dithering about out here in the middle of the night. She *did* look odd, though. Do you think you'd better look in——just, I don't know, say goodnight, or something, to make sure?

ANGELA: She's finished her drink and is half asleep by now. Relax, Peter, and get to bed or all the good *your* hot drink has done you——

[She has come, in her automatic tidying, upon the cleaning things and the silver.]

What on earth——

PETER: What?

ANGELA: Nothing, darling. Nothing. Go on to bed. Just absent-mindedness.

PETER: What's the matter?

ANGELA: Nothing. Just some cleaning things Aunt Agatha must have left this morning. It's so unlike her. And anyhow, I could swear——

THE RETURN

PETER: Swear what?

ANGELA: I could have sworn before we went out this——

[She handles some piece of silver she might be expected to notice if it were moved or missing.]

Oh, what the hell. I'm beginning to get in a tizz too, now. Go on—shoo. I'm coming.

[She turns out the light and follows Peter into their bedroom, closing the door. After a moment Agatha's door opens softly again. The light is on in her bedroom. She is dressed. She crosses the living room to a desk and takes a sheet of paper and pencil and goes back to her room, moving swiftly and quietly. We see her shadow in the open doorway as she stoops at a table, writing. She comes back into the living room, props a note up on the mantelpiece, goes back to her room, and comes out in a moment with coat and hat which she is pulling on as she comes, and handbag. She turns out the light in her room, but leaves the door as it is, wide open. She hesitates for a second outside the Swithins' room as if regretfully, and then very quickly and quietly lets herself out of the "front" door. As the "front" door closes, Angela, without her dressing-gown, comes out from her room (in which the light is not on). Peter is heard protesting as she appears.]

PETER (off): For heaven's sake, Angela, now what?

ANGELA: The dashed alarm clock—I forgot it. I'll never wake in time to get you to work tomorrow without it.

[She crosses to the kitchen, without bothering with lights in either room, and comes back winding a big kitchen-type alarm clock. She goes close to the living room clock to see

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

the dial to set it by, and as she turns back to her own room notices Agatha's door wide open. After a second she crosses to it, listening.]

(Softly.) Aunt Agatha? Are you awake? Aunt—

[She turns the light on inside the room. She comes out again; hurries across to the kitchen, and turns the light on in there to look; turns on the lights in the living room.]

Peter. Peter, come here.

PETER *(off)*: Good God, what a night—

ANGELA: Peter, she's not here. She's gone. There was something wrong. She's gone.

[Peter comes in, pulling on his dressing-gown.]

PETER: Gone?

ANGELA: That wasn't quiet. That was desperation.

PETER: Gone, at half past two in the morning?

ANGELA: Peter, I can hear what you said. You said that some people were such a dead loss there was nothing to be done about it. Nothing to be done about it. . . .

[They stare at each other, frightened.]

Curtain

ACT THREE

Scene: The Convent parlour.

Time: It is late afternoon.

In the distance the nun's voices can be heard singing the Salve Regina.

The room is empty. A tea-tray with a padded cosy is on the table. The singing ends, and there is a pause. Then simultaneously the two doors open. The Prioress comes in, unhurriedly, right. The Chaplain, with a great bustling, left. The Chaplain is dressed in cassock and biretta. They both stop as they see each other, and look about the room.

CHAPLAIN: But— isn't she here?

PRIORRESS: I thought so. I had a telegram—

CHAPLAIN: The Sister Portress told me. She said she had arrived. She must have gone into the Chapel. She would have remembered—Thursday afternoon, Benediction at four.

PRIORRESS: Did you notice her in the public part as you came out?

CHAPLAIN: No, I came straight through from the Sacristy. What did she say in her wire?

PRIORRESS: Just the time that she would be arriving, and the request that I'd see her. You saw her, I thought you said, recently.

CHAPLAIN: I did. I did. I gave her advice. No, not advice, even: abuse. Habit, and ill-temper; and all the cock-sure conviction of the psychiatrist who's read the text-books on applied psychology. Blithering idiot!

PRIORRESS: You didn't advise her to come back?

CHAPLAIN: No, no. But from what I did say she must have decided it was the only thing to do. She's taken her time, thought it over, and decided I was

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right. She's a woman with such an infernally logical mind! Idiot. Idiot.

PRIORESS (*after a pause, takes off the cosy and feels the tea-pot*): Your tea's getting cold, Father.

CHAPLAIN: And you can *not* soothe my conscience with first aid applications of hot sweet tea!

PRIORESS: It would go against my own to give it you cold. And, by the way, Father, I've been thinking: the Refectory Sister would have time to make your tea *after* Benediction instead of leaving it here stewing for a quarter of an hour every Thursday if we could arrange——

CHAPLAIN: I suppose she *is* still in the Chapel? She might have——have thought better of the whole thing, and just left.

PRIORESS: I hardly think Agatha would have become as mercurial as all that. It took her thirty-six years to reach her last decision. But I am glad of this opportunity, Father; as you are here, perhaps you would be good enough to deal with the whole thing? I did ring Father Augustine as soon as I got the telegram, but they told me he was away, giving a Retreat at Grayshott. And of course in any case as our Chaplain——

CHAPLAIN: It's my headache? I did want to see her. I should have found something better to say. The world must be full of women who feel as she does, it must always have been full of them. Someone must in all these aeons have thought of something better to say to them than that. But she's *your* headache, Reverend Mother, and don't forget it! You're the Prioress of this convent, not me!

PRIORESS: Well, yes. But Agatha Fosdyke is not one of my nuns. That is very kind of you, then, Father, if you will see her. I'll ring the Presbytery for you and tell them you will be delayed a little.

THE RETURN

[Turns towards door, right.]

CHAPLAIN (*staying her*): Hey! Reverend Mother! You're scared! I believe you're scared.

PRIRESS: Why, what of?

CHAPLAIN: Of an unpleasant emotional scene that is going to take place in the next half hour in this room! Don't you deny it! "Oh, Father Augustine will deal with it"—but Father Augustine is at Grayshott, wise man. "Well then, Father Blake will deal with it. He's always making scenes and getting into tantrums himself, it won't upset him." Eh? Mm?

PRIRESS: Well, you saw her recently, Father. You said—

CHAPLAIN: And that is straightforward blackmail. Because I was fool enough to admit in your hearing that something I said to her was a mistake, I'm to have the whole problem on my hands. Well, I was talking to myself. Eavesdropping and blackmail! Oh, no, you don't get out of it that way.

PRIRESS: I meant that she is after all in the world. Whatever her trouble is, it must be something you would know more about than I.

CHAPLAIN: Even that isn't true. She's been looking at my world today through eyes more like yours than mine. Have *you* no humanity, I wonder? Agatha Fosdyke is—she was when I last saw her—in very great distress of mind. You knew her as a child, her parents were kind to you as a young girl, she was your Sister here in this house for many years, and under your care . . . but Father Augustine or the Chaplain will be able to cope with her now.

PRIRESS: Father, you know I can't help her.

CHAPLAIN: No. But it might be nice to find you looking as if you'd like to. You needn't worry. Miss Fosdyke was well brought up and she has spent many

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years schooling herself: she won't make a scene in any sort of bad taste, such as throwing herself on her knees and imploring your help. I hope.

[The door, left, opens quietly, and Agatha comes in.]

AGATHA: Reverend Mother—it's good of you to see me.

[They exchange the Convent embrace. Agatha looks round.]

AGATHA: Tea for the Chaplain after Benediction on Thursdays! I'm glad you're still here, Father. I hoped I might see you.

CHAPLAIN: They told me on the door that you were here.

PRIORESS: Do sit down, won't you, Agatha? It is nice to see you again. If Father Blake can stay for a little, I will just go and ring the Presbytery for him.

CHAPLAIN: Now, there's no need—

PRIORESS: Oh, yes, indeed, Father: it's no trouble. I know you always have to hurry back on Thursdays. We must let them know.

CHAPLAIN: Well, I shan't be staying long: it's you that Miss Fosdyke has come to see.

[The Prioress goes out right.]

AGATHA: She's afraid!

CHAPLAIN: She's human.

AGATHA: Poor Margaret! One forgets how quiet it was. For months I've felt that even walls and floors never quite stayed still. I never thought I should live so to hate music! If only wireless could have stopped at what it was invented for: picking up distress signals from ships at sea!

THE RETURN

CHAPLAIN: None of it—out there—improves on acquaintance?

AGATHA: Only the things that were there all along, to my mind—the parks and the countryside. And even that, you know. . . . There is a tree in the garden here, a tall, rather scrawny willow: I used to watch it turning from grey-green to silver; then after a windy night in the early autumn to see the grass white like seagulls' feathers with its elegant long leaves. When you've got plenty of trees you don't really notice them.

CHAPLAIN (*nice*ly): A bit like the sailor, aren't you? When you're at sea you're homesick, and when you're at home you're seasick. No, no—I'm not bullying you! You know that what I said to you the other day was very stupid, don't you?

AGATHA: No.

CHAPLAIN: But it was. There is nothing on this earth so dangerous as putting out a finger to touch another human being's life.

AGATHA: It's your job, Father.

CHAPLAIN: Then we should get danger-money— You've been brooding over it.

AGATHA: Thinking about it. It was quite right, of course.

CHAPLAIN: A thing may be perfectly true in one specialised sense and have no earthly bearing on practical life.

AGATHA: No, I mean right as well as true, right that you should say it.

CHAPLAIN: Right, right; there you go—what right have you to suppose that I'm right? *I'm* not supposed to be infallible. I'm an impetuous ass—and you know it.

AGATHA: It's perfectly logical. After all, if a bird doesn't use its wings or a reptile its legs for long

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enough, they weaken and shrink and wither away, don't they? I was here a long time, not using those muscles—even if I was born with them.

CHAPLAIN: It's a question of temperament. The mystical or the active: you have one or the other. No, no, I didn't mean quite that, you mustn't think——

AGATHA: It's all right, Father. I should do what I mean to do now, whatever you said.

CHAPLAIN: Reverend Mother tried to get Father Augustine to be here today.

AGATHA: Father Augustine?

CHAPLAIN: Spiritually he's better qualified to advise you than either of us.

AGATHA: It was kind of her to bother; but it's a practical step I'm going to take. Later, Father Augustine's help might be invaluable . . . perhaps.

CHAPLAIN: Something's happened. . . .

[The key is heard and the Prioress comes in, right. She looks at them before speaking.]

PRIORESS: That is all right, Father: Father Clarke will start to hear Confessions for you at six, and you can relieve him when you arrive.

CHAPLAIN: Thank you, Reverend Mother——

PRIORESS: Don't go, Father. You've—you've had a talk to Miss Fosdyke?

AGATHA: Yes. Father Blake's very kind. I went home, Margaret, to Brattesleigh. It's a Government Office now, but I'd had an idea of settling in one of the cottages. Do you remember the little room you used to have, next to Cecilia's, when you stayed with us?

PRIORESS: Yes. It had green and white striped walls, and it looked across the shrubbery to the gazebo. I remember it well.

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AGATHA: It's an extra cloakroom for the typists, now.

PRIORESS: Don't—don't do this, Agatha, don't try and tell me things.

AGATHA: Margaret, I'm sorry! I don't want to spoil your—your peace, your memories—I thought you'd be amused at how little romance I've found, outside.

PRIORESS: I mean, I can't help you, there's nothing I can do.

AGATHA: Of course you can't! If you could, as my nephew Peter would say, "there ought to be a lot of money in it." Though you must know a lot more about what they've made of the world than I did: you've had to read the papers.

PRIORESS: But—there's nothing we can do! We knew, we told you it would be a shock, that things weren't the way you left them, but—you'd have said yourself just not liking the way of the world was no reason for staying in a convent.

AGATHA: Margaret—

PRIORESS: It's no good, it's no good, Agatha! Don't appeal to me.

AGATHA: But—

PRIORESS: Hasn't Father Blake told you? I left you so that he could tell you. . . . You can't come back. Don't say anything for a moment. Don't distress yourself. I can do absolutely nothing. It's been a mistake, perhaps, a terrible mistake, but it's been made, we can't pretend there has been no mistake.

AGATHA: Margaret, please, you must listen to me—

PRIORESS: No, don't, don't. It's humiliating and degrading, you mustn't do it. I tell you, I have no power to take you back. I know what I'm refusing you. When I have to refuse young girls who think they have vocations, even when they have none at

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all it is terrible to have to refuse them even though they don't know and they'll never know what I'm refusing them! But you know. It's not—it's not that you broke your vows, Agatha, you never broke them, they were unbound for you—but you didn't keep them, and how could they be accepted again? Can't you see, even if the Order were willing, Rome could never sanction it. My hands are tied, I have no power——

AGATHA: Father, stop her! Stop it!

PRIORESS: I——

CHAPLAIN: Reverend Mother: I think—she doesn't want to come back. (*There is a long pause.*) I must go and get out of my cassock, and I left everything out in the Sacristy. I'll look in again, before I go.

[*He goes out left and closes the door. There is another silence.*]

AGATHA: I'm sorry, Margaret; I tried to stop you.

PRIORESS: I didn't understand. . . . You're happy, then?

AGATHA: Happy? (*Laughs gently.*) No.

PRIORESS: I thought, when you telegraphed—and Father Blake seemed to think, too, that he had said something when he saw you that had been——

AGATHA: The last straw? In a way, it was.

PRIORESS: Have you changed, then? What is it? I don't understand.

AGATHA: Perhaps no one ever broke your back. Have you ever known the real outer darkness, Margaret?

PRIORESS: Despair? It afflicts us more than the others you know.

AGATHA: If a man could paint and loses both his hands, and his sight so that he can't even see what he

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would paint. . . . No, he could see in his mind's eye. Even a deaf musician can compose great music. A madman, with one tiny lucid cell in his brain that only knows that he is quite, quite mad. There's no describing it—the loss, and the sense of loss, and the utter purposelessness.

PRIORRESS: One comes through it.

AGATHA: No, not some of us. "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth"—and *earth*. I believe—with acceptance, Margaret, with absolutely no experience of belief. And I love my neighbour with duty, Margaret, and absolutely no experience of love. "I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting"—and I look towards death without the experience of any hope. There is for me now and from now on no consolation. And the relief of knowing and accepting that is unspeakable.

PRIORRESS: No one can help.

AGATHA: No one can help. And no one need. It is of absolutely no importance. The ant in the ant-heap, the ant souls in the ant-heap of souls, the ant of unimportance in the whole rolling, peaceful desert of unimportance! It's over, Margaret. For me there's no coming out on the other side. And it doesn't matter.

[They remain for some time in silence. The afternoon has been darkening imperceptibly, and now when the door, left, opens and the Chaplain comes in, he switches on the lights. He has taken off his cassock, and carries his greatcoat and hat.]

CHAPLAIN: . . . Very quiet. She didn't want to come back?

PRIORRESS: No, Father.

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AGATHA: Father Blake is devoured with mortal curiosity.

CHAPLAIN: Mea culpa.

PRIORESS: Yes—why the telegram? Why did you want to come up here and see me, then?

AGATHA: Because I wanted to consult you, and after this week I shall have neither the time nor the money, I'm afraid.

CHAPLAIN: But——

PRIORESS: What about? If you had decided——

AGATHA: My niece.

PRIORESS: The girl who came here to fetch you, with her husband? My dear Agatha, don't you tell me *she* has developed a vocation? I never saw a less likely subject.

AGATHA: Margaret, you must get out of your head the notion that there is a queue of desperate women trying to invade your Enclosure.

PRIORESS: And what would you know about that, Sister Agatha? You only saw the few that got in under my guard. You'd be surprised how many there are! Well, but what about this niece, then?

AGATHA: They've been good to me, she and Peter. The only thing in the whole world that I want to do just now I can't I want—I do want to so very badly—to help them, and I can't. I've hunted high and low for some purpose for my life, and the one and only thing that I must do, which is repay them, I can't. I'm even more lost in their world than they are—how can I help? So I had to come to you.

PRIORESS: To me? But why?

AGATHA: You were Mistress of Novices for a long time. You've had so many young women through your hands. It's your advice I want.

PRIORESS: The problems of pious young novices are

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rather specialised, I'm afraid; scruples and doubts and tiresome little whimsies. I could tell your niece how to cure a trick she has of fidgeting with her hands, and that nervous jar in her voice I noticed, but I fancy you haven't come all this way for that.

AGATHA: You couldn't even cure those unless you had the knack of finding what's behind them.

CHAPLAIN: You haven't only had your novices nonsense to deal with, Reverend Mother. Since you've been Prioress, you've said yourself, you've had problem women of every sort and shape coming into this room. What's the trouble, Miss Fosdyke? And let's hear the oracle.

PRIORESS: And you said such a short time ago how dangerous it was to indulge in giving advice!

AGATHA: Most of the women who've come to you—apart from the ones who've got past your guard—is it the world around them they couldn't deal with?

PRIORESS (*counting on her fingers*): The men they love have died or left them. Their husbands have found someone else. Their children are grown up and don't need them any more. They have great mystical gifts, which they can't develop in the bustle of their homes. They have studied Yoga and Buddhism and Hermetic Occultism and come to the conclusion that we would provide the nearest available equivalent of the proper oriental background. . . . Those are the main classes. Since the end of the war, of course, there have been several who, as far as I could make out, simply couldn't stand queues.

AGATHA: They've been so very good to me, these two. I owe them so much—Angela specially. Another woman in their tiny little flat must have been a great trial.

CHAPLAIN: And she's unhappy?

AGATHA: You've seen them. If it were only that

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they quarrel—well, they make it up again, it isn't that.

CHAPLAIN: I had the impression that she loved him.

AGATHA: She does. (*Sadly.*) Angela, I think, has a great capacity for love. A natural capacity for love.

CHAPLAIN: And still not happy?

AGATHA: It's so strange, they're both of them fighting the world all the time. Even when they quarrel, they're only taking that out on each other. Everything's against them, wars, and economics, and the struggle for success—the whole world and everything that's in it on one side, and the two of them, poor children, on the other.

CHAPLAIN: Heavy odds.

AGATHA: But whatever for? I *don't* understand. I can't help her—I can't see the enemy.

CHAPLAIN: No, no, you wouldn't. And I was afraid to see you sent out against it! . . . But then, she couldn't conceive your enemy either, you know. I doubt if the nightmares of individual purpose and spiritual aridity haunt Mrs. Swithin at all.

AGATHA: But their own war is ruining their lives.

CHAPLAIN: It's a sobering thought that half of us in the battlefield haven't a notion what the fellow beside us is firing at.

AGATHA: They're very young, and they've been good to me, Margaret. I'm leaving their flat, and I thought of you: you must have known such girls as Angela. What have you said to them? Have you ever found anything that helped?

[*The shutter behind the grille is opened.*]

PRIORESS: Forgive me a moment.

[*She goes over to the grille, and a conversation in low tones*

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is carried on. The shutter is closed, and she turns back to the others.]

She's here—your niece.

AGATHA: Angela—here?

PRIORRESS: The Sister Portress just 'phoned through a message. The girl is in a state of excitement, distress, I gather. I've told them to send her in.

AGATHA: I didn't even tell her I was coming here. I left early—very early—this morning. I only left a note telling her not to bother about me for meals. Why should she come—

CHAPLAIN: Perhaps she's developed a vocation after all.

AGATHA: And distressed?

CHAPLAIN: You probably left a trail of some kind. We're all amateur detectives nowadays. If you've disappeared from their flat and caught a train, it's a fair guess this would be where the train went to.

[The door, left, bursts open and Angela comes in. She is in a highly emotional state.]

ANGELA: Aunt Agatha! Please, please, you mustn't do it. Can't you see, it's just my fault, I couldn't make the world seem a good place to you because I'm such a mess myself. It *is* all right really, people *are* happy and things needn't be sordid—it's their fault if they are. You mustn't judge everything by what you've seen of it with us. Please, please give it another chance—

AGATHA: My dear—

ANGELA (*to Chaplain*): Oh, couldn't you help? You know it's—it's natural to live in the ordinary world, you could persuade her, explain to her, you must know people who are happy and making a success of

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it. It's just that Peter and I have let everything get us down so, and we're so mixed up about each other. It's not Peter's fault, it's mine, it was my job, at home all day, and I did try so hard. I can't bear it, to have failed her—— Can't you tell her——

CHAPLAIN: Mrs. Swithin, if you'd just——

[*Angela turns in despair to the Prioress.*]

ANGELA: Even you, you've known her all these years, you know she wasn't happy here before. You can't have her back in there, you can't, it's not Christian—it's——

PRIORESS: Be quiet, my dear; and don't be so silly.

AGATHA: Angela, they wouldn't even *let* me go "back in there."

ANGELA: They wouldn't? Oh! Oh, darling, thank God. But you wanted them to. We did fail you.

AGATHA: Why did it mean so much—for you yourselves?

ANGELA: Because we thought you could take it. We watched you. We know how much more ghastly everything must look for you than it did to us and you were quite calm and still, and so peaceful in the flat it was like having a—oh, I don't know—a tree growing there. You had such peace!

AGATHA: No, Angela——

ANGELA: Oh, you had, you had—you must have had! And I thought if you could take it, so could we, it would be better to stop fighting and hanging on and struggling, and take it, and perhaps get some peace, too, in the end. After the party, when we went to bed, I said, "Go back into the Army, and I don't give a damn if you have to live on your pay for ever, you were supposed to be good at it, maybe you'll even get somewhere—we'll stick at it till you do."

THE RETURN

And he said, "Let's have a kid, and the hell with what it costs," he knew I'd always wanted one so terribly, and we were going to and he was going to find out about the Army, and now it's not true, and even you couldn't take it! Oh, Aunt Agatha, we'd—we'd built things on it! It seemed to matter so!

AGATHA: Angela, dear child: I didn't come back here to be a nun again.

ANGELA: Not to try to?

AGATHA: No.

ANGELA: You—it didn't all seem to be hell and useless to you?

[*There is a pause.*]

AGATHA: No. No. There's nothing whatever the matter with you all but growing pains. Good heavens, the Dark Ages lasted five centuries, and in the first half of this one, you've already learned to fly faster than sound, you've discovered how to watch your hearts beating, to twiddle a knob and hear what they're saying in Yokohama or Peru, or see what they're doing in Sutton Coldfield—and you don't know what to do with it all. Too many Christmas presents; you've made yourselves sick, and frightened yourselves into screaming nightmares with your own jack-in-the-box of an atom bomb. It's all right.

CHAPLAIN: Is it?

AGATHA: I'm not running away from it, Angela.

ANGELA: But in the middle of the night, Aunt Agatha—we were terrified.

AGATHA: Oh, dear, I didn't think you'd know till breakfast time. I—just went for a walk, and into a church that's open all night. There was something I wanted to think out.

ANGELA: But the money—the solicitor? We were trying to trace you all the morning, and I'd just tried

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that Youth Centre when your solicitor rang up and asked Peter to go and see him. If you weren't coming back here, what was all that about the money? (*To Chaplain.*) Did you know about it?

CHAPLAIN: Nothing about any money.

AGATHA: Never mind that now, Angela—

ANGELA: But I do, I don't understand! Your solicitor told Peter you wanted to make over the whole of your annuity to him, every year!

AGATHA: Well, dear, it was family money, and as it was an annuity I couldn't leave it to him when I died, so I thought he might as well have it now. It's not very much, but anything is a help. I worked it all out quite satisfactorily, and I went to see my solicitor as soon as his office was open.

ANGELA: But what did you mean to do?

AGATHA: I'm going to work.

ANGELA: But Aunt Agatha, Peter wouldn't take it! How could you think he would take it? It's—it's hurt him terribly, just when everything looked like making sense and he was pleased because I believed he would be good at his own job that he liked, he says you go and think he's no good either, and you're sorry for me and that's why you wanted him to have it! Of course he wouldn't take it, even if you were coming back here. And as for staying outside and working!

CHAPLAIN: I must say it was rather a slap in the eye with a wet fish for the poor young man.

AGATHA: Well, it was family money, one used to have ideas about not leaving it away from the family. I'm sorry, I thought I ought to try that first.

ANGELA: But if you're not coming back here, why on earth do you want to get rid of it?

AGATHA: It's unearned income, you know, and nowadays that's considered wrong.

THE RETURN

ANGELA: What?

PRIORESS: Are you sure you've really understood about money, Agatha?

AGATHA: Yes, perfectly. Unearned income is taxed very highly—if you have enough of it, it's taxed so that it practically disappears altogether. Everybody puts up with it, and there isn't a revolution over it, so everybody must agree that it's quite right, basically, and that unearned income is a thing you shouldn't really have. Well, I don't need it, luckily, I can work.

ANGELA: Aunt Agatha, what are you going to do with it?

AGATHA: If Peter won't take it, I explained to my solicitor; some of it goes already in tax, of course, and the rest, as it's paid into the trust yearly, my solicitor will simply hand it over to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

ANGELA: *What!*

AGATHA: Conscience money, I believe they call it.

ANGELA: She's mad!

AGATHA: I am *not* mad, it's the obvious and logical thing to do! That's what's the matter with you all nowadays, you're trying to live in two worlds at once, looking over your shoulders all the time, you accept the principles and you won't follow them to their obvious conclusions. I know the old-fashioned convention would have been to give it or leave it to some charity. Why on earth, when hospitals, and the blind, and cripples and orphans and the rest are all the business of the State? Hand it straight over to the Exchequer, and presumably it goes where it's needed most.

ANGELA: You *are* mad. But if that's what you're going to do with it, Peter'll take it and like it.

AGATHA: Good. I'm old-fashioned enough, too, to want to keep it in the family.

ACT THREE

CHAPLAIN: Miss Fosdyke, you're not young.

AGATHA: I can qualify for an old age pension. And (*to Prioress*) look at Sister Immelda, in charge of the Convent laundry. How old is she?

PRIORESS: She must be eighty-two or three.

AGATHA: And good for another ten years. Besides (*to Angela*) if I had the money, you know you tried to make me like bridge-parties and matinées and having my hair done, and all the things women of my age are supposed to like, and I did find them so dull! I've worked it all out; it's the logical thing to do.

ANGELA: Do you know, I don't believe I am going to make Peter take the money? I think I'm going to tell him what you're going to do with it if he doesn't, and I'm going to tell him, I think he can stand on his own ten toes without it? I think that would shake him quite a bit. And do you know, I honestly believe he could.

CHAPLAIN: Good for you!

ANGELA: But, oh heavens! I hate to think of the government getting it!

AGATHA (*to Prioress*): I think that settles what I came up to see you about.

PRIORESS: All the same, Agatha, I'm glad you came.

AGATHA: We must go, Angela. There was a train back I meant to catch, at six-twenty-five.

CHAPLAIN: You haven't told us what you're going to do.

AGATHA: Oh, I've found a room, very clean and cheap, in a little street near where I am going to work, so that I shan't have to waste money on bus fares. I'm going to move over there tomorrow, if that's convenient for you, Angela, so's to be settled in nicely by Monday.

CHAPLAIN: And what's the work? And how and why did you hit on it?

THE RETURN

AGATHA: I think perhaps it's a mistake to go about trying to do good—it might be better just to do something well. (*To Angela.*) You remember you made me come with you to the cinema again the other day? I was very interested in what it said.

ANGELA: What *was* said, darling? It was that Technicolor life of Ivan the Terrible, wasn't it?

AGATHA: Oh, well, you know I always keep my eyes shut during the coloured ones. No, the other man.

ANGELA: Well, there was the Mickey, and the News——

AGATHA: Yes, in the newsreel—the man who talked about exports.

ANGELA: My God! You didn't believe that? But he was a politician!

AGATHA: It sounded very reasonable, to me.

ANGELA: Oh, why did we ever let you out at all?

AGATHA: He simply said the country couldn't buy food or luxuries or afford any leisure because it hadn't any money, and the only way to get any money was by making things and selling them abroad. Really, I can't see anything to stare at in that.

CHAPLAIN: I beg your pardon, but you are practically a *lusus naturae*, you know.

AGATHA: Well, anyhow, I went to the place they call a Labour Exchange, as soon as I'd seen my solicitor, and they found this work for me. It's quite a small factory, where they make the parts for wireless sets. It's a terrible thought, in a way, that one should be perpetuating all that noise, but one can always hope they will mostly be used for ships' radios. They tested me, and found my hands were quite neat and quick; and apparently they do a very large export business. They pay three pounds fifteen shillings a week to start with, and it's all quite satisfactory.

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ANGELA: I don't believe it.

AGATHA: Now don't be a goose, there's nothing to gawk about.

ANGELA: But all this—suddenly, in the middle of last night! Why? Aunt Agatha, when we found you'd gone we were scared it was something Peter had said—

AGATHA: It was.

ANGELA: Oh, God. Don't tell him so! (*To Chaplain.*) He said some damnfool thing about some people not being able to justify their existence—

CHAPLAIN: He did?

AGATHA: No, no, not that. It was the wonderful way he couldn't for the life of him see why they wanted to try. He said people were an Act of God, like the lilies of the field or a thunderstorm. All they had to do was to get on with the job. Living.

CHAPLAIN: How easily we do all find each other's solutions.

ANGELA: But—we wanted you to be happy.

AGATHA: Happy! Happy! What do you all think you are—birds, with bird brains, expecting to be nothing but happy all the time? Human life is larger than happiness. There's room in it for mountains, deserts, pain. There's triumph as well as success.

CHAPLAIN: Yes.

AGATHA: And there's more in love than emotion and affection. Yes, and more than being kind, and feeling happy in being kind. Love is acceptance. And I accept life.

PRIORRESS: You've found that life is your vocation, Agatha.

AGATHA: I accept it. . . . I do accept!

Curtain

AS LONG AS THEY'RE
HAPPY

by

VERNON SYLVAINÉ

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As Long As They're Happy was presented by Linnit and Dunfee, Ltd., at the Garrick Theatre, London, on July 8, 1953, with the following cast:

GWENDOLINE	<i>Susan Lyall-Grant</i>
LINDA	<i>Virginia Hewett</i>
PATRICIA	<i>Sally Cooper</i>
STELLA BENTLEY	<i>Dorothy Dickson</i>
JOHN BENTLEY	<i>Jack Buchanan</i>
BOBBY DENVER	<i>David Hutcheson</i>
HERMANN SCHNEIDER	<i>Frederick Berger</i>
MICHAEL KENLEY	<i>Stephen Hancock</i>
PETER PEMBER	<i>Nigel Green</i>
PEARL	<i>Madi Hedd</i>
CORINNE	<i>Jean Burgess</i>
BARNABY	<i>John Boyd-Brent</i>

The play directed by Roy Rich

Setting designed by Fanny Taylor

Music for Vernon Sylvaïne's song, "Please don't forget to remember," by Jack Strachey

CHARACTERS

(in order of their appearance)

GWENDOLINE
LINDA
PATRICIA
STELLA BENTLEY
JOHN BENTLEY
BOBBY DENVER
HERMANN SCHNEIDER
MICHAEL KENLEY
PETER PEMBER
PEARL
CORINNE
BARNABY

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

John Bentley's house near Regent's Park. Morning.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1. *The same. Afternoon.*

SCENE 2. *The same. Evening.*

ACT THREE

SCENE 1. *The same. Night.*

SCENE 2. *The same. Next morning.*

ACT ONE

Scene: The lounge of John Bentley's house, near Regent's Park.

There are French windows at right leading to the garden. The main entrance to the lounge is through an arch at right centre. At left centre there is an arched or squared recess in which can be seen the stairs with decorative wrought-iron banisters, leading to upstairs. Down left there is a door leading to a dining-room off-stage.

There is a chair at either side of the French window. At right of the entrance arch and facing the audience is a radio-gram. Through the arch can be seen a long table against the wall, and electric fittings on the wall. There is a small window in the off-stage right wall. On stage, left of the arch and facing the audience, is a long narrow table carrying bottles of cocktails and spirits, a vase with flowers, books and telephone. Against the left wall is a medium grand piano, with piano stool up-stage facing the audience. At right centre there is a settee with narrow sofa table behind and against it. At left centre there is a low upholstered arm-chair. Below the door down left is a chair. Usual light fittings and suitable carpet, rugs, pictures and etceteras. Where architecturally possible the set breaks at slight angles.

(NOTE: Directions as to left, right, etc., refer to stage left, stage right, etc.)

It is about eleven a.m. on a spring morning. The sun shines through from the garden. A moment—and Gwendoline cautiously descends the stairs left centre. She is an attractive girl of sixteen, slim, slight and sensitive. She wears pyjamas, slippers and dressing-gown, and her hair is attractively dressed. She glances about the lounge, then moves quickly to the telephone up-stage. She lifts the receiver and dials a number.

ACT ONE

GWEN: Hullo. Is that the Savoy Hotel? . . . This is Mr. J. Arthur Rank's secretary speaking. Would you put me through to Mr. Robert Denver, please? . . . Mr. Robert Denver. . . . Well, perhaps you know him as Bobby Denver. . . . Thank you. (*Gwen rests the receiver, hurries to the archway, looks off-stage, then hurries to the telephone.*) Hullo? . . . He's what? . . . In his bath? . . . Well, can't he get out of his bath? . . . Oh, but listen, this is very urgent. Mr. J. Arthur Rank is waiting right here to speak to him. . . . Would you do that, please? . . . The number is Hampstead 4327. . . . Yes, as soon as possible. . . . Thank you. Goodbye.

[*Gwen smilingly replaces the receiver as Linda enters through the archway. Linda, maid to the Bentley household, is about thirty. She is a thin, worried type, but she doesn't drop her aitches and she is not a caricature. She wears a little white apron in front of her black skirt.*]

What do you want, Linda?

LINDA: Well, Harry's called for Mr. Skeffington, miss, and I can't find him anywhere.

GWEN (*moving to settee*): He's in my bedroom.

LINDA: He hasn't been there all night, has he?

GWEN: He certainly has. I felt lonely.

LINDA: Well, for heaven's sake don't let your father know. He's beginning to proper hate Mr. Skeffington.

GWEN (*sitting on settee*): Poor Daddy. I feel so sorry for him.

LINDA: Why?

GWEN: He's getting old and crotchety.

LINDA: Nonsense! Your father's in the full flush of ripe middle-age.

GWEN (*wistfully*): Whenever I think of him now I see the leaves falling—and the corn bending.

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LINDA: Yes—you let him hear you talking like that and you'll be doing some bending.

GWEN (*smiling*): Oh, no. I'm not a child any longer. I'm sixteen. I'm a woman! Ready to fulfil my destiny.

LINDA (*moving to stairs*): I don't like that sort of talk. I'll get Mr. Skeffington.

[*She exits up the stairs. Telephone rings. Gwen rises and excitedly hurries to lift the receiver.*]

GWEN: Hullo? . . . Yes, that's right. Oh, thank you. I'll put him through to Mr. Rank. (*She taps the receiver rest to simulate an exchange plug noise.*) Hullo? Is that Mr. Robert Denver? . . . (*She gives a deep sigh.*) Oh, Bobby! I love you! I adore you! It's Gwendoline. Hullo. . . . Hullo. . . . Hullo. . . .

[*Linda descends the stairs with Mr. Skeffington.*]

(*Taking the dog's lead.*) All right, Linda—I'll take him.

LINDA: He can't stay in here.

GWEN: Why not?

LINDA: He's so dirty.

GWEN: I like him like that.

LINDA: Miss Gwen, I don't know what's come over you lately. I think you're sickening for something.

[*She exits through the archway.*]

GWEN (*picking up the dog*): Skeffy! He spoke to me! (*Enraptured.*) Right close to my ear, I heard his voice. He said, "Who the hell are you?" And when I told him he slammed down the receiver. He didn't just replace it. (*Enraptured.*) He slammed it down!

[*Telephone rings. Gwen hurries to it and lifts the receiver.*]

ACT ONE

(*Hopefully.*) Hullo? (*Irritably.*) No. How *could* it be Euston Station?

[*Gwen bangs the receiver down as Linda hurries in through the archway.*]

LINDA (*excitedly*): Miss Gwen—your sister's here!

GWEN (*surprised*): Which one?

LINDA: Miss Patricia—I mean Mrs. Pember.

[*Patricia enters briskly through the archway. She carries a small Paris Airline valise. She is twenty-one, brisk, forthright, modern and hard-boiled. She is wearing very tight trousers, exaggerated brogues of light yellow, red socks, a yellow jersey with a plain rounded neck, a dull green jacket, and a necklet of outside imitation pearls to match her earrings. Her hair is brushed back flat and tight and a red ribbon holds the horse's tail effect at the back of her head. She has just the suspicion of a black eye.*]

PAT: One hour to fly over from Paris, and three to get through the damn customs. Hullo, Gwen.

GWEN: Pat! I scarcely recognised you.

PAT: I haven't been away all that long, have I?

GWEN: No, of course not. Are you all right?

PAT (*as she throws her small valise on to the settee table*): I'm fine. Where's mother?

GWEN: Out. You've got a black eye.

PAT: Yes. I bumped into somebody.

GWEN: Is Peter with you?

PAT: No. I left him in Paris.

GWEN: But what about your honeymoon?

PAT: I left that in Paris too.

GWEN: Is anything wrong?

PAT (*taking a packet of French cigarettes from her hip pocket*): For God's sake! What *is* all this? I've just flown over to buy some clothes, that's all.

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

[*Pat extracts a cigarette and replaces the packet as Linda takes Mr. Skeffington from Gwen.*]

LINDA (*as she does so*): She doesn't look happy, Miss Gwen. I can always tell unhappiness. I remember when my mother married my father, I could see at once she wasn't happy.

PAT (*having lit the cigarette*): Linda——

LINDA: Yes, miss?

PAT: Get to hell out of it.

LINDA: Yes, miss.

PAT: And bring me a sandwich.

LINDA: Yes, miss—er—Mrs.—madam.

[*Linda exits confusedly through the archway with Mr. Skeffington.*]

PAT (*briskly, as she sits on the settee*): Have you heard from Corinne?

GWEN: Not since she went to New York.

PAT: It was quite funny, really—two of us suddenly getting married.

GWEN: I couldn't see anything funny about it. Marriage is a sacred undertaking.

PAT (*smiling*): Oh, dear. Still taking life seriously? Are you going to bed or getting up?

GWEN: I'm convalescing. Daddy thinks I've been ill.

PAT: Oh? What's the matter.

GWEN: I just happen to have lost my appetite, that's all.

PAT: In love with somebody?

GWEN: Of course not.

PAT: Does father know?

GWEN: Nobody knows.

PAT: Well, take it slowly, Gwen. Don't rush into anything.

ACT ONE

GWEN: Oh, Pat, what's wrong?

PAT (*irritably*): Nothing, nothing! I'm just tired, that's all.

GWEN: Why are you dressed like a morbid fisherman?

[*Pat rises and moves up-stage to pour herself a neat whiskey.*]

My husband *likes* me to dress like a morbid fisherman. Peter is an Existentialist. Our flat is in the Boulevard St. Germain. And, in the Boulevard St. Germain, all Existentialists dress like morbid fishermen.

GWEN: How did you get that black eye?

PAT (*turning*): An elderly French aristocrat tried to crack Peter with a bottle. He missed him and hit me. (*She drinks some of her whiskey.*)

GWEN: What dreadful sort of life are you leading in Paris?

PAT (*moving to right end of settee*): There are no words to describe it. It's the far end of hell. If ever I have any children they'll be certified at birth. (*She drinks some more whiskey.*)

GWEN: What on earth will father say?

PAT (*having banged down her glass on to the settee table*): Gwen, I've been living where policemen walk about in fours. Our flat is a converted cellar with an outside inconvenience, and our landlady is one of the original knitters under the original guillotine. To me the word "father" sounds about as frightening as the word "pussy cat".

[*Pat stumps out her cigarette into an ashtray at right end of settee table, as Linda hurries in through the archway carrying a sandwich on a plate.*]

LINDA: I'm afraid this is the best I can do, Miss

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

Patricia. Oh, dear. I can't get used to your marriage.

PAT (*taking the plate*): Nor can I. (*She lifts the top bread of the sandwich.*) What in hell's name is this?

LINDA: I think it's liver sausage, miss. It was all right when I had it for breakfast.

[*Pat places the plate and sandwich on the settee table as Stella Bentley is heard calling, off-stage.*]

STELLA (*off-stage*): Linda!

LINDA (*to Pat*): There's Mrs. Bentley! I reckon she'll just about fall down when she sees you.

[*Linda hurries away through the archway as Pat moves down right.*]

PAT: Oh, hell!

GWEN: What's the matter?

PAT: I forgot I'd have to go through all this.

GWEN: How do you mean?

PAT: Darling, you know Stella. She's the most wonderful stepmother anybody could have, but—oh, gosh!—that exuberance! Any moment now—and she'll simply burst into the room—probably with a loud cry of "Pat, darling! This is the most wonderful moment of my life!" I sometimes wish she'd never left the stage. She'd be a Dame or something by now.

GWEN: How you've changed.

PAT: So have you. You're walking on air—and you look quite beautiful. How long have you known him?

GWEN: Be quiet!

STELLA (*off-stage*): Pat, darling! This is the most wonderful moment of my life!

[*Pat laughs—and Stella arrives in the archway. She is a*

ACT ONE

most attractive woman—young for her thirty-nine years—and faultlessly dressed for spring out of doors in town. She carries a large bunch of yellow roses. She remains framed in the archway as she smilingly glances round the room. Her eyes rest on Pat, then she looks at Gwen as she moves forward.]

(To Gwen.) Where is she?

[Gwen silently indicates her sister. Stella moves down centre as she stares at Pat.]

Oh, no! I thought you were somebody from the Chinese laundry.

PAT (*moving to right centre below settee*): Stella, please don't be facetious. I'm tired.

STELLA (*over-sympathetic*): Of course you are. (*She moves to Pat.*) You poor darling. I've never seen anybody look so tired. (*Quietly.*) You can tell me about the black eye when we're alone together. (*Brightly.*) How's Peter and how's Paris—and above all—are you happy? (*Without waiting for an answer.*) Darling, those trousers! Are they meant to be as tight as that?

GWEN: Mother, for heaven's sake!

STELLA: And those brogues! Of course, they'll last for ever. I simply can't wait to see what Peter's wearing. Where is he?

PAT: In prison.

STELLA: Splendid. What did you say?

PAT (*making unemotional statements*): Peter is in a small prison, just off the Rue Bergère. He's been charged with assaulting a gendarme and smashing up the Petit Poisson Night Club. I've flown over here to borrow five hundred thousand francs from father.

STELLA: *What?*

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

GWEN (*to Pat*): You're fooling.

PAT (*sitting centre of settee*): I'm not.

STELLA: But what happened?

PAT (*taking plate from table behind her, but remaining sitting*): We were celebrating my birthday. The party got a little wild and Peter had too much to drink. For an Englishman he's very excitable.

STELLA (*sitting left of Pat*): Does he *always* hit you in the eye when he's excited?

PAT: He's *never* hit me. Somebody else did that, quite accidentally.

[*Pat takes a bite of the sandwich.*]

GWEN: It was a French aristocrat, and he hit her with a bottle.

STELLA (*to Pat*): Well, thank heaven you're meeting some nice people. How much is five hundred thousand francs?

PAT: About five hundred pounds.

STELLA: Is Peter in a cell?

PAT: He was last night. He's probably on his way to Devil's Island by now.

STELLA: Hasn't he got his passport with him?

PAT: What's that got to do with it?

STELLA: It definitely states that he's got to be looked after and afforded every protection. Anyway, I thought the French were our allies or something. This is dreadful! It'll kill your poor father.

[*Pat has another bite at the sandwich.*]

GWEN: Oh, mother, don't be melodramatic.

STELLA (*turning*): Gwen, how dare you talk to me like that? When I'm so upset, too. Go back to bed at once!

ACT ONE

GWEN: Why should I? There's nothing the matter with me.

STELLA: I'm not thinking of you. I want to talk to Pat.

GWEN: So do I.

STELLA: Well, you can speak to her later. She's just come straight from Paris, and quite obviously she has something to tell me that a girl of your age shouldn't hear.

GWEN (*moving to stairs*): You're getting more like father every day.

STELLA: How do you mean?

GWEN (*as she ascends*): Whenever he mentions Paris—he winks.

[*Gwen exits to upstairs.*]

STELLA (*excitedly*): Pat! I can't wait to hear about you and Peter. The marriage *was* quite legal, wasn't it?

PAT (*throwing plate and sandwich on to settee*): Good God, of course it was!

STELLA: Is Peter still writing plays?

PAT: Yes—he wrote one last Thursday.

STELLA (*rising and moving to centre*): But that's wonderful! *You* can continue your acting and he can write the loveliest parts for you.

PAT: No, Stella. You don't understand. He doesn't write plays that can be acted.

STELLA (*wistfully*): Oh, how that takes me back!

PAT: To him the theatre is a servile medium through which he expresses his views as an Existentialist.

STELLA (*completely lost*): Ah, yes, of course, dear—

PAT: He's fifty years ahead of his time.

STELLA (*happily*): Well, you must just try and keep up with him.

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PAT: He doesn't lead the life of an ordinary individual. He's quite strange—really very queer.

STELLA: Darling, you don't mean in any way your father wouldn't understand?

PAT: Most emphatically not! (*Wildly.*) But I can't go on living with him!

STELLA: Why not? You love him, don't you?

PAT: Yes, I love him, but I don't like him. He's as crazy as a coot!

STELLA: Darling, all playwrights are.

PAT: But he's not content with writing plays! A fortnight ago he decided to take up sculpture. Our only wardrobe is full of clay, and our bedroom is full of pornographic statues. He sleeps all day and gets up at midnight. He's growing a beard and he eats his food with his fingers. He wears pale blue shorts and rides a red bicycle. He drinks like a fish and gives the victory sign in reverse to all policemen.

STELLA (*as she moves to piano*): Oh, Pat! You don't know how I envy you.

PAT (*amazed*): What?

[*Stella places the roses on the piano, and turns.*]

STELLA: For fourteen years I've been married to a man whose motto is "Steady as she goes." For fourteen years I've listened to nothing but talk about stocks and shares and bulls and bears. I've survived it because I transferred my own ambitions to Corinne, you, and Gwen. But believe me, Pat, after the dull and ordered security of life with your father, Peter's temperament would lift me to the skies. I sometimes feel I'd like to set fire to this house, seduce the vicar, and go busking in the West End.

[*Linda hurries in through the archway.*]

ACT ONE

LINDA: Mrs. Bentley! The master's come home.

[*Pat rises as Stella gasps.*]

STELLA: Oh, no! Linda, whatever you do don't tell him Mrs. Pember is here.

LINDA (*reluctantly*): Very well, ma'am.

[*Linda exits as Stella indicates room left.*]

STELLA: Pat, wait in there. I want to do this my way.

PAT (*grabbing her valise*): I've got to get that five hundred pounds.

STELLA: I'll get it for you. I just want to make quite sure that your father's in the right mood to hand it over.

PAT (*crossing Stella to left*): Okay.

STELLA: And when you meet him for heaven's sake pretend to be happy.

PAT (*angrily*): I am happy!

[*Pat exits into the room left as Stella moves to take up the yellow roses. John Bentley's voice is heard.*]

JOHN (*off*): And what's this slipper doing here?

LINDA (*off*): That's Mr. Skeffington's, sir.

JOHN (*off*): I told you to keep that damn dog out of the house. The place is getting like a bear garden.

LINDA (*off*): Yes, sir.

[*John Bentley enters through the archway. Quite obviously he is not in a good mood. About forty-six, well built and fit, good looking, well groomed. There is a certain pompousness about him but he has an attractive personality. He is dressed in a short black jacket and carefully creased trousers, etc. He carries the "Financial Times".*]

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

STELLA: John, dear. You're home very early, aren't you? (*Holding up the roses.*) Look! Aren't they lovely? Is anything wrong? You're not ill, are you? Will you be staying for lunch?

JOHN: Taking your questions in the correct order, the answers are—yes, very, I hope not, and I don't think so.

STELLA: Oh. Well, thank goodness for that. Shall I put them in water for you?

JOHN (*surprised*): Are they for me?

STELLA: Of course.

JOHN: Why—what have I done?

STELLA (*smilingly*): It's the tenth.

JOHN: The tenth?

[*John looks blank. Stella continues:*]

STELLA: The tenth of May. The day your first wife left you.

JOHN: Stella, you really are the most tactless person I've ever met!

STELLA: I'm sorry. I thought it was an occasion for rejoicing.

JOHN (*irritably*): Quite possibly it is, in a masochistic sort of way, but we've never remembered it before. Why, for no reason at all, start today?

STELLA: Yes, it was rather silly. I know. I'll pretend you gave them to me. (*She clasps the roses to her breast and smiles.*) There. Is that all right?

JOHN: Yes, Stella, that's all right.

[*John has glanced at his wife quite casually and he has not intended to continue looking at her, but he does.*]

They look lovelier than ever now. I wish I had bought them for you. (*He kisses her on the cheek.*)

ACT ONE

STELLA (*surprised*): Thank you, John.

JOHN (*moving up-stage*): How's Gwen?

STELLA: Much better. Quite her old self again.

JOHN (*as he pours himself a whiskey*): Good.

STELLA: Not whiskey, dear? Not in the morning. You only do that when you're worried.

JOHN: I *am* worried.

STELLA: What's happened? Oh, I did so want you to be in a happy mood. Are those share things going up and down again?

JOHN: No, Stella. It's nothing to do with my work in the City.

STELLA: You mean—it's something important?

[*John reacts, then continues:*]

JOHN: This morning, at the office, I received a twenty-five minutes' phone call from Corinne in New York.

STELLA (*anxiously*): She's not ill, is she?

JOHN: No. She sounded quite fighting fit. She sent you her love, and her husband sent his love, and she hoped you were quite well, and her husband hoped you were quite well, and she enquired all about her dog and her canary and her tortoise. She also asked how I was. The rest of the twenty-five minutes was spent explaining why her husband was out of work and impressing upon me the urgent necessity for cabling her a thousand dollars at once.

[*Stella glances unhappily towards the door, left.*]

A thousand dollars! How am I supposed to do that? They've only been married two months.

STELLA (*feebly*): How much is a thousand dollars in francs?

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JOHN: What on earth has that got to do with it?

STELLA: I was just wondering.

JOHN: She should never have married that damn fellow. She *wouldn't* have done if I'd had *my* way.

STELLA: You're not blaming me for it, are you?

JOHN: You introduced him to her.

STELLA: And I'm glad I did. Barnaby is masculine and virile. You should have seen him at Olympia.

JOHN: A cowboy without any cows. A film actor on horseback. A fine husband he'll make.

STELLA: When he's working he earns fabulous money.

JOHN: And whether he's working or not he spends it.

STELLA: Why isn't he working now?

JOHN: Your Bump-along-Barnaby, or whatever he's called, happens to have a carbuncle on his bottom and he can't sit on his horse. That temporary emergency lands Corinne in the bread line.

STELLA: But everyone knows that the film world is chicken one day and feathers the next. It's like the stage.

JOHN (*angrily*): Thank you, I don't want to hear anything about *that* profession! I had Corinne trained to be a private secretary. She could have been safe and secure in an embassy by now.

STELLA: But she didn't want to be a secretary. She wanted to be a veterinary surgeon. I'm quite sure she only married Barnaby because she's so fond of horses. What are you going to do about it? You can't let them starve.

JOHN: Of course I can't! I'll have to fork out, that's all. But when is it going to stop? The man's obviously toxic—liable to get carbuncles on his backside every other month.

STELLA: No, dear, I remember reading about it—they never strike twice in the same place.

ACT ONE

JOHN (*as he looks at the bits and pieces on the settee*):
What's all this mess?

STELLA: I had a sandwich.

[*John looks at her.*]

It wasn't very nice.

JOHN: That's quite obvious. Apparently you filled your mouth with liver sausage and blew it all over the settee.

[*John takes up a half cigarette from the ashtray.*]

"Le petit Caporal." (*He looks at Stella surprisedly.*)
French.

STELLA: How clever of you, dear.

[*Linda hurries in through the archway and makes for the stairs. She carries Pat's semi-overcoat, a waist-length duffle-type in red and black check.*]

JOHN (*to Linda*): What have you got there?

LINDA: It's Miss Pat's, sir. (*As she looks at Stella.*)
Oh, dear!

STELLA (*smilingly, as she moves up-stage*): That's all right, Linda. (*Taking the coat.*) You can get on with your work.

LINDA (*unhappily*): Yes, ma'am.

[*Linda hurriedly exits through the archway as Stella holds out the coat.*]

STELLA (*laughingly, to John*): Have you ever seen anything so ridiculous? Pat sent it by post.

JOHN: From Paris?

STELLA: Yes. She wants it French cleaned.

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JOHN: I see. And I suppose you found the cigarettes in one pocket and the liver sausage in another? (*Abruptly.*) She's here, isn't she?

STELLA: Yes.

JOHN: Why didn't you tell me at once?

STELLA (*putting down the coat*): You seemed so upset about Corinne—I wanted you to recover a little before hearing about Pat.

JOHN (*anxiously*): Is she ill?

STELLA: No, dear.

JOHN (*hopefully*): Has she left her husband?

STELLA: No, dear.

JOHN: Is she unhappy?

STELLA: No, dear.

JOHN: Does she want anything?

STELLA (*quickly*): Yes, dear.

JOHN (*quickly*): How much?

STELLA (*very quickly*): Five hundred pounds.

[*John slaps a hand to his forehead and collapses into the armchair left centre. Stella moves to him.*]

John, it could have been so much worse! She might have married a man who knocked her about.

JOHN: I see. So I'm to regard my daughter's marriage as highly successful just because she hasn't got a black eye.

[*Stella forces a little laugh.*]

I thought you told me Pat's husband was an established playwright.

STELLA: He is. It's just that he hasn't been established long enough.

JOHN: Has he ever had a play taken?

STELLA: Of course he has. But Peter doesn't *want* his plays to be acted. He's an Existentialist.

ACT ONE

JOHN: What does that mean?

STELLA: He's fifty years ahead of himself.

JOHN: Good. He's obviously going a long way. (*He rises.*) Would anybody have believed it possible? My two daughters. After devoting my whole life to them—after all my hopes and prayers that they would marry into safety and security—and I scarcely know the names of their penniless husbands. (*Angrily.*) Damn it, I haven't even met them!

STELLA: Corinne was too scared to bring Barnaby here, and Pat had to signal from the window to let Peter know whether you were in or out. Can you wonder that they slipped away to get married?

JOHN: That's right! Blame me for it. The father's always in the wrong. Give the children money—and you spoil them. Don't give them money—and you handicap them. Expect much from them—and you set too high a standard. Expect nothing from them—and you give them an inferiority complex. There's no answer to it.

STELLA: Oh, but there is! Surely, as long as they're happy—

JOHN (*crossing to right*): Nonsense! Any monkey with a bomb tied to its tail can be happy until it goes off! Thank God Gwen is only sixteen. I'll make sure *she* meets the right man. (*Angrily.*) Why didn't Peter have the guts to come and ask me for that money himself?

STELLA: He couldn't get away.

JOHN: He could have phoned me.

STELLA: At the moment he doesn't happen to be on the phone.

JOHN: He could have written, he could have sent a telegram. No! He preferred to send his wife.

[*The door left is flung open and Pat enters.*]

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

PAT (*almost shouting*): He did *not* send me! He doesn't even know I'm here.

JOHN (*staring at Pat*): Good God! Have you been shipwrecked?

STELLA: John! That's not a very sweet welcome.

JOHN: But why has she disguised herself? (*To Pat.*) What's happened to you?

PAT (*moving towards stairs*): I can't stand any more questioning!

STELLA (*restraining her*): Pat, dear, your father's only interested.

PAT: He's not!

JOHN: I certainly am. For one thing, I'm interested to hear how you got that black eye.

STELLA: A French aristocrat hit her with a bottle.

JOHN: *What?*

STELLA: It was an accident—he didn't *know* he was doing it.

JOHN: Well, what the hell did he *think* he was doing?

STELLA: Oh, don't bother about unnecessary details. (*Moving Pat towards John.*) Aren't you going to give you daughter a kiss?

JOHN (*after a second's hesitation*): Yes, of course.

[*John moves to Pat and kisses her on the cheek. He looks at her.*]

Are you happy?

PAT (*grimly, with her hands in her trouser pockets*): Yes, very!

JOHN: That's good. (*He pats her arm.*) That's fine.

[*John moves away to right as with some attempt at breeziness he continues:*]

Stella tells me that Peter is a—er—

ACT ONE

STELLA (*at centre*): A playwright, dear.

JOHN (*at right*): No, no. There was another word.

PAT (*at right centre*): An Existentialist?

JOHN: That's it. What exactly does that mean?

PAT (*immediately on the defensive*): Existentialism is a philosophy. It's a school of thought that seeks to reaffirm, in modern idiom, the stoic form of individualism.

STELLA: Isn't it exciting?

JOHN (*to Pat*): Are you sure you understand what you're talking about?

PAT (*defiantly*): Peter is teaching me to understand it.

JOHN: I see. And is that ridiculous get-up an expression of individualism?

PAT (*angrily*): Yes, it's exactly that! I *am* an individual now, with my own opinions and my own way of life.

STELLA (*restrainingly*): Pat, dear—

PAT (*losing all restraint*): But I don't expect *you* to appreciate that. Any more than I could expect you to appreciate a Leonardo da Vinci, or a Bach concerto, or anything else that didn't find its inspiration in the Stock Exchange. It must seem quite ridiculous to you that Peter doesn't write his plays for money.

JOHN: Not at all. As long as *I* keep my health and strength, why should he?

PAT (*loud*): I'll never forget that as long as I live. (*Loudly, as she turns and makes for the stairs.*) Never! (*Hurrying up the stairs two at a time.*) Never!

[*Pat exits to upstairs.*]

JOHN (*hiding his upset*): Well, that was a pleasant little interlude. (*He moves to the whiskey.*) Quite like old times, wasn't it?

STELLA: She's on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

JOHN (*angrily, as he pours himself a drink*): Then why

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isn't Peter here to look after her, instead of gallivanting about in Paris?

[*John drinks as Stella replies.*]

STELLA: He's *not* gallivanting about in Paris. He's in prison.

JOHN (*after a splutter*): *What* did you say?

STELLA (*scared*): John, dear, please take things calmly. I read somewhere the other day that this world is *not* the centre of the universe. Do remember that. I don't want you to have a stroke.

JOHN: This is no time to discuss my blood pressure! Deviating, for just one moment, it might interest you to know that the doctor says I'm below what I should be above. But that was before this morning! (*Managing to control himself.*) Now then. What were you saying as to the whereabouts of my precious son-in-law?

STELLA: He's in a little prison—just a very small one—and it's only used for the nicest people.

JOHN: And what has he been charged with—murdering his six other wives?

STELLA: No, dear—he smashed up the Petit Fish Night Club—but he didn't do it with malice aforethought. He was sitting by himself, quietly drinking a cup of coffee, when somebody insulted the British Empire. Peter, of course, immediately lost his temper and went through the Club like a bulldozer.

JOHN (*pleasantly surprised*): Oh. Well, that's something to his credit. God knows we can do with an expression of patriotism these days. I never imagined he was that sort of fellow.

STELLA: Oh, yes. He's terribly like that. And that's why Pat wants the five hundred pounds.

JOHN: You mean for compensation?

ACT ONE

STELLA: Yes. Peter insists upon paying for the whole thing himself. As soon as he does, he's as free as the wind.

JOHN (*smilingly*): Tell Pat to come down and see me.

STELLA (*blowing him a kiss*): You're the sweetest man in the whole world!

[*Stella turns, moves towards the stairs—and the telephone rings. She takes the receiver.*]

Hullo? . . . Yes, this is Mrs. Bentley speaking. . . . Oh, yes, I've been wanting to meet him for weeks. . . . Oh, no! Not this morning. You must stop him. . . . (*Frantically.*) But you don't understand! Would you hold on, please?

[*Stella covers the mouthpiece with her hand and looks towards her husband, who is glancing at the "Financial Times".*]

(*Appealingly.*) John, dear—go into the garden.

JOHN (*at right*): Why?

STELLA: I *must* be left alone for just two minutes.

JOHN (*moving towards her*): Let me have a word.

STELLA (*hurriedly*): No, no. It's quite all right.

[*Stella turns her back and huddles over the mouthpiece, and John continues to read his newspaper as she continues at the telephone.*]

Hullo? . . . Et—parlez vous francais?

[*John looks up.*]

Bon. Alors, fait attention. (*Emphatically.*) Il ne faut pas venez ici ce matin. . . . Non! Mon mari

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est ici et il savez absolutely rien de tout. . . .
(*Appalled.*) Il a departe? . . . Ici dans cinque
minutes? Oh, mon Dieu!

[*Stella replaces the receiver and acts a happy laugh to John, who acts one back.*]

JOHN (*putting down his paper*): That was really quite extraordinary. I can't understand a word of French but I got the whole gist of that.

STELLA (*moving down centre*): Did you, dear?

JOHN (*moving down right*): Why don't you want somebody to come round here this morning, and what is it I know nothing about?

STELLA: Would you like another whiskey?

JOHN: Answer my question!

STELLA (*after a moment's hesitation*): It's Gwen.

JOHN (*moving to in front of settee*): What do you mean?

STELLA: She's in love.

JOHN (*irritably*): What are you talking about? She's only sixteen—she could still be at school.

STELLA (*moving to him*): John, please believe what I'm telling you. She's desperately—dangerously in love.

[*A pause. John stares at Stella. Then he pulls himself together, takes a rigid and imposing stance and enquires heavily:*]

JOHN: Who is the boy?

STELLA: Well, he isn't quite a boy, dear. I suppose he's a man, really.

JOHN: How old is he?

STELLA (*after a moment's pause*): Thirty-seven.

[*John stares at her blankly for a moment, then he half closes his eyes and fumbles to loosen his tie as he collapses on to the settee. Stella hurriedly sits at his left.*]

ACT ONE

Oh, John! Take some deep breaths or something. Think of the Milky Way—and all those stars. My book says they're not really there at all. (*Brightly.*) Do you realise that at any moment the earth may lose its atmosphere? That would mean complete oblivion for everybody, including Corinne's cowboy, Pat's playwright, and—er—Gwen's crooner.

[*John stares fearfully at Stella.*]

JOHN: Gwen's *what*?

STELLA: He's a singer, dear. He croons into a microphone. He's the sensation of London! He's followed about wherever he goes—and even middle-aged women try to steal his braces as souvenirs. And he's absolutely original! Instead of making people happy—he makes them miserable. When he sings, he cries real tears! You can actually see them *streaming* down his face. It's wonderful!

[*Stella rises and moves to her handbag at left end of settee table, as she continues:*]

And look at this. (*Producing it.*) It's a press cutting I found in Gwen's bedroom last week.

[*Stella holds out the press cutting and John takes it.*]

JOHN (*reading*): "Police were called to the stage door of the London Coliseum last night when three hundred devotees of Mr. Bobby Denver screamed and fought to kiss his hand or tear a button from his jacket. There is no doubt about it, this tearful Romeo of Song—with little or no voice—has sobbed his way into the hearts of a million fans, one hysterical woman even going so far as to throw herself in

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front of the crooner's car and beg him to drive over her."

STELLA (*excitedly*): What do you think of it?

JOHN (*grimly, as he props himself up*): Has Gwen ever met this ghastly product of a degenerate age?

STELLA (*quickly*): Bobby says they've only met twice. He's staying at the Savoy Hotel, and one night I managed to speak to him on the phone.

[*John surges to his feet and makes for telephone. Stella turns.*]

What are you going to do?

JOHN (*lifting the receiver*): I'm going to send for the police!

STELLA: They'll give it to the papers. Anything to do with Bobby Denver and out comes a special edition.

JOHN (*slamming down the receiver*): My God, have we all gone mad? Years ago a man had to spend his whole life toiling upwards through the night, even having to die before he could make the slightest claim to fame. But in this enlightened epoch some silly so-and-so has only to coin a ridiculous catch phrase, or waggle his navel in front of a television camera, and within twenty-four hours he's practically immortal! Did I understand you to say he was calling here this morning?

STELLA: Yes. His secretary said he was already on his way. Any moment now—and you'll be able to discuss the whole thing with him as man to man.

JOHN: I'll shoot him right between the eyes!

STELLA: John, dear, control yourself.

JOHN (*sitting left centre*): Gwen, my baby daughter. (*Suddenly and angrily.*) I blame *you* for this!

STELLA: John!

ACT ONE

JOHN: For fourteen years you've tried to bring your mad stage world into the lives of my children, and this is the result.

STELLA: What are you talking about? I gave *up* the stage to please *you*!

JOHN (*rising*): But you couldn't forget it, could you? Night after night, for years on end, you filled this house with actors and actresses. I'll never forget those evenings. It was a cold war with insanity. And when I couldn't stand it any longer, you went underground. Cunningly and ruthlessly you brought my daughters up to hate my way of life—and to hate the careers I had them trained for. And where are they now? Corinne and Pat married to improvident clowns, and Gwen in love with a weeper—a crooner.

STELLA: I think you're forgetting that your first *wife* left you.

JOHN (*irritably*): What's that got to do with it?

STELLA: She left you because she couldn't stand your dull absorption with the City. Any more than Corinne or Pat could stand it. Any more than I can stand it! There's no colour in this house. No life, no sweet insanity! I'm sorry, John, but I've got to say it. I would willingly leave you tomorrow for either Laurel or Hardy.

JOHN: You don't mean that?

STELLA: Of course I don't. Oh, I'm sure everything will turn out all right—as long as we take things calmly.

JOHN: Thank you, Stella, I don't need advice. I know exactly what to do.

STELLA: What?

JOHN: There's obviously something very much the matter with Gwen. I'm going to consult a psychiatrist.

STELLA: I've already been to one.

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JOHN: When?

STELLA: Two days ago. Gwen hadn't eaten for forty-eight hours, so I phoned my sister and she told me about a man called Hermann Schneider. He's a foreigner.

JOHN: You surprise me.

STELLA: He lives in a little flat at Park South, but he's frightfully clever. He once cured a woman who had fallen in love with the high tides at Brighton. I told him about Gwen, and what do you think he said?

JOHN: I haven't the faintest idea.

STELLA: He suggested we should try and get the crooner to come and stay here.

JOHN (*ironically*): Did he really?

STELLA: He said that if Gwen could see him going to the bathroom to clean his teeth she would soon realise that he was just an ordinary man like you or anybody else.

JOHN: Thank you very much.

[*Urgent ringing at the front door bell.*]

STELLA: Bobby Denver!

JOHN: Now listen, Stella. I'm handling this my way. I don't want any interruptions from *you*!

STELLA: I won't open my mouth.

[*The front door bell rings again as Linda comes hurrying through the archway.*]

LINDA (*very excited*): Oh, sir, there's a crowd of people outside the door, and somebody's ringing the bell.

JOHN (*irritably*): Well, go and open the door.

LINDA (*quickly*): But there are two policemen outside as well, sir.

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STELLA (*quickly*): It's all right, Linda. We have somebody very important calling.

JOHN (*to Linda*): Take that plate away.

LINDA (*as she makes for the settee*): Very good, sir.

STELLA (*quickly*): And hurry! Mr. Denver isn't used to being kept waiting.

LINDA: Oh, ma'am! You don't mean Mr. *Bobby* Denver?

STELLA (*quickly*): I certainly do.

JOHN (*to Linda*): Get a move on!

LINDA (*gaping incredulously*): Bobby Denver, the crying crooner?

STELLA (*irritably*): Yes!

[*Linda moans, staggers, and collapses on to the settee.*]

JOHN (*to Stella*): What's happened?

STELLA (*hurrying to Linda*): She's fainted!

JOHN: Damn it, why choose a time like this?

[*The front door bell rings again, as John and Stella hurry to Linda.*]

STELLA (*to John*): You'd better answer the door yourself.

JOHN (*indignantly*): I will not!

STELLA: Well, *somebody's* got to let him in.

[*Linda opens her eyes and tries to prop herself up.*]

(*To Linda.*) Are you feeling any better?

JOHN (*emphatically*): Of course she is!

STELLA (*to Linda*): Do you think you can manage to answer the door?

JOHN (*immediately*): Of course she can! (*To Linda.*) Come on. (*He lifts Linda to her feet.*) Ups-a-daisy!

[*Linda sways like a reed in the wind.*]

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Now then. Best foot forward.

[*John supports the staggering Linda towards the archway as Stella protests.*]

STELLA: John, she can't!

JOHN: Of course she can. She's as steady as a rock.

[*John releases Linda. Swaying against the archway she clings desperately for support.*]

Good girl, Linda. That's wonderful! Now then, steady as she goes.

[*With a mighty effort Linda swings herself out into the passage and staggers out of sight.*]

Splendid!

STELLA: She'll faint again when she opens the door.

JOHN (*returning from the archway*): Of course, I just don't understand your sex.

STELLA: I know, dear.

JOHN (*having glanced towards the French windows*): Damn it, now there's a bunch of old girls trying to climb over the hedge. (*Shouting towards the old girls.*) Go away! Mind your own business! (*He closes the French windows.*)

STELLA: Shouldn't we tell Gwen to come down?

JOHN (*emphatically*): Absolutely no!

STELLA: Ssh!

[*Linda appears, clinging to the archway.*]

LINDA (*in a hoarse whisper*): If you please, sir—Mr. Bobby Denver.

[*Laughing out loud, Bobby surges into the room. He clutches a bunch of tulips and a full-length microphone with flex coiled. His exquisite light fawn suit is torn in several*

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places, his collar is open, his tie is missing, his hair is ruffled, he has no hat, there are lipstick marks on his cheek, and he is holding up his trousers.]

BOBBY (*loudly and happily*): Hullo, Mrs. Bentley! I suppose you are Mrs. Bentley? Isn't it a lovely day? Phew! I thought I'd never make it. You know something'll have to be done about this popularity business. It's not safe to go out. (*Indicating John.*) Who's this?

STELLA: My husband.

BOBBY: Well, well! (*To John.*) I thought you'd be at the office. (*To Stella.*) I hope you don't mind the mike coming in. I always take it with me—in case somebody asks me to sing.

JOHN (*angrily*): Nobody's going to ask you to sing in this house!

STELLA: Oh, John, I'd love him to.

BOBBY (*smilingly*): That's very sweet of you.

STELLA (*indicating the microphone*): How does it work?

BOBBY: I'll show you. (*Holding out the microphone to John.*) Hold it for a moment, will you?

[John reluctantly takes the microphone.]

That's right. (*To Stella.*) Now, we just plug it in and—if it doesn't fuse—Bob's your uncle. (*Uncoiling the flex.*) Have you got a plug here? (*Looking left.*) Ah, yes! There we are. (*As he moves left to plug the flex into power point.*) Of course, I don't have to do all this when I appear in public. Still, it's all exercise. (*Having plugged in.*) Now then. I think we're all set. (*To John, and moving back to left centre.*) Er—just for safety, sir—would you mind pressing down the little switch at the top?

[John irritably presses down the switch. Bobby continues.]

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(*Smilingly.*) That's right! (*Brightly.*) Would you like to try it, sir?

JOHN (*angrily bellowing, with the mike right in front of him*): I'll do nothing of the sort!

[*The amplification frightens John into a dither, as Bobby rocks with laughter and moves to John to take the microphone and stand it near the piano, clearing the flex as he does so.*]

JOHN (*angrily*): Now listen to me, Denver!

BOBBY (*still laughing*): Just a moment. (*To Stella.*) What can I do with these?

JOHN (*livid, as he points*): My own tulips!

BOBBY: Yes, I'm afraid so. Your front garden's in a hell of a mess. They shoved most of your daffodils into my car. It was a Girl Guide who pulled these up. Well, they're no use to *you* now, *are* they?

[*Bobby looks towards Linda, who is still gapingly holding on to the archway, and smiles as he holds out the flowers.*]

(*To Linda.*) Here you are, darling.

[*Linda totters towards Bobby as she whispers.*]

LINDA: Oh, no! You don't mean it?

BOBBY: Of course I do. (*He hands the flowers to Linda as he continues.*) With love from me.

[*Linda gives a moan and goes down like a shot pigeon. Bobby burst out laughing.*]

(*To Stella.*) You know (*indicating Linda*) that sort of thing used to upset me terribly—but I'm getting so *used* to it!

ACT ONE

STELLA: Well, I'm not finding it frightfully original. John, she's very in the way. Do take her outside or something.

JOHN (*hivid*): I'll do nothing of the sort!

STELLA: Well, I can't lift her, and if Bobby tries she'll probably have hysterics.

JOHN (*as he moves to Linda*): Hell and damnation! (*As he slightly raises Linda.*) You stay exactly where you are, Stella.

[*John, walking backwards, drags Linda towards the archway as he glares at Bobby and growls.*]

And I've something to say to you, sir, when I come back.

[*John exits backwards through the archway and the unconscious Linda, still clutching the tulips, trails out after him.*]

BOBBY: Very excitable, isn't he?

STELLA: Not as a rule. Would you like a drink?

BOBBY: No, thanks. I've only just had breakfast.

STELLA: Well, please sit down.

BOBBY: I can't. I'll have to be going in a moment. (*Looking at his wrist watch.*) The whole of the British Broadcasting Corporation is waiting for me. Doesn't it sound important?

STELLA: Very.

BOBBY: I just can't get used to it. A couple of years ago I didn't even have to pay income tax. Now I owe them *thousands*.

[*Bobby laughs out loud, and suddenly grabs at his waist-line.*]

STELLA: Something gone wrong?

BOBBY: I can't keep my pants up.

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STELLA: Don't you wear braces to hold them up?
BOBBY: I do as a rule, but the Girl Guides got them——

[He produces and holds out a pair of black silk braces from his jacket pocket.]

I got them back, though. I did a half-nelson on her flag pole.

[Stella laughs as she moves to Bobby and takes the braces.]

STELLA: Shall I help you?
BOBBY: You can't, darling. I've only got one button left. I lose about forty a week.

[Stella and Bobby laugh, and Bobby tightens the waist buckles of his pants as John comes galloping back through the archway. He skids to a stop and glares at Bobby.]

JOHN: What are you laughing at?
BOBBY: I've lost my braces again.

[John glares at the still laughing Stella, sees the braces in her hand and gasps.]

JOHN: Stella!

[Bobby claps one hand to his mouth to subdue a fresh outburst of laughter, as Stella says.]

STELLA (to John): Oh, no! You don't understand!

[Stella starts laughing again and Bobby doubles up with laughter as he totters to Stella. He tries to speak but only gurgles can be heard as he points to John, then to Stella, then to the braces, then to himself.]

ACT ONE

JOHN (*losing his temper—to Stella*): Pull yourself together! Are you crazy? Laughing like a stupid schoolgirl—when my daughter's morals are at stake.

STELLA (*handing the braces to Bobby*): Oh, John, don't be so ridiculous!

BOBBY (*shoving the braces into his pocket*): What's he talking about?

STELLA: I've told him about Gwen.

BOBBY: So what? The poor kid hasn't done anything wrong.

JOHN: Are you trying to pretend you don't know she's in love with you?

BOBBY: Dozens of women are in love with me—or *think* they are.

JOHN: Gwendoline is not a woman. She's an innocent child. Damn it, you're old enough to be her father!

BOBBY: So is Donald Peers. And what about Pappy Crosby—all the kids are in love with *him*. I can't help it if the whole sex has gone potty.

STELLA: I think it's a lot to do with the food we eat—there's no *nourishment* in it.

JOHN (*angrily*): Will you be quiet? (*Unbelievably, to Bobby.*) Do you mean to say you haven't encouraged this—this illicit infatuation?

BOBBY: *Encouraged* it? I'm fed to the teeth with it! Gwen has twice forced her way into my dressing room—and twice I've had her turned out. I spoke to her like a Dutch uncle—I wouldn't have bothered to do that if I hadn't liked the kid. Yesterday I received a telegram from her in which she said she would commit suicide if I didn't meet her alone for at least two minutes. I thought it time to come and see her mother.

STELLA (*smilingly, to Bobby*): Her stepmother.

BOBBY (*smilingly*): Of course—I should have guessed.

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JOHN (*pompously, as he raises his voice—to Bobby*): May I ask why you didn't prefer to interview her *father*?

BOBBY: Because I've had previous experience of this sort of trouble, and I've never yet met a father capable of understanding any daughter.

[*Gwen, still wearing her dressing-gown, appears at the top of the stairs.*]

JOHN (*to Bobby*): Have *you* any children?

BOBBY: No. I had a wife, but she left me.

GWEN (*from the stairs*): Why did she leave you?

STELLA (*turning*): Gwen!

[*Gwen descends the stairs.*]

BOBBY: Oh. Hullo.

JOHN (*to Gwen*): Go back to your room at once!

[*Gwen moves to Bobby.*]

GWEN: I saw you arrive, and my heart nearly stopped. Why have you come here?

BOBBY: Well—er——

STELLA: I asked him to.

GWEN (*to Bobby*): Why did your wife leave you?

JOHN: That's got nothing to do with you. Now listen, Gwen. This nonsense has got to stop. Denver himself has asked me to put an end to it.

GWEN (*to Bobby*): Have you?

BOBBY: I do think you're behaving rather foolishly.

JOHN (*to Gwen, angrily*): Damn it (*pointing to Bobby*) he's nearly as old as I am! You're only sixteen!

GWEN (*to John*): Juliet was only fourteen when she fell in love with Romeo.

JOHN: They were foreigners!

ACT ONE

GWEN (*to Bobby*): Cleopatra was only eighteen when she fell in love with Antony.

BOBBY (*to Stella*): Some of the Cleopatras I've seen have been at least forty.

GWEN (*to John*): John Knox was fifty-nine when he married a girl of fifteen. Ruskin was forty-two when he fell in love with Rose la Touche, and she was only twelve.

JOHN (*angrily*): Denver isn't in love with *you*.

GWEN: I know, but I'm in love with him.

BOBBY (*to Gwen*): Now listen, don't be a silly kid.

GWEN (*quietly*): Why did your wife leave you?

BOBBY: We were temperamentally unsuited. She had no sense of humour. I used to knock her about. It was the only way I could make her laugh.

JOHN (*to himself*): Good God!

GWEN (*to Bobby*): You could never make me believe that. Oh, Bobby! I love you so much.

JOHN (*angrily*): Be quiet!

STELLA: Gwen, dear—not in front of your father.

GWEN (*to Bobby*): I fell in love with you that first Monday at the Coliseum. You sang—my favourite of all your songs—"Please don't forget to remember!" And you cried real tears. I've loved you ever since.

JOHN (*loudly*): Gwen! (*As he points.*) Upstairs!

GWEN (*whipping round, angrily*): You can't talk to me like that! I'm not a child any longer.

JOHN: I'll talk to you as I think fit. Go to your bedroom.

GWEN: Bobby! Sing that song to me now. I'll listen to you from upstairs. Please, Bobby, sing it! I'll kill myself if you don't!

JOHN (*to Gwen*): If you stay down here two seconds longer, I'll put you across my knee. I've half a mind to do that, anyway.

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GWEN (*as she stares wide-eyed at her father*): You've insulted me in front of *him*! I'll never forgive that. But I'll make you sorry for it!

[*Gwen turns and hurries halfway up the stairs, then she stops for a moment.*]

(*Loudly and tearfully.*) I'll make you so sorry for it you'll wish you'd never been born!

[*In a flood of tears Gwen exits to upstairs.*]

BOBBY (*anxiously, to Stella*): She won't do anything silly, will she?

STELLA: I hope not. (*Turning.*) John, for heaven's sake go upstairs and apologise.

JOHN: Apologise! I'll do nothing of the sort!

STELLA: You know what an impulsive child she is. She might throw herself from the window.

JOHN: What?

STELLA (*urgently*): Hurry!

JOHN: Oh, damn and damnation! (*As he hurries up the stairs.*) Gwen! Wait for Daddy! (*Over his shoulder.*) You stay exactly where you are, Stella!

[*John exits to upstairs.*]

BOBBY: Do you think she *will* throw herself from the window?

STELLA: No. She always talks like that when she wants to frighten her father. Besides, her bedroom used to be the nursery—it still has bars across the window.

BOBBY (*laughingly*): Doesn't *he* know that?

STELLA (*laughingly*): He's forgotten.

[*John suddenly appears at the top of the stairs. He frantically descends two of them, as he shouts.*]

ACT ONE

JOHN (*desperately*): Denver! You'd better sing that damn nonsense. She's having hysterics in the bathroom!

[*John tears up the stairs again and exits, as Stella says:*]

STELLA (*to Bobby*): There's the piano.

BOBBY: No! It upsets me too much. I'm not fit to meet anybody for hours afterwards.

STELLA (*as she makes for the stairs*): I'm not thinking of you—it's Gwen I'm worried about.

BOBBY (*moving to the piano*): Oh, damn it! (*Turning.*) I'll have to use my microphone.

STELLA (*turning*): You won't need it in a little place like this.

BOBBY (*as he sits at the piano*): You'll be surprised.

[*Bobby strikes some opening chords, then plays and sings with exaggerated tenderness and sentiment, with a choke in almost every note and conveying the impression that at any moment he will completely break down and sob his heart out.*]

The day we met, the roses grew
And smiled at us, as if they knew,
Alas, that roses die
And we must say goodbye
But—
Please don't forget to remember
Darling mine.
Sweetheart, I didn't know
How quickly those hours would go
Since first I kissed your
Lips so red.
You made my life divine,
So please don't forget to remember,
Darling mine.

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[Choking with sobs and apparently scarcely able to see for tears, Bobby rises, chokes his way to the arch, turns his contorted and blear-eyed face to Stella, waves a feeble good-bye, then bursts into uncontrolled sobbing and exits. Stella herself is sniffing and dabbing a handkerchief to her eyes, and as Bobby exits and John appears at the top of the stairs she calls out:]

STELLA (*towards the archway*): Bobby! You can't leave like that!

JOHN: I hope he can! I've never heard such a damned awful noise in the whole of my life!

STELLA (*loudly*): Oh, do be quiet, you silly, dull man!

JOHN (*at the foot of the stairs*): Stella!

[Stella has already hurried to the piano. She grabs her hat and the beautiful roses that she had bought for her husband and makes for the archway as she calls again:]

STELLA: Bobby! Bobby! Wait for me!

[Stella exits through the archway as John, bewildered and furious, moves to centre, as the French windows open and Linda enters carrying Mr. Skeffington.]

JOHN (*immediately, to Linda*): What the hell do you want?

LINDA: I'm worried about the dog, sir. I was listening to Mr. Denver singing and suddenly Mr. Skeffington was sick on the crazy paving.

[John's face lights up. He delightedly pats the dog's head, as he murmurs:]

JOHN: There's a good boy! Good old boy!

The curtain falls

ACT TWO

Scene I

Scene: The same. About four hours later.

The settee has been tidied. The French windows are open. The sunlight shines from a different angle. On the settee is a black Homburg. Bobby's mike is still plugged in and is standing near the keyboard of the piano.

A moment—and Linda hurries in through the archway and makes for the stairs. She carries a glass of milk on a tray. She has hurried halfway up the stairs when telephone rings. She stops, turns, descends the stairs, rests the tray on the drinks table and takes the receiver.

LINDA: Hullo? . . . (*Irritably.*) No, it *isn't* Euston Station. You ought to know that by now.

[She replaces the receiver, hurries to the stairs and gets halfway up when she realises she has left the glass of milk behind. She stops, turns, hurries down the stairs, takes up the tray, turns again, hurries to the stairs and is halfway up when telephone rings. She stops, turns, descends the stairs, rests the tray on the drinks table and takes the receiver.]

Hullo? . . . Oh, Mrs. Bentley, where have you been? . . . Oh, but you don't know what's been happening! About two hours after you left, Miss Gwen jumped out of the bathroom window! . . . I'm not being silly, ma'am. We've had to have the doctor! . . . Yes, I found her myself, all unconscious, just by the dustbin. . . . No, the doctor said she hadn't broken anything—but she's shaken

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everything up. . . . Poor Mr. Bentley's been nearly off his head with worry. He was so afraid she might try it again, he sent for that psychologicalist. . . . Yes, that's right, ma'am—Mr. Schneider, from Park South—he's upstairs with her now—and he's very worried about her. He says that when people deliberately jump out of a window, it usually means they've done it on purpose. . . . Speak to who? . . . I'm afraid you can't, ma'am. Mr. Bentley's gone to the chemist with the doctor's prescription. . . . Oh, yes, please do, ma'am—as soon as you can! . . . Goodbye.

[*Linda replaces the receiver, takes up the tray and hurries to ascend the stairs. She is halfway up when John Bentley's voice is heard.*]

JOHN (*calling, off-stage*): Linda!

LINDA (*stopping, turning and descending*): Yes, sir?

[*John enters through the archway. He carries two medicine bottles wrapped in paper.*]

JOHN: Who was on the phone?

LINDA (*at the foot of the stairs*): Mrs. Bentley, sir.

JOHN: Where was she speaking from?

LINDA: The French Embassy, sir. I told her about Miss Gwen and she's coming right back at once.

JOHN (*as he places the bottles on the table right centre*): She needn't bother.

LINDA (*unhappily*): Oh, dear!

[*Linda starts to ascend the stairs as John enquires:*]

JOHN: Is Mrs. Pember still upstairs?

LINDA (*turning at the second stair*): Yes, sir—so is Mr. Schneider.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

JOHN: What have you got there?

LINDA: A glass of cold milk for Miss Gwen, sir.

JOHN: The doctor said hot milk.

LINDA (*leaving the stairs*): I'm sorry, sir.

JOHN: And Linda—

LINDA: Yes, sir?

JOHN: I don't want any talk about today's events. You understand?

LINDA: I won't whisper a word, sir.

JOHN: Good.

[*Linda hurries away through the archway. John moves towards the stairs, stopping suddenly as he sees Mr. Hermann Schneider solemnly descending them. Schneider is about fifty-five, short, stout; wild, curly hair, pale fat face and fierce eyebrows. His expressive hands are clasped behind his back and his head is bent in thought. John asks anxiously:*]

Well?

SCHNEIDER (*having reached floor level*): Mr. Bentleys, ven ze doctor examine your daughter, did 'e find any bruises?

JOHN: I don't really know. He said she hadn't hurt herself. Why do you ask?

SCHNEIDER: Nussing. I vos joose vondering.

JOHN (*anxiously*): Mr. Schneider, do you think she's going to be all right?

SCHNEIDER: Oh, yes. I don't sink you 'ave anysing to worry about—except per'aps jooost keep ze vindows closed. (*Turning.*) Vy did you phone for *me*?

JOHN: My wife told me she had already seen you about Gwen.

SCHNEIDER: Ah, yes. I remember. Ze trouble is still viz ze same crying crooner?

JOHN: Yes.

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SCHNEIDER: Zey are a nuisance, zose men—but an interesting phenomenon.

JOHN: How do you mean?

SCHNEIDER: Zey are cardboard lovers for disappointed wives—safety valves for respectable spinsters. Viz ze crooner on ze stage, ze ladies can go to ze theatre and have a little romance wizout getting into trouble. But wiz your daughter it is different. Zere is som'sing unusual. You are qvite certain you don't like 'im?

JOHN: Quite!

SCHNEIDER: I suppose zat is to be expected. After all, you are natural enemies.

JOHN: Oh? Why?

SCHNEIDER (*shrugging his shoulders*): Bobby Denver make ze people cry wiz 'is sad songs—you make zem laugh wiz your funny jokes from ze Stock Exchange. (*Briskly.*) Tell me, you are not biased because of Mrs. Bentley running after 'im?

JOHN: Not at all. My wife used to be an actress. I regard her behaviour this morning as just a piece of theatrical nonsense. It's Gwen I'm worried about. She's only a child.

SCHNEIDER: Ze female of ze species is never a child. A little girl is a small voman.

JOHN (*irritably*): I don't wish to go into any unpleasant psychological ramifications. I live an ordinary decent life and I just want to know how to deal with this trouble.

SCHNEIDER (*briskly*): Okay. I vill tell you. (*Sitting left centre.*) But zis is positively my last professional appearance as a psychiatrist.

JOHN (*sitting on settee*): Oh. Why?

SCHNEIDER: Mr. Bentleys, my profession has been undermined by frivolous people. (*Angrily.*) In every play in ze Vest End, zere is a psychiatrist!

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

Zose damn playwrights! Zey 'ave look up our sleeve and put all our cards on ze table. (*Tearfully.*) For six years, at Ellis Island, I study for my American degree—und in ze last six munce, I am almost bankrupt! For the future I will apply my psychological knowledge only to business.

JOHN: But how does all this concern my daughter?

SCHNEIDER (*rising*): I vill tell you. (*Sitting on settee, at left of John.*) My son 'as invented a silent—'ow you say?—der Behalter—der Behalter for das Mafchzimmer—a silent cistern for ze little room.

[*A pause. Schneider looks at John who blankly looks back at him. Schneider, seeking to elucidate matters, gives two little pulls at an imaginary chain.*]

JOHN (*immediately, as he makes to rise*): For heaven's sake!

SCHNEIDER (*stopping John from rising*): No, please! Listen! You do not appreciate. (*Dramatically.*) Instead of all ze "Yah, Yah, Yah!" ven ze vater pours from ze tank—zere is only a little "Sob, Sob, Sob"—like somebody crying. (*Briskly.*) Now zen! For som'time, my son 'as vondered vot to call ze silent cistern. But today, I can tell 'im! (*Emphatically.*) Ve vill call it ze Bobby Denver!

JOHN: Oh, ridiculous! (*Rising.*) I'm sorry. I'm very busy.

SCHNEIDER (*rising*): Too busy to bozzer about your daughter's happiness?

JOHN (*irritably*): How can such nonsense possibly concern my daughter or anybody else?

SCHNEIDER: Mr. Bentleys, ven a man accidentally shoot 'imself in ze heart—zat is tragedy, you cry. But ven a man accidentally shoot 'imself in ze seat of ze pants—even zo 'e die—you laugh. (*Forcibly.*)

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It is ze same tragedy, but you laugh! Shall I tell you vy? (*Emphatically.*) Because ze tragedy 'as been robbed of dignity. Do you see vere I am getting at? 'Ow could your daughter take seriously ze tragic tears of a man whose name vos on der Behälter for das Mafchzimmer? It vill kill 'im viz ridicule! Und, at ze same time, ze publicity vill make much money for my son. (*Smilingly.*) Ze perfect marriage between psychology and business.

JOHN: It would certainly make my wife change her mind.

SCHNEIDER (*smilingly*): For zat reason also, I took ze liberty to phone Bobby Denver and ask zat 'e kom 'ere at vunce.

JOHN: Of all the damned impertinence! How did you know where to find him?

SCHNEIDER: Mrs. Bentley tell me 'e live at ze Savoy. I phone zere und zey say 'e is at ze B.B.C. I phone again und—vunderful!—I speak to 'im personal.

JOHN: You didn't tell him about Gwen jumping?

SCHNEIDER: Oh, no! I only say som'sing very serious 'as 'appen und 'e is to kom at vunce.

JOHN: I won't see him. I'll throw him out!

SCHNEIDER (*solemnly*): Mr. Bentleys, upstairs your daughter lies in her bed wiz her pillow wet wiz tears as she cries "Bobby! Bobby!" Please—don't keep 'im away from her. Ven a man is going to stab you in ze back—look him in ze face.

JOHN: Schneider, I'm quite convinced that you're an imposter!

SCHNEIDER (*indignantly*): Ich verstehe nicht!

JOHN: But I think you're a clever one. And if, by fair means or foul, you can put a stop to my daughter's infatuation for this crooner, I'll give you two hundred pounds.

SCHNEIDER: Soch money!

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

JOHN: Well? What do you suggest?

SCHNEIDER: I 'ave already explain ze Behalter for das Mafchzimmer.

JOHN (*irritably*): No, no! I want something more definite.

SCHNEIDER: Okay. (*Brisely.*) I would advise zat—to prepare ze ground—you do ze rough stuff. Smack ze daughter, 'it ze wife. Make zem afraid of you.

JOHN: I'll do nothing of the sort.

SCHNEIDER: Ve sink of som'sing else. Tell me, vot is Bobby Denver's reaction to zis romance?

JOHN: He says he's not interested.

SCHNEIDER: Zen appeal to 'im to 'elp you. Ask 'im to do ze David Garrick.

JOHN: What does that mean?

SCHNEIDER: Vell, 'e deliberately drinks—to make ze daughter disgusted viz 'im.

JOHN: Have you any other ideas?

SCHNEIDER: For two hundred pounds? I didn't started yet. I sink it would 'ave a great reaction on ze respect of your family—if you leave 'ome.

JOHN (*irritably*): What are you talking about?

SCHNEIDER: Eizer ze daughter gives up zis nonsense or you pack your bag und valk out—never to return!

JOHN (*emphatically*): I couldn't leave my home. My conscience wouldn't let me. Besides, I'm nervy about damp sheets.

SCHNEIDER (*clutching his forehead*): Mein Gott! At such a time. (*Suddenly.*) Ah! (*Slowly, as he moves closer.*) 'Ow would ze wife react if, vun day, you bring 'ome—a strange voman?

JOHN (*indignantly*): Are you suggesting immorality?

SCHNEIDER (*emphatically*): If it is necessary zat you sacrifice yourself for zis great cause, I would say, "Stop at nussing zat does not make you look

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foolish!" But I suggest only zat you change your way of living. Srow aside your British conventions and restraints! Your family laugh at zem. I am qvite certain zat it is reaction to your respectable solidity zat 'as make your daughter fall in love wiz ze Bohemian crooner. Okay! From today forwards, you vill live in soch a vay zat vill make Toulouse-Lautrec seem like ze Salvation Army.

[*The front door bell rings urgently.*]

Bobby Denver!

JOHN: Hell!

SCHNEIDER: Are ze vindows closed upstairs?

JOHN: Yes, I think so. Where's that bromide? Ah! (*As he takes up the bottles.*) D'you think I can give her a double dose?

SCHNEIDER: You should 'ave ask ze doctor.

JOHN (*as he hurries up the stairs*): I'll risk it.

[*John exits up the stairs.*]

SCHNEIDER (*to himself*): A double—a double. Now vot does zat remind me of? (*Suddenly.*) But of course!

[*Schneider makes for the whiskey and pours himself a treble as he happily hums a little tune—and Pat, still in her Existentialist garb, enters and descends the stairs. She is wearing large dark glasses and carries a book. Schneider raises his glass and beams at the contents.*]

Mr. Schneider, 'ere's vishing you very 'appy complexes.

[*About to drink, his eyes open wide as Pat silently passes in front of him to exit through the French windows.*]

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

(*Fearfully.*) Oh, no! Mein Gott!

[*Schneider hurriedly drinks his whiskey and mops his forehead with his handkerchief as Bobby Denver staggers in through the archway carrying a half-unconscious Linda over his shoulder. Bobby is wearing a different suit. It isn't damaged, but his collar is open and askew. He carries his tie and his hat.*]

BOBBY (*as he enters*): You know, this woman should only walk about in a bath chair.

SCHNEIDER: Tell 'er to go back to ze kitchen.

BOBBY (*propping Linda on to her feet*): She can't go anywhere. She's got paper legs. (*To Linda.*) Are you feeling better?

[*Linda feebly nods her head.*]

Good. You know, I think it would be safer if you went about on all fours. Alternatively, answer the door with your eyes shut, then you won't know who's calling. *That* would help, wouldn't it?

[*Linda feebly nods her head. Bobby leaves go of her. Linda sways sideways and Bobby grabs her again.*]

Listen, honey, you're in a bad way. I'd like to see you go to bed.

[*Linda's eyes open wide and she goes down like a shot pigeon. Bobby looks at Schneider.*]

She misunderstood me.

[*John comes hurrying down the stairs.*]

(*Smilingly.*) Good afternoon. (*He moves aside and indicates Linda.*) You're just in time.

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JOHN (*livid*): No, by heaven, she can stay there!

BOBBY: It looks so untidy.

JOHN (*moving to Linda*): Hell and damnation!

[*John glares at Bobby as he half lifts Linda by the arms.*]

I believe you do it on purpose.

BOBBY: As a matter of fact, I do. Your wife said you needed exercise.

[*John, walking backwards, drags Linda towards the archway as he glares at Bobby and growls:*]

JOHN: I curse the day I met you!

[*He exits through the archway with the still unconscious Linda trailing after him, as Bobby remarks:*]

BOBBY (*to Schneider*): What a title for a song.

SCHNEIDER (*ingratiatingly*): May I take your 'at?

BOBBY: Sure.

[*Bobby holds out his hat. It has been torn right across and the two sections hold together by a thread.*]

Which half would you like?

SCHNEIDER: Oh, no! (*As he takes the hat.*) 'Ow 'as it got broken?

BOBBY: The usual struggle. Another excited female. (*As he pulls a woman's stocking from his pocket.*) But I'm hitting back! Oh, boy, I'm hitting back! (*As he shoves the stocking back into his pocket.*) There's no telling what I might win in the next scrimmage.

SCHNEIDER (*excitedly, referring to the hat*): May I keep zis?

BOBBY (*as he puts his tie on*): If you like that style.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

SCHNEIDER: Oh, sank you. I vill make a pair of Bobby Denver slippers wiz it. I vill sell zem. Ho, ho! (*As he shoves the hat into his pocket.*) You vait und see.

BOBBY: I can't wait—I've got an appointment.

SCHNEIDER: All in good time, Bobby. But first, before Mr. Bentleys' return, I 'ave a proposition to make. My name is Schneider—Prof. Hermann Schneider. Plis—would you allow me to 'ave your name inscribed on a Wasser Behälter?

BOBBY: That depends. Where's it worn?

SCHNEIDER: I refer to ze vater tank in ze—er——

BOBBY (*amazed*): You don't mean the thingummybob in the whatyoumaycallit?

SCHNEIDER: Exactly! It would be a sensational advertisement.

BOBBY: Certainly not!

SCHNEIDER (*turning nasty*): Okay. Zen I vill not use your name. I vill inscribe ze Behalter—"Ze Crying Crooner."

BOBBY: You know, you're hitting below the belt. I don't think I like you.

SCHNEIDER: I am a business man. I do not appreciate sentiment. To me, you are no more zan a little cog in ze veel of my ambitions.

BOBBY: So! You make ze insult, huh! You sink you can play ze big shot, heh? Mein Gott! Ich mochte etwas Brot mit Booter und Käse und dann einen Pfannkuchen!

[*Schneider angrily protests in a flow of ad lib German. Bobby angrily interrupts him.*]

Horch! If you put my name on ze pull sing I go to the polizei, und you get ein, zwei, drei, vier, *funf* years imprisonment. Und ven you kom draussen—I kick ze shins—und brechen das necken!

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[*More angry ad lib German from Schneider, and John enters through the archway.*]

JOHN (*angrily interrupting*): Schneider—shut up and get out!

SCHNEIDER: Danke schon! Auf wiedersehen!

[*Schneider turns, grabs his hat, and hurriedly exits through the French windows.*]

JOHN: Denver, I quite appreciate that theatre people have a warped sense of humour—but this afternoon even *your* witticisms seem out of place.

BOBBY: Why? What's happened?

JOHN: Some two hours after you left this morning Gwen jumped from the bathroom window.

BOBBY: Are you serious?

JOHN: Of course I am.

BOBBY: But—I had no idea. Is she hurt?

JOHN: Fortunately, no. But I think it's high time you realised that her ridiculous infatuation is no laughing matter.

BOBBY: I never thought it was. What made her do it?

JOHN: She knew my wife had gone off with you.

BOBBY: You mean Gwen jumped out of the window because of—what was it, jealousy?

JOHN: If one can apply such a term to her unbalance, yes.

BOBBY: Good Lord! What can we do about it? I'm as worried as you are.

JOHN: Listen, Denver—for some fantastic reason Gwen regards you as an idealist. To her, your tears are an expression of spiritual emotion and poetic sentiment—and nothing I can say will alter that opinion.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

BOBBY: Well, what do you suggest?

JOHN: You've got to disillusion her. You've got to do a Henry Irving (*hurriedly*) I mean, a David Garrick. You've got to do something that will make her ashamed of you—and I'll be very obliged if you can manage to do it away from her—and away from me.

BOBBY: Times have changed, you know. When Garrick pretended to get tight, it was regarded as a social disgrace to have one over the eight.

JOHN: In my circle, sir, it still is.

BOBBY: You're not a Rotarian?

JOHN: As it happens, I am—and I've yet to see a member of the Club under the influence.

BOBBY: I must have joined the wrong branch.

[*Stella enters through the archway.*]

STELLA: Hullo, Bobby! What are *you* doing here?

BOBBY: I was sent for, urgently.

STELLA: Because of Gwen?

BOBBY: Yes.

STELLA: John, did she really jump from the window?

JOHN (*coldly*): I would prefer not to speak to you. But as you are directly responsible for Gwen's mad impulse, I will advise you. Yes, she jumped from the bathroom. She whispered that information herself.

STELLA: Where was she found?

JOHN: Just by the dustbin—flat on her back, quite unconscious, her face wet with tears. (*Indignantly.*) Are you smiling?

STELLA: Only with relief. (*Turning.*) Bobby, will you excuse me?

BOBBY: Of course, darling.

[*Stella moves towards the stairs.*]

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

JOHN (*intercepting her*): I don't wish you to see her.

STELLA (*amazed*): *What?*

JOHN: She certainly doesn't want to see *you*. Quite apart from that, she's in a deep sleep. I gave her a double dose of bromide.

STELLA: Then I can see her without waking her.

JOHN (*emphatically*): I prefer that you remain down here.

STELLA (*quietly*): Will you please get out of my way?

JOHN: No, I will not.

STELLA: I'm going upstairs. If you try to stop me—I'll hit you.

JOHN (*shocked*): You'll *what?*

BOBBY: Oh, don't start any rough stuff.

JOHN: Ah, yes! (*Quietly, as he looks at Stella.*) Rough stuff! (*Loudly.*) Stella, sit down!

STELLA (*emphatically*): I'm going upstairs.

[*John gives Stella a gentle push on the shoulder—just enough to send her back one step.*]

BOBBY: Oh, no!

[*Stella has already recovered her balance and she gives John a push in the chest that sends him staggering backwards, to land on his backside at the foot of the stairs.*]

STELLA (*to Bobby*): I hope that hasn't distressed you too much?

BOBBY: It was fascinating.

STELLA: I've never done it before. It was quite spontaneous.

[*John has risen. He moves down to left of Stella, as he says:*]

JOHN: Your whole attitude makes me feel quite sick

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

with disillusionment. Not content with an afternoon of shameful flirtation——

STELLA: Oh, John! Don't be so stupid. I had an innocent little fling and I feel all the better for it. Now I can settle down again and lose my personality without feeling restless. I think all wives should have a little fling now and then. (*To Bobby.*) Don't you?

BOBBY: Well, it rather depends *who* they fling.

JOHN (*to Stella*): You were away for over four hours!

STELLA: But I wasn't with Bobby all that time. I spent an hour at the bank and two hours at the French Embassy. It may interest you to know that I got Peter released from prison at exactly three-thirty. He's flying over on the first plane possible.

JOHN: He's not going to stay *here*.

STELLA: Oh yes, he is.

BOBBY (*to Stella*): Who's Peter?

STELLA: My son-in-law.

BOBBY: What was he doing in prison?

STELLA: Sitting on a jury.

BOBBY: How very uncomfortable.

[*Stella and Bobby laugh together.*]

JOHN (*to Stella*): Are you absolutely heartless? Do you want Gwen to jump from another window?

STELLA: She hasn't jumped from the bathroom window yet.

JOHN: What do you mean?

STELLA: The greenhouse is directly underneath it—and the dustbin is round the corner. I think Gwen rather lost her bearings—unless, of course, a frightfully strong wind caught her in mid air.

JOHN: We shall see.

[*John moves to the stairs and pompously ascends them to exit, as Stella says:*]

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

STELLA: Don't go, Bobby. (*As she hurries up the stairs.*) We might have some *more* rough stuff in a minute.

[*She exits as Bobby replies:*]

BOBBY: Charming! I haven't enjoyed so much domesticity since my wife slapped me on the stomach with a cold hot-water bottle.

[*The telephone rings—just behind Bobby. He starts violently and takes the receiver.*]

(*Into telephone.*) Hullo? . . . (*Broad Scotch.*) Aye, this is Euston Station. . . . Aye, there's a train to Glasgow at six o'clock—but I'm afraid it went yesterday. . . . Well, you might faind a seat on the eight-thirty express, but it's awful slow. I think you'll faind it quicker if you walk. Aye, and it's much cheaper. . . . Well, if you've got to come back, I suggest you don't go at all—that'll be cheaper still. . . . No, you can't get your threepence back. You've pressed Button A and it's a dead loss.

[*He replaces the receiver as John descends the stairs. He passes Bobby without a word, moves to the archway and exits as Stella hurries down the stairs.*]

STELLA (*to Bobby, as she passes him*): We're going to inspect the dustbin.

BOBBY: Have a nice time.

[*Stella laughs and exits through the archway, as Pat enters through the French windows. She is carrying her book and wearing her dark glasses.*]

Good Lord! I mean, hullo.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

PAT (*stopping*): Hullo.

BOBBY: Who are you?

PAT: I'm one of the daughters here. Are you the crying crooner?

BOBBY: That's right. But I don't think I could make *you* cry. What's your name?

PAT: Patricia. Why?

BOBBY: I just wondered what sort of name went with those trousers.

[*Pat crosses to the stairs. Bobby continues:*]

Are you Peter's wife?

PAT: Yes.

BOBBY: I bet you're glad he hasn't got to sit on that jury any longer.

PAT (*turning, at foot of stairs*): What the hell are you talking about?

BOBBY: I was only making conversation.

PAT: Listen, you've caused *enough* trouble in this house. Why don't you beat it?

BOBBY (*moving to her*): What a pity!

PAT: What do you mean?

BOBBY: You're so tough—and you *could* be so charming. You look like hell—and you could look so wonderful. (*He moves to the piano, as he continues.*) A pretty girl shouldn't dress like that.

[*He switches on the microphone and sits at the piano, as he continues:*]

Don't you want your husband to think——

[*Bobby sings and plays—without fooling:*]

When my sugar walks down the street

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

All the birdies go tweet, tweet, tweet——

[*Pat turns and starts to ascend the stairs, as Bobby continues:*]

And in the evening when the sun goes down
It's never dark when she's around——

[*Pat stops on the stairs and, without turning, listens—as Bobby continues:*]

She is affectionate, and I'll say this
When she kisses me, I sure stay kissed.
When my sugar walks down the street
Why all the birdies go tweet, tweet, tweet,
She's such a pretty baby——

PAT (*interrupting wildly, as she turns*): Oh, shut up!

BOBBY (*stopping playing*): What's the matter?

PAT (*wildly, as she descends the stairs and moves to down centre*): Don't you think I *want* to behave normally?

[*She flings her book and glasses on to the settee.*]

Don't you think I want to look like a woman?

[*She pulls off the red ribbon and shakes her hair loose.*]

I'm sick of this damn way of living! (*Pulling off her jersey.*) And I'm sick of these damn clothes!

[*She flings her jersey aside. She is wearing a brassiere. Still in the same wild mood, she fumbles angrily with the side zip of her trousers as Gwen, in a dressing-gown, appears at the top of the stairs and Bobby shouts frantically:*]

BOBBY (*to Pat*): Steady! Steady! That'll do.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

GWEN (*from the stairs, to Pat*): You wicked devil!

PAT (*angrily, to Gwen*): Oh, go back to bed!

GWEN (*as she descends the stairs, to Pat*): I'll kill you!
I'll kill you in your sleep.

BOBBY (*at centre, to Gwen*): What's the matter with
you?

[*Gwen on the verge of tears, moves forward to left centre.*]

GWEN: She was trying to seduce you. (*Wildly, to Pat.*) All right! Two can play at that game.

[*She wrenches at the cord of her dressing-gown.*]

PAT (*at right centre*): You crazy little fool! What are
you doing?

[*Gwen whips off her dressing gown and flings it on the floor.
She is wearing pyjama trousers and jacket.*]

GWEN (*to Pat*): Now then! It's *your* move!

BOBBY (*to Gwen*): You know, you need a damn good
spanking! (*To Pat.*) So do you.

[*Bobby picks up the dressing-gown and throws it to Gwen.*]

Put that on at once!

GWEN: Not till she puts her jersey on!

BOBBY (*appealingly, to Pat*): Be a sport.

PAT: I'm not going to be dictated to by a silly kid.

BOBBY (*angrily*): You're sisters, aren't you?

[*He moves to Pat, grabs her by the wrist and pulls her
towards Gwen.*]

Come on! You're going to kiss and be friends.

PAT (*struggling to release herself*): Leave me alone!

[*Bobby holds her with difficulty as John and Stella enter
through the archway to hear Bobby shouting.*]

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

BOBBY (*to Pat*): Damn it, one little kiss won't hurt you!

JOHN (*livid*): *What* did you say?

[*Pat wrenches herself free from Bobby and he staggers back to near Gwen, who hurriedly puts on her dressing-gown as Pat picks up her jersey and John moves forward to centre as Stella moves down right.*]

(*To Bobby.*) I'll get you six years for this! But first I'm going to thrash the daylights out of you.

[*Pat hurriedly puts on her jersey as Gwen moves protectingly to the front of Bobby.*]

GWEN (*on the verge of tears, to John*): Oh, no, you're not.

JOHN: Get out of the way!

GWEN (*wildly*): I won't!

STELLA: John, there must be *some* explanation.

PAT (*to John*): Gwen and I had been rowing each other. He was asking me to kiss *her*.

STELLA (*to John*): There. You see?

JOHN (*to Pat*): Who removed your jersey?

GWEN: She removed it herself. She was trying to attract him.

PAT: I was not!

GWEN: You were! (*To John.*) And, as a counter-measure, I removed my dressing-gown.

JOHN (*moving past Pat—to Stella*): Now perhaps you'll realise the damnable effect these men have on women? (*Angrily.*) I suppose I should feel flattered that you came home with your hat on.

BOBBY: Er—could I have a little word?

JOHN (*turning*): Not to me! (*Moving back to centre.*) I'm going to throw you into the gutter, where you belong.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

GWEN (*desperately*): Daddy, if you touch him, I'll hit you!

JOHN: *What* did you say?

STELLA: John, you're being narrow-minded and 'biased. Personally, I think Bobby's a decent man and I like him.

GWEN (*wildly*): I love him!

[*John looks hopefully at Pat.*]

PAT (*to John*): He made me realise that I've been dressing like an idiot. I'm grateful to him.

JOHN: I see. (*To Stella.*) It appears that I'm the only one with any sense of decency. (*Sorry for himself.*) I feel rather in the way. Excuse me.

[*He turns and solemnly ascends the stairs to exit.*]

PAT: What's he going to do?

STELLA: I don't know. (*Looking towards the stairs.*) I believe I'm rather worried.

BOBBY: He won't jump from the bathroom window, will he?

STELLA: I don't think so. He couldn't get through it.

GWEN: I did.

PAT: You did not!

GWEN: I did! I landed on the greenhouse, fell to the ground, and staggered round to the dustbin.

PAT: Ha!

GWEN: I did! (*To Stella.*) And if you go out with Bobby again, I'll jump from the roof. I'll jump from the roof every day until I'm dead!

BOBBY (*to Stella*): I don't think that bromide had much effect.

GWEN (*wildly*): Oh, Bobby! I love you so much!

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

BOBBY: Oh, shut up!

STELLA (*suddenly*): Ssh!

[*She looks towards the stairs. John enters to descend the stairs. He is wearing his bowler hat and he carries a suitcase. It has obviously been jammed full of clothing in a hurry and one pyjama leg hangs out.*]

John, dear, are you going somewhere?

JOHN: I'm leaving.

GWEN (*at left centre*): Oh, Daddy!

JOHN (*at centre*): I no longer fit in with the scheme of things here. I don't feel bitter—just a little heart-broken, that's all. Do you happen to know where my umbrella is?

BOBBY (*at left*): He's going to Manchester.

[*Stella tries to control her laughter. John stares at her with amazement.*]

JOHN: Is nothing sacred to you? I may never see you again. Is there anything particularly funny about that?

STELLA (*at right centre*): No, dear, of course not. It's just that (*pointing to his suitcase*) your pyjamas are hanging out.

JOHN (*having glanced at his suitcase*): Ah, yes. I understand. My tragedy has been robbed of dignity.

[*He looks from Stella to Pat and Gwen, then back to Stella.*]

Well, goodbye.

GWEN: Daddy! You can't leave us. What will we do?

JOHN: Oh, I'll make all necessary arrangements. I'll still look after you.

[*Bobby quietly moves to the piano as Pat says:*]

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

PAT (*to John*): Damn it, this is your home!

JOHN (*bitterly*): I have no home.

[*Bobby switches on his microphone and sits at the piano, as Stella replies:*]

STELLA (*to John*): I never thought *you* would desert your family.

JOHN (*bitterly*): I have no family!

[*Bobby sings and plays.*]

BOBBY: Do not forsake me, oh my darlin'.
On this our wedding day. . . .

[*John freezes. Stella tries hard not to laugh. Patricia claps a hand to her mouth and shakes with suppressed laughter. Gwen bites her lip to stop crying, and sinks into the chair, left centre. Bobby smilingly continues singing.*]

Do not forsake me, oh my darlin'.
Wait! Wait along!

[*John suspiciously glances from Stella to Pat to Gwen—and again at Stella. Then he half turns towards Bobby, who has continued:*]

I do not know what fate awaits me
I only know I must be brave.

[*John carelessly shrugs his shoulders and moves to near Bobby—as much as to say “I can take it.” Bobby smilingly continues:*]

For I must face a man who hates me,

[*John again shrugs his shoulders and carelessly meanders to the archway, as Bobby continues:*]

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

Or lie a coward—a craven coward——

[*John stands still in the archway, with his back to his family. Bobby continues:*]

Or lie a coward in my grave!

[*John suddenly drops his suitcase, grabs his handkerchief and bursts out sobbing as he turns and totters to Stella to be enfolded in her arms, as Gwen sobs out loud and Pat flops on to the settee to hide her laughter in a cushion, as:*

The curtain falls]

Scene 2

Scene: The same. About two hours later.

John's suitcase has been removed. The French windows are closed, the curtains are open. Outside lighting is dusk. The lounge lights are on.

As the curtain rises, John's voice is heard from upstairs.

JOHN (*off-stage, angrily*): There's no need for you to go at all!

STELLA (*off-stage*): I've got to look after Gwen, haven't I?

JOHN (*off-stage, angrily*): Then keep her away from Denver!

STELLA (*off-stage*): Oh, John! Don't you understand? Tonight she says goodbye to Bobby for ever.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

JOHN (*off-stage, angrily*): All right!

[*A door upstairs is slammed—and John enters, to descend the stairs. He is dressed as before. He is in a violent temper. He descends two or three stairs then turns as he shouts towards upstairs.*]

But I warn you, Stella—if you *do* go, you'll find me a very different man when you return!

[*The telephone rings. John descends the rest of the stairs, moves forward, grabs the receiver and growls:*]

Hullo? . . . (*Angrily.*) No, it is not! This is the Beachy Head Lighthouse!

[*He slams back the receiver as Linda enters.*]

LINDA (*nervously*): If you please, sir, there's a Mr. Michael Kenley to see you.

JOHN: Tell him to go to the devil!

LINDA (*towards the passage*): Will you come this way, please?

[*Michael Kenley enters and Linda hurries away. Michael is about twenty, good looking, manly, and not particularly well dressed. He carries his hat and a newspaper.*]

MICHAEL (*smiling*): Good evening, sir.

JOHN: What the hell do *you* want?

[*Michael laughs.*]

MICHAEL (*briskly*): I'm from the *Daily Record*, sir. We wondered if you would be good enough to advise us if there was any particular reason for Bobby

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

Denver calling here twice today. We've had quite a number of phone calls about it—and we thought you might be able to give us some small piece of information that might be of interest to the general public.

JOHN: I loathe the general public—almost as much as I loathe people who force their way into my house to pick up bits of scandal.

MICHAEL (*brightly*): Scandal, sir? Ah! Now we're talking.

JOHN (*really curious*): Have you no shame?

[*Michael laughs.*]

MICHAEL: I was assigned to this job. I didn't choose it. Actually, I was on my way to attend a conference covering the recent statements of Italian scientists that there *is* life on other planets.

JOHN: Well, why didn't you go to it?

MICHAEL: The editor said Bobby Denver was more important.

JOHN (*piteously as he holds his head*): Please go away! I feel desperately ill.

[*Pat enters to descend the stairs, as she says:*]

PAT (*to John*): Why don't you go to bed?

MICHAEL (*as he looks at Pat*): Oh, gosh!

[*Pat is wearing a low-cut evening dress, with semi-crinoline to the floor—and she looks very beautiful and very feminine. She carries a small fur cape.*]

JOHN (*smiling*): Ah! Now that *is* my daughter.

PAT (*as she leaves the stairs*): Thank you, Daddy.

JOHN: My dear, you look lovely. And the dress of course—I've never seen anything like it.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

PAT: Yes, you have. Stella's been wearing it for over a year. (*Having noticed Michael.*) Who's this?

JOHN (*irritably*): Nobody.

[*Pat immediately moves to shake hands with Michael.*]

PAT: How do you do?

MICHAEL (*smilingly*): Hullo.

JOHN (*to Pat*): Are you going to this damn television thing?

PAT: No. I'm going to Claridges. I'm meeting an elderly Guards officer who's the biggest snob in London. He'll probably make me sit at a separate table—but I'm going to enjoy every dull English moment of it.

[*Michael laughs.*]

JOHN: But what about your husband? He'll be here within half an hour.

PAT: That's why I'm going to Claridges.

JOHN: Pat, don't be so stupid.

PAT: Oh, father! Do mind your own business.

JOHN: What?

PAT (*to Michael as she moves to the archway*): You wouldn't get me a taxi, would you?

MICHAEL: You bet I would!

PAT (*with a smile*): Thank you.

[*She exits through the archway.*]

MICHAEL (*to John*): Excuse me, sir? I'll be right back.

[*He hurries away through the archway as John shouts after him.*]

JOHN: No, you damn well won't! If you ever look in here again, I'll break your neck!

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

[*Gwen, in evening dress, has entered to descend the stairs as she says:*]

GWEN (*anxiously, to John*): Was that Bobby?

JOHN: No—but the same goes for him.

GWEN (*as she leaves the stairs*): Where's Pat?

JOHN: She's gone to Claridges.

GWEN (*wildly*): I don't believe it! Oh, damn and blast her, she's double crossing again!

JOHN (*angrily*): If you use that language in front of me, I'll—

GWEN: I'm sorry, Daddy—but she's *after* Bobby. I know she is!

JOHN: Well, I hope she gets him.

GWEN: But she's married!

JOHN: So is he! And it's about time you realised it.

GWEN: I've been realising it all day. I'm not going to see him again after this evening.

JOHN: Where are you meeting him?

GWEN: He's calling for me here.

JOHN: Gwen, you're only a baby. Do you really want to flaunt yourself in front of all those people—with a married man of thirty-seven?

GWEN: I'm going to listen to him singing—and have a little supper with him, that's all. And—we're going to have a chaperon. Stella's coming, too.

JOHN: That's what's worrying me!

[*Linda enters through the archway.*]

LINDA: If you please, sir—Mr. Peter Pember.

JOHN (*holding his forehead*): Oh, my God.

[*Peter Pember enters through the archway. He is a well-built fellow, about twenty-two. Crew-cut hair, and a beard of about a fortnight's growth. He is wearing clumsy*

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

yellow brogues, red socks and pale blue shorts: a brown sweater with a rolled neck, a mustard jacket, and a white beret. He carries a battered old suitcase, tied round with string—and a large paper parcel. He enters a step or two, then stands still and smiles sardonically at John.]

PETER: Hullo, father.

[Linda claps a hand to her mouth and hurriedly exits as John winces and closes his eyes.]

GWEN: Oh, no! *(To Peter.)* You're not really Pat's husband, are you?

PETER: I hope so. I've been taking some awful liberties, if I'm not. Are you her sister?

GWEN *(aggressively)*: Yes.

PETER: I don't think we're going to like each other.

GWEN: I know we're not!

JOHN *(to Peter)*: Take that bonnet off!

PETER: What do I do with my luggage?

JOHN: Well, if it belonged to me, I'd throw it away.

PETER: Jolly good idea.

[He throws the suitcase and parcel on to the floor near right end of settee and, without removing his beret, moves to centre as he produces a German-type pipe from his pocket.]

(Brightly.) Where's my woman?

JOHN: Your *what*?

PETER: My little one, my loved one, my rose of Sharon, my wife.

JOHN: She's out.

PETER *(at centre)*: Remind me to be annoyed with her.

[He fills his pipe with loose tobacco from his pocket as he glances round the room.]

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

Well, well! So this is my new home. It simply reeks of Suburbia. But it has its memories. (*Smilingly, to John.*) Months ago I used to wait for you to go to bed, then creep in here and do my courting. (*Looking right centre.*) Oh, how I remember that settee!

JOHN (*at left of Peter*): I don't like your conversation, sir.

PETER (*producing a match from his pocket*): It isn't conversation, it's just idle chatter. I'm never very witty when I first meet people. I find it gives them an inferiority complex.

[*He strikes the match on the seat of his shorts and lights his pipe.*]

GWEN (*at left*): Oh, Daddy! He's ghastly!

JOHN (*to Peter*): Have you booked yourself in at a hotel anywhere?

PETER (*in between puffs*): No, dear boy, I'm staying here. Where my wife is, there am I—and let no man put asunder.

[*He shakes the match out and throws it over his shoulder.*]

JOHN: Pember, I dislike you intensely!

[*Genuinely surprised, Peter looks at John and, at the same moment, exhales a mouthful of pipe smoke full into John's face. John chokes and coughs—then continues:*]

If it hadn't been for the fact that you smashed up that Club in defence of the British Empire—

PETER (*interrupting*): What are you talking about? I don't like the British Empire.

JOHN (*immediately, to Gwen*): Fetch your mother!

[*Gwen turns and hurries up the stairs to exit, as Peter says:*]

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

PETER (*as he steps on to the settee*): She won't throw me out. She simply adores me.

JOHN (*loud, as he moves to the settee*): Now listen to me, Pember—

PETER (*as he relaxes full length on the settee*): I'd love you to call me Peter.

JOHN: I'll call you a lot of things before I'm through with you. Take your feet off that settee—and put that filthy pipe out!

PETER: Yes, I must admit it is rather offensive. It was given to me by a Swedish naturalist. A most charming fellow—I shared his cell. He'd been sentenced to six months for sitting his wife on a Primus stove—and he found the smell of this pipe just too nostalgic. (*As he takes them off.*) Do you mind if I remove my brogues? I haven't had them off since last Friday.

JOHN: Pember! I'm going to have you certified.

[*He moves away to left. As Peter puts his brogues on the carpet against the right end of the settee he says:*]

PETER: My dear fellow, in this mad world, it would be a certification of sanity.

[*Stella enters to descend the stairs—in evening dress.*]

STELLA: Peter! How lovely to see you again!

PETER (*rising and stepping over the settee*): Ah, Stella! Charmante! Comment ca va?

STELLA: Très bien, merci.

PETER (*as he takes her hand*): Est-ce que je peut vous embrasser?

STELLA: Mais certainement!

[*Peter kisses Stella on each cheek.*]

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

(*Laughingly.*) Oh, dear! You're quite Parisian, aren't you?

PETER: No, but I've picked up a lot of habits from the *English* in Paris.

STELLA (*laughing and turning to John*): John, dear, this is our son-in-law. Isn't he exciting? (*To Peter.*) My husband's always very shy when he first meets people. You'll like him when you get to know him better.

PETER: I hope so. I must confess that up to now I've found him bitterly disappointing.

[*He moves to flop on the settee.*]

STELLA (*laughing, to John*): He's so witty. You mustn't be offended. He only says what he thinks. (*To Peter.*) I'm afraid Pat had to go out.

PETER: So I understand. But why are you afraid?

STELLA (*laughingly*): Why have you taken your shoes off?

PETER: I'm giving them a breather. Do you like my socks? I knitted them myself.

STELLA: John—his socks!

JOHN: I've seen them!

STELLA (*laughingly*): Have you had anything to eat?

PETER: I'm still full of black bread from the prison.

STELLA: Well, you make yourself comfortable and I'll get you a nice big whiskey.

JOHN (*at left centre*): Oh, no, you won't!

STELLA (*at centre*): What do you mean?

JOHN (*with ominous restraint—as he moves to her*): Stella, you and I—in our different ways—have more or less enjoyed an association of some fourteen years. During that long time, I have given way to you on almost every conceivable occasion. But today, over the question of Bobby Denver, we have practically reached the point of separation. And if—to that

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

crisis—you add the insult of allowing this indecent pathological specimen to stay in my house, then I most solemnly warn you, I shall not be responsible for my actions!

PETER: Very good!

JOHN (*continuing steadily, to Stella*): Don't be misled because I happen to be speaking quietly. Inside me, there is a seething beyond your understanding. I hear strange voices telling me to do things. There is a peculiar ringing in my ears——

[*Urgent ringing at the front door bell.*]

PETER (*wiggling a finger in his ear*): I've got that.

[*Gwen, still in evening dress, and carrying a small fur cape, comes hurrying down the stairs to make for the archway.*]

STELLA (*to Gwen*): Where are you going?

GWEN (*excitedly*): It's Bobby!

[*She hurriedly exits through the archway.*]

STELLA: Oh, John, it's Bobby!

JOHN (*mockingly as he moves to side of piano*): Ow, it's Bobby!

PETER: Who's Bobby?

STELLA: Bobby Denver, the crying crooner. Gwen's crazy about him. (*In a whisper, having glanced at John.*) But he's thirty-seven and she's only sixteen.

PETER: Good Lord, that's nothing. I know an old farmer in the Pyrenees who married a girl of thirteen. He's *eighty-seven*. They both play with the same toys.

[*Bobby and Gwen enter together through the archway. She is holding his arm. Bobby is in full evening dress. There is no sign of any mauling from the fans.*]

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

STELLA: Hullo, Bobby!

BOBBY: Hullo, darling!

JOHN (*angrily*): You will not address my wife like that! I'm sick of your "darlings" to each other!

BOBBY: It's only a theatrical expression.

GWEN: It doesn't mean anything, Daddy.

JOHN: Get away from him! (*Pointing to left.*) Sit down there—go on!

[*Gwen crosses and sits left as Bobby says:*]

BOBBY (*to Stella*): Quite a crowd outside—but look! No braces missing, no buttons ripped off. D'you think I'm slipping?

STELLA (*at right centre*): Perhaps they didn't recognise you in the dark.

BOBBY: Well, that's insulting. (*Reacting suddenly and pointing as he notices Peter.*) Who's this?

STELLA: Er—Peter Pember, my son-in-law.

BOBBY (*crossing to Peter*): How are you?

PETER: Why do you ask? You're not interested in my health.

STELLA: He's an Existentialist.

BOBBY: Oh, I see—wearing the national costume.

GWEN: Don't speak to him, Bobby. He's horrible.

STELLA: Gwen!

[*Peter takes Bobby's right sleeve and pulls him on to the settee, as he says:*]

PETER: As a matter of fact, Denver, we have quite a lot in common.

BOBBY: Really?

PETER: Oh, yes. The morbid depression of your singing and utter hopelessness of my philosophy form quite a strong link between us.

[*Bobby rises and looks at Stella.*]

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

BOBBY: I don't think I like him. (*Crossing Stella.*)
Do *you* like him, Bentley?

JOHN: God forgive me, the appalling comparison
has almost made me like you.

STELLA (*as she makes for the stairs*): Come along, Peter.
I'm sure you want to have a wash or something.

[*Peter picks up his suitcase—not the parcel—and follows Stella.*]

PETER: Am I sleeping with my wife?

STELLA (*as she ascends the stairs*): No. I'm afraid
you'll have to have the little room next to my
husband tonight.

JOHN: No, by heaven, he won't!

[*John makes for the stairs. Finding Bobby in his way he shoves him to one side, as Stella exits and Peter follows. John frantically ascends the stairs as he shouts:*]

Stella! I've warned you. If he stays here, I'll cut his
bloody throat. Stella!

[*He exits as Bobby laughs.*]

BOBBY: You know, I believe your father's beginning
to enjoy himself.

[*He stops, immediately apprehensive, as he notes the depth of feeling behind Gwen's steady gaze.*]

GWEN (*quietly*): Hullo, my darling.

BOBBY (*nervously*): Gwen, you've got to be good.

GWEN (*quietly*): This is the first time, in the whole of
our lives, that we've ever been left alone together.

BOBBY (*calling towards the stairs*): Stella!

GWEN: Oh, no!

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

BOBBY: Are you going to behave yourself?

GWEN: I promise. (*Crossing to the settee.*) But please sit down—just for a moment.

BOBBY (*looking at his wrist watch*): We've got to get to the studio.

GWEN (*appealingly*): Just until Stella's ready.

BOBBY: All right—but you stay where you are.

[*He sits in the chair left centre. Gwen smiles and sits on the settee. A pause. They look at each other. Gwen smiles and Bobby immediately looks away.*]

(*Briskly.*) Tell me, how are you getting on at school?

GWEN: I've left school. Father's having me trained to be a secretary. I hate it! I want to be a writer. I want to write like Dostoevsky. (*Suddenly.*) But I'd be *your* secretary. (*Rising and moving to near him.*) Oh, Bobby, that would be a wonderful idea.

BOBBY: Forget it.

GWEN: Why did your wife leave you?

BOBBY: She made a hit on Broadway when I was still on the beach at Blackpool—few marriages could stand up to that.

GWEN: Where is she now?

BOBBY: In America.

GWEN: Do you still love her?

BOBBY: Yes.

GWEN: I hate her!

BOBBY: What an extraordinary child you are. Full of wild emotions. I suppose it's adolescence or something.

GWEN: Life itself is adolescent. In the great scheme of things, this old world of ours is very young.

BOBBY: Is that a quotation?

GWEN: Oh, no. I never express myself through the minds of other people. I'd rather kill myself.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

BOBBY: There you go! Jumping out of the window again. Or *did* you jump?

[*Gwen ignores the question as she impulsively moves forward to kneel beside him.*]

GWEN: Bobby! After the television, let's give Stella the slip. Let's have our little supper alone together.

BOBBY: No darn fear! (*Rising and crossing to right.*) Stella comes with us and Stella *stays* with us. And, after tonight, we don't meet again. That was what we arranged and you swore on your oath you'd keep to it.

GWEN (*rising*): Would you like a whiskey?

BOBBY (*after a moment's pause*): Have you ever heard of David Garrick?

GWEN: No.

BOBBY: Then I'd like a large one.

GWEN: Oh, yes! I'll get it for you.

[*She hurries to pour a large whiskey as Bobby sits on the settee.*]

BOBBY: Nothing with it. I like it good and straight. I didn't have any for breakfast this morning and I'm rather missing it.

[*Gwen hurries to him with a glass full of neat whiskey.*]

GWEN: There you are, my darling.

[*Bobby stares at the enormous drink, then takes the glass.*]

BOBBY: Thanks.

[*He looks at the whiskey—smiles feebly at Gwen—again looks fearfully at the whiskey—unobtrusively crosses a couple of fingers, and drains the glass. His eyes bulge, his*

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

legs cross—and he is only just able to hold out the glass and gasp:]

May I have another?

GWEN (*excitedly, as she takes the glass*): Oh, please do!

[She hurries to the radiogram and switches it on, then hurries to pour another treble as—unseen by her—Bobby leans sideways with his hand on his stomach, and his face contorted. Suddenly, Bobby's face brightens. He is looking down at Peter's big brogues. He half looks towards Gwen, then again at the brogues—and he sits up straight and smiles: as Gwen comes back to him with the refilled glass.]

Are you sure you wouldn't like some soda water with it?

BOBBY (*happily, as he takes the glass*): Quite sure, thanks.

GWEN (*happily*): I'll get you a cigarette.

[She turns and makes for the cigarette-box on the piano, and Bobby—having glanced towards Gwen—quickly pours the whiskey into one of the brogues. He immediately tilts the empty glass to his lips as Gwen returns with the cigarette-box—and quiet sentimental music comes from the radiogram.]

(*Holding out the box.*) Help yourself.

BOBBY (*holding up his glass*): I'd rather have another whiskey.

GWEN (*taking the glass*): Oh, good!

[She hurries to pour yet another whiskey and Bobby has another peep at the brogues before continuing:]

BOBBY (*happily*): I'm afraid drinking is rather a

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

strong weakness of mine. The doctor's trying to limit me to two bottles a day.

[*Gwen arrives with the whiskey. She has half filled the glass. Bobby reacts.*]

Good heavens! (*Hurriedly, as he takes the glass.*) I mean good health!

GWEN: Good health!

[*She replaces the box on the piano and hurries to the foot of the stairs to look upwards and listen as Bobby—having glanced towards her—hurriedly pours the whiskey into the other brogue, as he replies:*]

BOBBY: Hurray.

[*Gwen turns from the stairs as Bobby, with tilted glass, appears to be draining the dregs. She moves forward.*]

GWEN (*as she gazes at him*): Oh, you don't know how I admire you.

BOBBY: *What?*

GWEN: For a man of your age to be able to drink nearly a pint of neat whiskey in less than five minutes. I think it's wonderful!

BOBBY (*hopelessly*): You mean you're not disgusted?

GWEN: Of course not!

BOBBY: So much for David Garrick!

GWEN (*sitting at his left*): Why are you so cold and indifferent? I thought the whiskey would warm your heart.

BOBBY: Was that why you asked me to have a drink?

GWEN: Yes.

BOBBY: Of course, I just don't know what to do about you.

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

GWEN (*on the verge of tears*): I'm in love!

BOBBY (*rising*): Oh, don't talk nonsense! (*As he bangs his glass down on the settee table.*) Honestly, Gwen, I'm fed up with it.

[*He moves to the French windows and suddenly claps his hands to his eyes, as he exclaims:*]

Aaaah!

GWEN: What's the matter?

BOBBY (*fearfully, as he slowly lowers his hands*): I've just seen the new moon through glass!

GWEN: Don't be so old-fashioned.

BOBBY: Everything will go wrong with me now. I'm doomed!

GWEN (*rising and making for the French windows*): Well, I'm going to be doomed with you.

BOBBY (*intercepting her*): No! Let me open the windows first.

[*He hurriedly opens the windows. Gwen moves to them.*]

GWEN: Where is it?

BOBBY (*pointing*): There—just above the trees. Wish for something nice and ask it to let me off.

GWEN (*looking out to the night*): Oh moon, serenely shining, don't be unkind to Bobby. Turn his thoughts from primitive superstitions and bring me closer to the man who is my love. (*Suddenly as she steps back.*) Oh!

[*Michael enters through the French windows.*]

MICHAEL (*to Gwen*): I'm sorry. I know I'm snooping—but please let me in on this. (*To Bobby.*) A little romance—yes?

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

BOBBY: Who are you?

MICHAEL: I'm afraid I'm from the *Daily Record*.

BOBBY: Well, what you heard just now is *off* the record.

MICHAEL: Okay, Bobby, if that's how you want it, but it would mean a lot if you could give me some sort of angle.

BOBBY: Nothing doing. You report one word of gossip and I'll get you the sack.

[*Michael laughs.*]

What's your name?

MICHAEL (*briskly*): Michael—Michael Kenley. Twenty-five years old. Born in Dublin. No parents. No money.

GWEN: A press reporter?

MICHAEL: Yes—but it won't last. I get kicked out of everything. (*To Bobby.*) And I've just about tried everything. I've washed up at Lyons, swept round at Selfridges, and last December I was Father Christmas at Gamages. (*He laughs out loud.*)

BOBBY: How do you manage to keep laughing?

MICHAEL: It started when I was Father Christmas and I can't get out of the habit.

BOBBY: Are you married?

MICHAEL (*laughingly*): Good Lord, no. Women don't take me seriously.

BOBBY: Perhaps you don't know when *not* to laugh.

MICHAEL (*laughingly*): Yes, I expect that's it.

BOBBY (*to Gwen*): I like him.

GWEN: I don't.

[*Michael laughs.*]

BOBBY (*to Michael*): Look in at Lime Grove Studio

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

this evening—about an hour's time—ask for me. I've got a television show—

MICHAEL: Thanks a lot.

GWEN: Oh, no!

BOBBY: Damn it, the poor devil's got to live. I only want him to report on my new song.

MICHAEL: I heard all the others. I thought they were lousy.

[He laughs out loud as Bobby reacts—and John's voice is heard from upstairs.]

JOHN (*off-stage*): Well, let him get pneumonia! It'll do him good. If he wears my overcoat, I'm through. Lock, stock and barrel, I've finished with the whole damn thing!

[A door is heard to slam. Gwen turns off the radiogram as John, completely out of control, hurriedly descends the stairs.]

GWEN: What's wrong, Daddy?

JOHN (*as he makes for the telephone*): Don't speak to me. (*As he lifts the receiver and dials.*) I don't want anybody to speak to me!

BOBBY: It's going to be a very one-sided phone conversation.

JOHN (*glaring at Bobby*): You mind your own damn business! (*As he sees Michael.*) And what the devil are you doing here? Get out!

MICHAEL: Okay, sir. (*Laughing out loud as he turns to the windows.*) Here I go again! I'll be seeing you, Bobby.

[He exits through the French windows, as John says:]

JOHN (*at the phone*): Hullo? . . . This is Mr. John Bentley. I want to speak to Mr. Schneider.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

BOBBY: Ah! Der Wasser Behälter mit de pull sing!

JOHN (*at the phone*): Well, tell him to phone me. It's urgent.

[*He slams down the receiver as Bobby says:*]

BOBBY: Is there anything I can do, sir?

JOHN: Yes—you can go to hell!

[*He sits left centre and sinks his face into his hands as Stella, now wearing a fur cape with her evening dress, descends the stairs followed by Peter. He is still wearing his white beret and a black evening dress overcoat, borrowed from John's wardrobe, and is still wearing socks without shoes.*]

STELLA (*as she descends*): Bobby, you don't mind if Peter comes with us, do you?

GWEN: Oh, no!

BOBBY: I don't think they'll let him in.

STELLA: He can sit with me. The only trouble is I can't find any shoes to fit him. (*To Peter.*) You'll have to wear your brogues.

[*Bobby laughs out loud.*]

PETER (*smilingly to Bobby as he makes for the settee*): I'll be the noisiest audience *you've* ever had.

BOBBY (*laughing out loud*): I bet you stamp your feet.

[*He still laughs as Peter puts one brogue on, as Gwen says:*]

GWEN (*almost in tears, to Stella*): This is the meanest thing you've ever done to me!

STELLA: Don't be selfish, Gwen. I can't leave him with your father.

GWEN (*tearfully as she leaves*): Come on, Bobby!

[*She exits through the archway.*]

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

STELLA (*turning*): John, dear, do be sensible.

GWEN (*shouting angrily from off-stage*): Bobby!

BOBBY: Oh, all right!

STELLA: Are you ready, Peter?

[*Peter stands with one foot half raised—and Bobby rocks with laughter.*]

PETER: Yes, but (*as he looks at the floor round about him*)

I seem to be standing in something wet!

BOBBY (*speaking with difficulty*): You're over-excited!

[*Rocking with laughter, Bobby exits through the archway, as Peter moves to follow him, still holding the other brogue in his hand.*]

PETER (*loudly and suspiciously, as he follows Bobby*): Have you been putting anything *in* my brogues?

[*He exits through the archway, as Stella moves to near her husband.*]

STELLA: John—can't you understand? This is Gwen's *goodbye* to Bobby. It's a farewell to her first romance.

JOHN (*hoarsely, with a wild dramatic gesture*): Go away!

STELLA: Oh, very well.

[*She moves to up-stage centre, then stops and looks back at John.*]

But, remember what Shakespeare said.

[*She remembers playing Juliet, and she faces the audience, as she continues:*]

“ Good night, good night, parting is such sweet sorrow,

That we must say good night, 'til it be—— ”

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

[*Peter suddenly reappears in the archway, as he says loudly and petulantly:*]

PETER (*to Stella*): Oh, come on, mother!

[*He exits as Stella freezes. Completely deflated, there is nothing for her to do but close her eyes and exit after Peter, in silence. The telephone rings. John comes to life, springs to his feet, and moves up-stage to grab the receiver.*]

JOHN: Hullo? . . . Yes. Is that you, Schneider? . . . Good! Now listen! (*Slowly and emphatically.*) What exactly did you mean when you suggested my bringing a strange woman here? . . . (*Loudly.*) Well, *find* one for me! (*Loudly and desperately.*) Yes—*as soon as possible!*

The curtain falls

ACT THREE

Scene I

Scene: The same. About three hours later. Night.

The windows are closed. The curtains have been half drawn to. The lights are on. The low armchair, from left centre, has been moved into and against the "waist" of the piano. Left centre there is a "waiter" carrying a couple of opened champagne bottles and an empty glass. At right of the "waiter" is a small chair. There are two or three empty glasses on the down-stage end of the piano. On the long table behind the settee are two opened champagne bottles, a half-full bottle of brandy, and several glasses. Peter's brown paper parcel is on the right end of the drinks table. Before the curtain rises the radiogram can be heard playing, and voices singing the end of one of the verses of a record of "Down Yonder."

John is sitting left end of the settee. He is wearing Peter's white beret, a dressing-gown, and a flowery scarf. His arm is round Pearl's waist. Her head is on his shoulder. He holds an empty glass. Pearl is about twenty-four, a platinum blonde, and quite beautiful. She wears a sleek black evening frock, with a slim wrapped coat of claret velvet, and rhinestone earrings. Schneider is sitting in the chair right of the "waiter." He wears a shabby dinner jacket—he's smoking a cigar and holding a glass of whiskey. Peter, still in the blue shorts, etc., is sitting on the piano, with his feet on the back of the small armchair. He is clumsily trying to knot a fantastically coloured scarf. John, Peter and Schneider slightly advertise the fact that they have had more than enough to drink. Pearl is cold sober, but the adverb is metaphorical.

The singing has reached the chorus as the curtain rises.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

JOHN:
SCHNEIDER: } (*at the top of their* }
PETER: } (*voices*) } Down yonder!

PEARL: Someone beckons to me

JOHN:
SCHNEIDER: } (*at the top of their* }
PETER: } (*voices*) } Down yonder!

PEARL: Someone reckons on me.

I seem to see a race in memory

Between the Natchez and the Robert E. Lee.

Swanee shore, I miss you more and more

Every day; my Mammy land, you're simply grand.

JOHN:
SCHNEIDER: } (*at the top of their* }
PETER: } (*voices*) } Down yonder!

PEARL: When the folk get the news

Don't wonder at the hullabaloo,

There's Daddy and Manny, there's Ephraim and
Sammy

JOHN:
SCHNEIDER: } (*at the top of their* }
PETER: } (*voices*) } Waitin' down
yonder for me!

[*The radiogram checks off, as Schneider and Peter shout together:*]

SCHNEIDER (*raising his glass, to Pearl*): Bravo!

PETER (*at the top of his voice*): Bentley for Chairman!

JOHN (*as he moves the microphone to centre*): I am now
going to sing a little song, all by myself.

PETER (*getting down from the piano*): Oh, no, you're
not!

JOHN: Oh, yes, I am! If Bobby Denver can croon—
anybody can croon.

SCHNEIDER (*rising and moving to sit at piano*): I will
play for you—vot is it to be?

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

JOHN: Something my office boy has been singing for the past six months—and has it made me cry!

PETER (*crossing behind John to sit on left end of settee*): Hit it, Hermann!

[*John switches on the microphone. Schneider plays and John sings "Cry"—in serious burlesque—directly to audience.*]

JOHN: When your sweetheart sends a letter of good-byyyyyyyye

It's no secret you'll feel better if you cryyyyyyyyyy

When waking from a bad dream don't you sometimes think it's real

But it's only false emotion that you feel.

If your heartaches seem to hang around too longggggggggg

And your blues keep getting bluer with each songggggggggg

Remember sunshine can be found behind a cloudy sky

So let your hair down and go right on baby

And Cryyyyyyyyyy!

[*Reprise in a higher key, from "If your heartaches." At conclusion, Peter, Schneider and Pearl applaud and cheer—and Peter takes the microphone back to near the piano keyboard, clearing the flex as he does so, as Pearl says:*]

PEARL (*to John*): Darling, you sing like a nightingale.

JOHN (*mopping his forehead*): Thank you, darling.

PEARL: I can sing too.

JOHN: Really? Who taught you?

SCHNEIDER (*proudly*): I did. She occupies a little flat next to my own. Each night, I give 'er a lesson qvite free.

PETER (*to Schneider*): Well, I think you should pay.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

JOHN (*at left end of settee, to Pearl*): What is your name again, darling?

PEARL: Pearl.

JOHN: Charming. And is Schneider your oyster?

PEARL: I don't know what you mean. (*Holding out her arms.*) Give me a little kiss.

JOHN (*indicating Peter and Schneider*): Not in front of the children.

SCHNEIDER (*laughingly*): Ve can go into ze garden.

PETER (*continuing his knitting, in front of right end of settee*): Not for me. I enjoy nothing more than watching an elderly man make a clot of himself.

PEARL (*to John*): Why don't you throw him out?

JOHN: Because I don't want anybody to know he's been here. (*Crossing to Peter.*) But later, I shall find myself a pair of scissors and remove his whiskers!

PETER (*grinning, as he continues to knit*): You resent my beard, don't you? It's a threat to the common level of your green meadow gregariousness. You ridicule it because it offends your bovine mediocrity.

JOHN: Peter, darling, you slay me.

[*With a little dance step, John moves up to the drinks table to refill his glass.*]

SCHNEIDER (*to Peter*): Vy don't you be'ave yourself? You 'ave already been kicked out from television.

If you are not careful, ze same sing vill 'appen here.

PETER: Oh, no. Be it ever so humble, this is my home—and an Englishman's home is his schlosh.

PEARL: There's no need to use disgusting words. Can't you talk seriously for a change?

PETER: But of course.

[*Peter sits on the settee, at Pearl's right, and leans his head on Pearl's shoulder, as he continues.*]

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

(*Over-seriously.*) Tell me, my darling, what do you think of the hereafter?

SCHNEIDER: Ah, no! No politics!

[*John drains his refilled glass, and fills it again, as Peter says:*]

PETER (*resignedly, as he rises*): Oh, very well. I shall go into the kitchen and make a pass at Linda.

SCHNEIDER (*irritably*): She is preparing sandwiches.

PETER (*making for the archway*): Good! I can take her unawares. (*Turning, as he smiles wickedly.*) If you hear anybody screaming, it'll be *me*.

[*Peter exits, with his knitting, as Schneider says:*]

SCHNEIDER (*following Peter*): Damn lunatic! Vy don't you mind your own business!

[*Schneider exits through the archway.*]

PEARL (*sweetly*): Mr. Bentley.

JOHN (*putting down his glass*): What is it, darling?

PEARL: This isn't quite the set-up I expected.

JOHN (*moving to settee*): How do you mean?

PEARL: Well, you're not very interested in me, are you? After all, I consider myself fairly attractive—and I'm not used to spending *platonic* evenings with strange men. I think you've been most insulting.

JOHN: Didn't Schneider explain that I had no requirements?

PEARL: Yes—but can't you change your mind?

JOHN (*sitting at Pearl's left*): My dear girl, we're discussing a standard of behaviour. We're not backing horses.

PEARL (*petulantly*): You got me here under false pretences.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

JOHN: I did nothing of the sort. It was a non-biological business arrangement which you understood perfectly well. Our relationship is no more than that of a managing director and his private secretary.

PEARL: Oh, sir! (*Jumping on to his lap.*) Just one little kiss!

JOHN (*putting her back on to the settee*): Absolutely, no.

PEARL (*petulantly*): Don't you ever want to kiss your *real* secretary?

JOHN: Not with any overpowering inclination. He's a middle-aged Scotsman with five children.

PEARL (*laughingly, as she puts her arms round him*): Now you're being silly.

JOHN (*removing her arms*): Pearl, darling, please remember—you're *Schneider's* trophy, not mine.

[*John rises and moves to centre.*]

PEARL: All right, Mr. Bentley—I shall want another ten pounds for wasting my time like this. If you don't give it to me, I shall make things difficult for you.

JOHN: How?

PEARL (*rising and moving to him*): I shall tell your wife there has been nothing between us.

JOHN (*aghast*): You wouldn't do that?

PEARL (*putting her arms round his shoulders*): Oh, yes, I would.

[*Schneider enters through archway.*]

SCHNEIDER (*continuing down left centre*): Ah-ha!

JOHN (*to Schneider*): Listen! Have you been teaching her the psychological approach to business?

SCHNEIDER: Only ze first lesson.

JOHN: Well, cut it out. She's matriculated.

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

[*Pearl sits on left arm of settee, as Peter hurries in through the archway and shouts:*]

PETER: Where's my parcel? (*As he sees it and takes it up.*) Ah!

JOHN: What have you got there?

PETER (*clutching the parcel to his chest*): The preliminary model of my masterpiece in sculpture!

JOHN: I thought you were a playwright.

PETER: Damn it, can't I have a hobby? I'm going to give it to Linda. I find her completely unresponsive. It will awaken her to the naked facts of life!

JOHN (*grabbing the parcel from Peter*): Give me that!

[*Schneider hurriedly moves the bottles from the "waiter" to the drinks table, and John puts the parcel on the "waiter" and rips off the string.*]

PETER: Well, be careful!

[*John throws aside the brown paper, and holds up a shapeless lump of "clay" (plasticine) about the size of a football. It has a large hole through its middle.*]

JOHN: What the hell is it?

PETER: It's a horse.

[*John looks at Peter, then drops the "clay" on to the "waiter" and stares at it.*]

JOHN (*to Peter*): Which part of the horse?

PETER (*holding his forehead*): It's the whole horse!

JOHN: But it hasn't got any legs.

PETER: It did have—but I removed them. When an artist finds that his work is beginning to resemble something, he should stop.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

JOHN: I don't think he should begin. What's its name?

PETER: Rebecca.

JOHN: Oh. It's a mare?

PETER: No, no! Sex doesn't enter into this at all.

JOHN: I'm not surprised. (*To Schneider as he indicates the shapeless "clay".*) Is this art?

SCHNEIDER: But certainly. Rodin said zat sculpture is nossing more zan a lump. Vot matters is 'ow you *look* at ze lumps!

JOHN: Right! (*As he slaps the "clay".*) This is mine.

PETER: Oh, no!

JOHN (*turning up his cuffs*): From now on, I am an artist—with all the right to be Bohemian, immoral and unwashed.

[*John pounds at the "clay" with his fist.*]

PETER (*in agony*): Aaaah! You damn vandal! God will punish you for this! I can't stand it! (*Turning and making for stairs.*) He's ruined it!

[*Peter ascends the stairs, as he continues.*]

(*Brokenly.*) He's ruined my horse!

[*Peter exits.*]

JOHN (*briskly*): Pearl—for an additional five pounds, you will adopt a piquant pose on the piano.

PEARL (*rising*): In the nude?

JOHN: Certainly.

[*Pearl crosses to the piano as she removes her claret coat.*]

PEARL: Oh, good! This is going to be fun.

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

SCHNEIDER: Mr. Bentleys, for in ze nude—zere is not enough clay. I speak from experience.

JOHN: Oh, very well. I'll do a mask. (*To Pearl.*) Just the face, darling.

PEARL (*angrily, to Schneider*): Why the hell did you have to interfere?

SCHNEIDER: You can still pose on ze piano. You 'ave got nice legs.

[*Pearl steps on to the small armchair and sits on the piano, showing her nice legs as she says:*]

PEARL (*to Schneider*): You make me sick!

JOHN (*to Pearl*): That's the expression I want. (*As he works furiously on the "clay".*) Steady now—hold it!

[*Gwen, still in evening dress, hurries in through the archway.*]

GWEN (*as she enters*): They're half killing Bobby. He's— (*She stops, then continues.*) What does this mean?

JOHN (*to Pearl*): Don't move, darling.

GWEN (*livid, to John*): What did you call her?

JOHN (*very busy*): It was only a theatrical expression. It doesn't mean anything.

GWEN: You've been drinking. Oh, Daddy! You're not going to let Stella see you like this?

JOHN: Why not? You've all been having fun. Now it's my turn. I'm very grateful to you, Gwen. Your own carefree outlook on life has opened up a whole new world to me. No more worrying about the future. No more responsibility or sense of duty. I'm in love with my new freedom—and the family can go to blazes!

GWEN (*wildly, to John*): Stella will divorce you for this!

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

JOHN: That's okay by me. (*Indicating Pearl.*) I'll marry Pearl.

GWEN: *What!*

PEARL (*to John*): Oh, darling! I'd love that!

JOHN (*to Pearl*): How old are you, my sweet?

PEARL: Twenty-four.

GWEN (*to John, tearfully*): You're forty-six!

JOHN: That's nothing! John Knox was a hundred and fifty-nine when he fell in love with Rose La Touche. And if you marry Bobby Denver, his new stepmother-in-law will be thirteen years younger than he is. *That'll* make him feel pretty ancient, won't it?

GWEN (*wildly*): I'm ashamed of you! (*Tearfully.*) You're a wicked man!

JOHN: Maybe I am. But I've never threatened to hit *my* father.

GWEN (*wildly*): If she stays here, I'll kill her!

PEARL (*to Gwen*): I think you're being awfully silly.

GWEN (*wildly, to Pearl*): Don't speak to me!

[*Tearfully she turns and makes for the French windows.*]

I won't stay in the same house with you! (*Glaring back at Pearl.*) You common concubine!

[*Gwen bursts into tears, turns, flings open one of the French windows and exits into the garden.*]

PEARL (*to John*): Was she hinting at something?

SCHNEIDER (*irritably*): Don't be so sensitive.

[*Bobby, still in evening dress, comes hurrying in through the archway.*]

BOBBY: Good Lord! What goes on?

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

[*John models furiously without looking up.*]

SCHNEIDER (*to Bobby*): Ssh!

PEARL (*smilingly, as she slips the top of her frock from her shoulders*): Hullo, Bobby Denver!

BOBBY (*moving to her*): Hullo, darling. (*Having kissed her on the lips.*) Who are you?

SCHNEIDER: She is a model for Mr. Bentleys. Plis don't disturb 'im.

BOBBY: Has he gone cuckoo?

SCHNEIDER: 'E 'as found 'is vocation.

BOBBY: I didn't know he'd lost it.

[*Michael enters through the archway, takes one look at John's white beret, and bursts out laughing.*]

SCHNEIDER (*angrily*): Ssh!

MICHAEL (*to Bobby*): Has Gwen seen this?

BOBBY: I don't know. (*To Schneider.*) Where is she?

SCHNEIDER: In ze garden. She vos a little upset.

BOBBY: I'm not surprised. (*To Michael.*) Go and look after her, will you?

MICHAEL: Okay.

[*Michael has another glance at John, laughs out loud, and exits into the garden.*]

JOHN (*loudly and petulantly as he slaps down a lump of "clay"*): I find it quite impossible to work with all this noise going on!

BOBBY: I didn't know you'd started.

JOHN (*indignantly*): Started? I've nearly finished.

BOBBY (*looking at the lump of "clay"*): Well, there's one thing about it—it isn't rude.

JOHN (*staring at Pearl*): If only I can get those eyes! Wait now! Don't move!

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

[*With outstretched fingers, John excitedly measures Pearl's eyes, as Stella, still in evening dress, enters through the archway.*]

STELLA (*angrily*): What does this mean?

JOHN (*over his shoulder*): Stand back! Oh! Hullo, darling. Excuse me a moment.

[*John hurriedly has one more check of the eye measurement, then—with his two fingers raised in the air, he hurries back to above the "waiter". Slowly he draws back his hand, then lunges his fingers into the "clay". Slowly and tensely, he withdraws them and anxiously leans forward to study the result. Excitedly, he turns to Bobby at his right.*]

Oh, wonderful! Denver—what do you think of it?

BOBBY: Magnificent! (*To Stella.*) Imagine what he could do with a bit of wire!

[*Pearl gets down from the piano and moves to John and he smilingly puts an arm round her and hugs her to him—as Stella crosses Bobby as she moves to right of the "waiter".*]

STELLA (*as she looks at the "clay"*): Oh, yes! It's quite something, isn't it? One can almost see Hyde Park. (*Charmingly, to Pearl.*) My husband must know you quite well.

PEARL (*with charm and emphasis*): Intimately.

STELLA (*surprised*): Really? I don't know which of you to congratulate. (*Indicating the "clay".*) This is supposed to be your face, isn't it?

PEARL: }
JOHN: } Of course.

STELLA (*as she turns and grabs a champagne bottle—wooden replica—from the drinks table just behind her*): Good!

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

[*Stella viciously wallops the "clay" with the bottle—and leaves it clinging to the "clay", as Pearl hurriedly leaves John, grabs her coat, crosses to right and gasps:*]

PEARL (*as she goes*): For Pete's sake!

[*Stella has already grabbed a loose piece of "clay" and she flings it after Pearl, as she almost screams:*]

STELLA (*to Pearl*): Get out! Get out before I tear you to pieces!

[*Schneider, babbling a torrent of ad lib German, grabs Pearl, and together they panic away through the archway, as John says:*]

JOHN (*to Stella*): Control yourself! Don't you realise that, at any moment, the earth may lose its atmosphere?

STELLA (*tearfully*): I'll never forgive you for this. Never!

[*John pushes the "waiter" away to up left and moves down centre to left of Stella, as he says:*]

JOHN (*emphatically*): To coin a phrase, I couldn't care less! I've had a little fling and I've thoroughly enjoyed myself. But I'm not going to settle down and lose my personality. I'm going to go on having little flings. This was only a rehearsal.

[*A high-pitched wbine comes from Stella, as she presses her handkerchief to her mouth.*]

BOBBY (*at right centre*): Pull yourself together. He was only putting on an act.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

STELLA (*sobbingly, to Bobby*): Every wife knows it must happen sooner or later—but for a man to be unfaithful, just out of spite—

BOBBY: He hasn't been unfaithful. (*To John.*) Have you?

JOHN (*smilingly*): Only metaphorically.

STELLA: There, you see? He's admitted it! (*Brokenly, to John.*) All the rest of my life now, I shall see the shadow of a woman tip-toeing behind you! (*Wildly.*) I don't want to live! (*As she makes for the stairs.*) I don't want to live.

BOBBY: What are you going to do?

STELLA (*dramatically, as she looks back from the foot of the stairs.*) That doesn't matter much. What *does* matter—is how I do it!

[*Stella, remembering her last performance at the Haymarket, slowly and magnificently ascends the stairs as she continues:*]

And I'm going to do it—beautifully!

[*Stella magnificently exits.*]

BOBBY: Oh, Lord, what does that remind me of? It was in a play somewhere. (*As he thinks hard.*) "I'm going to do it beautifully. I'm going to do it beautifully." (*Suddenly.*) Bentley! It was Hedda Gabler! She's going to shoot herself!

JOHN (*calmly, as he smiles*): Upstairs? All alone? Without an audience? It would be a physical impossibility. Why, even when she played "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray", she couldn't bring herself to die off-stage. They had to re-write the whole end of the play.

[*Peter frantically descends the stairs, as he gasps:*]

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

PETER (*to John*): Stella! She's in the bathroom! Writhing on the floor! She's foaming at the mouth! Quickly!

[*Peter tears back up the stairs, frantically followed by John.*]

JOHN (*as he ascends the stairs, to Bobby*): Phone the doctor!

BOBBY: What's the number?

JOHN: I don't know—phone and ask him!

[*John exits upstairs after Peter, as Linda comes hurrying in through the archway.*]

LINDA (*immediately, urgently and anxiously*): Is anything wrong, sir?

BOBBY (*immediately and urgently, as he moves to her*): Linda, this is serious! What's the doctor's phone number?

LINDA (*flustered*): Er—er—er—

[*Bobby takes her by the elbows, his face close to hers.*]

BOBBY: The number! Quickly!

LINDA (*flustered*): I can't remember it, sir—not when you look at me so close!

BOBBY (*shaking her, and raising his voice angrily*): Damn it, pull yourself together! What's the number?

LINDA (*breaking down*): Oh, don't be cross with me, Bobby! (*Loudly and tearfully.*) I couldn't bear you to be cross with me!

BOBBY (*immediately, and with gentle and soothing charm*): Linda, darling, I'm not cross with you. (*As though to a child.*) Bobby only wants to know the number. Bobby likes you. Bobby almost *loves* you.

[*Linda closes her eyes and moans. Bobby mechanically moves to behind her, and as she passes out backwards, he*

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

catches her. Silently and mechanically, he exits backwards through the archway and Linda, still unconscious, exits with him—as Peter slowly descends the stairs to sit mopingly at the foot of them. One second—and Bobby comes hurrying back through the archway.]

(Immediately, to Peter.) Is she still alive?

[Peter nods.]

Then why are you looking so miserable?

PETER *(as he rises and leaves the stairs)*: I'm pondering the Stygian chicanery of women. Do you know what caused that awful frothing at the mouth?

BOBBY: No.

PETER: Half a tube of my toothpaste.

BOBBY: Are you sure?

PETER *(showing the tube)*: I took it out of her hand as we got her on to the bed—and she opened one eye and whispered, "Don't say anything!"

BOBBY: Did you tell Bentley?

PETER: No. He'd fallen on his knees and was deep in prayer. I didn't like to interrupt him.

BOBBY *(as he pushes past Peter and makes for the stairs)*: My God, you're as mad as they are!

[Bobby hurriedly exits up the stairs as Pat, still in evening dress, enters through the archway. Peter at left centre remains motionless for a moment as he stares at her, then murmurs:]

PETER: Oh, Pat.

PAT *(at centre)*: What's the matter? Do I look too unspecified, too ordinary? Have I joined the common throng? Have I let you down?

[Peter is silent for a moment. He glances at his blue shorts and yellow brogues.]

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

PETER: I feel rather ridiculous.

PAT (*surprised*): You mean you're not fed up with me for dressing like this?

PETER (*smiling as he shakes his head*): No. You look like—— (*Pause.*) I've never seen anything like it!

PAT: Was it going to be something complimentary?

PETER: Much more than that.

PAT: But I don't understand. Have you lost your faith, or been converted?

PETER: I was going to ask *you* that.

PAT (*moving to him*): All right. I'll give you the answer. (*Steadily.*) I'm never going back to the Boulevard St. Germain—and I never again want to hear the word Existentialist. I'm going to live an ordinary normal life, with ordinary normal people, and if you find that impossible—(*her voice breaking*)—well, it's just too bad.

PETER: Now may I tell *you* something?

PAT: Go ahead.

PETER (*steadily*): I've hated almost every moment of our life in Paris. I don't really know what the word Existentialist means, and I know absolutely nothing about sculpture. (*Loudly and irritably.*) I feel frozen to death in these damn shorts, I hate this beard—and I've always wanted to live near Wimbledon Common.

PAT: Peter!

[*She puts her arms out to him and he holds her close. She looks up at him.*]

(*Really very puzzled.*) But why on earth have you been behaving like a crazy lunatic all these weeks?

PETER: You forget what you were like when we first met. You were screamingly bored by anything commonplace—you jeered at everything conventional. Picasso was your patron saint—James Joyce

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

your Bible. You swore like a trooper, you drank your whiskey neat—and it was only with the greatest difficulty I stopped you chewing tobacco.

PAT: But that was only a phase. It was revulsion against father.

PETER: Maybe, but *I* didn't know that—and I thought that if I didn't act crazy too, I'd lose you. (*Pause, then quietly.*) And I didn't *want* to lose you.

[*She looks up at him and he kisses her on the lips—then continues:*]

So I didn't tell you I was writing a play about Queen Victoria—and I didn't tell you——

[*Peter pauses and looks worried.*]

PAT: What?

PETER (*quietly, as he turns away*): I don't think I can.

PAT: But you must! Is it anything dreadful?

PETER: *I* don't think so—but *you* might.

PAT: Anything to do with a woman?

PETER (*unhappily*): No.

PAT: Oh, Peter, tell me! I understand most things about life—and I'm tremendously forgiving.

PETER (*reluctantly*): All right. (*He looks at her.*) Pat—I'm a Conservative.

[*They laugh together. He moves to her and takes her hands.*]

Shall I tell you something else?

PAT: Yes.

PETER (*smilingly*): I'm hungry.

PAT (*laughingly*): I'll get you a sandwich.

PETER: Darling, the kitchen's full of them. Linda's prepared a whole banquet. (*He looks at her.*) I love you so much.

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

[*Bobby appears at the head of the stairs and quietly descends them, as Peter continues:*]

(*To Pat.*) I wish I could tell you how you looked when you came into the room just now.

PAT: Well, try. Did I look pretty?

PETER: Oh, yes.

[*Bobby switches on his microphone and quietly sits at the piano, as Peter continues:*]

But that doesn't describe it. You looked—you looked——

BOBBY (*playing quietly and singing sincerely without tears*): Sweet and lovely——

PETER (*to Pat*): That's it!

[*Pat puts her arms round Peter. Bobby has continued singing:*]

BOBBY: Sweeter than the roses in May——

[*Peter kisses Pat on the lips. Bobby has continued:*]

BOBBY: And she loves me——

[*Peter holds Pat close to him as they move to the archway. Bobby has continued:*]

Heaven must have sent her my way.

Skies above me——

Never were as blue as her eyes——

[*Peter and Pat exit as Bobby continues:*]

And she loves me——

Who could want a sweeter surprise——

[*Gwen, angry and desperate, enters through the French windows and makes for the stairs. Bobby switches off the microphone, as he says:*]

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

Where are *you* going?

GWEN: Upstairs—to pack. I won't stay here another night!

BOBBY (*rising*): You know, if you go on like this you'll be sent to one of those schools.

[*Michael smilingly enters through the French windows as Gwen replies:*]

GWEN (*her eyes narrowing*): Oh, no! Nobody's going to send me anywhere! I'm going to follow you for the rest of my life. When you stay at the Savoy, I shall live in an attic nearby. If you go to America, I shall stow away on the same ship. If you rejoin your wife, I shall separate you. When you become old and ill, I shall look after you. And when you die—I shall die, too.

MICHAEL: Never underestimate the power of a woman.

GWEN (*to Michael*): Oh, shut up!

BOBBY (*quietly*): Michael.

MICHAEL: Yes?

BOBBY: Would you mind?

MICHAEL: You mean, out again?

BOBBY: Just for a few moments.

MICHAEL: Sure. I've had quite a long stay, for me.

[*Michael laughingly exits through the French windows. Bobby looks at Gwen.*]

BOBBY (*at left centre*): I didn't expect *you* to break a promise.

GWEN: How do you mean?

BOBBY: You swore on your oath that if we spent the evening together you'd stop all this nonsense.

GWEN: We weren't *alone* together. Anyway, if I *did* swear on my oath I can't keep to it. (*Moving to him.*)

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

Bobby, is it because I'm only sixteen that you won't take any notice of me?

BOBBY: That's one reason, yes.

GWEN: What's the other?

BOBBY: I'm *over* sixteen.

GWEN: If you were twenty, and I were nineteen—would you take any notice of me then?

BOBBY: Oh, yes, rather.

GWEN: Well, can't you *pretend* I'm nineteen?

BOBBY: Yes, but I can't pretend I'm twenty.

GWEN: I was quite close to you tonight when you were singing—and I saw the tears streaming down your face. Only in you have I found somebody tremblingly alive to all the sorrow in the world. Somebody who can't even whisper the words "Goodbye" or "Forgive me" without his eyes filling with tears. It was like finding water in the desert. And now—(*her voice breaking*)—away from you, I couldn't live.

BOBBY: You're not in love with *me*. You're in love with tragedy. You've been reading too much Dusty-Dosty-what's-his-name. You'll make quite a writer yourself when you grow up a bit and get a sense of proportion. At the moment you're just wallowing in sloppy sentiment.

GWEN: This isn't you speaking.

BOBBY: It certainly is. And I've got another surprise for you. I haven't cried real tears since I was a kid. I've never been able to *see* the tragic side of life, and I've never found anything to cry *about*. I'm a comic! Until recently I was perfectly happy making people laugh. All this weeping warbler stuff is giving me the willies!

GWEN: You mean your tears weren't real this evening?

BOBBY: No.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

GWEN: Were they real that Monday at the Coliseum?

BOBBY: No.

GWEN: Oh, Bobby, I don't believe you! You're trying to keep me away from you. Tell me it isn't true. If you don't, I'll kill myself! (*Tearfully but insistently.*) They *are* real, aren't they?

BOBBY: No, they're not! I can't cry at all. I use an onion.

[*A pause. Gwen stares at him.*]

GWEN (*in a whisper*): You're fooling.

BOBBY: I'm not. (*Producing a small onion from his trouser pocket.*) This is the one I used to break your father up. "High Noon"—remember? And I used it again tonight. At the right moment I stick my finger into it, touch my eyelids—and it's a physical impossibility to whisper "Goodbye", "Forgive me"—or even "Bob's your Uncle", without the tears simply *streaming* down!

[*He puts the onion back in his pocket as Gwen half turns away, bends her head, and presses a hand to her face.*]

Oh, come on, Gwen! Be a man. You've got to face *up* to life.

GWEN (*brokenly, in a whisper*): Don't speak to me!

BOBBY (*gently as he moves to her*): Listen——

GWEN (*wildly, as she makes for the archway*): Go away!

[*Gwen exits.*]

BOBBY: Poor silly damn kid—why did she have to pick on me? (*Top of his voice.*) Michael!

[*Michael hurries in through the archway.*]

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

BOBBY: That was very quick.

MICHAEL (*as he makes for the archway*): She's going to take some looking after *this* time.

BOBBY: Were you listening?

MICHAEL (*laughingly*): Of course!

[*Michael hurriedly exits through the archway—and John (without beret) enters to descend the stairs, slowly—as Bobby takes his handkerchief and dabs one eye. He looks at the handkerchief.*]

BOBBY: Good Lord! It's a real one. A *real* tear! (*As he carefully folds the handkerchief so as not to crease the tear.*) Oh, if only I could have it stuffed.

JOHN (*dully as he leaves the stairs*): I can remember when that sort of conversation would have sounded quite strange.

BOBBY (*replacing the handkerchief into his breast pocket*): How's Stella?

JOHN: The toothpaste upset her stomach. She's feeling very weak. She has only just enough strength to prop herself up and whisper the most poisonous remarks about my mother.

BOBBY (*at right centre*): I told her you hadn't been unfaithful.

JOHN (*at left centre*): So did I. But we're just little sparrows beating our wings against a wall of female granite. If I live to be a hundred and ninety, I shall spend every remaining hour of my life under the shadow of guilt and suspicion. (*Moving to him.*) Bobby—you'll have to stay the night here.

BOBBY: I can't.

JOHN: My dear old friend, you must. Any moment now—and she'll rise from her bed of sickness to begin my cross-examination. I can't go through it by myself!

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

[Linda enters through the archway, carrying a large silver tray, with coffee pot, milk jug, four cups and saucers, four small plates, four knives—and two large plates piled high with sandwiches. She reaches the foot of the stairs, and John half turns, as he says:]

Ex—Linda.

LINDA (*turning and moving down left*): Yes, sir?

JOHN: Prepare the little bedroom next to yours, will you?

LINDA (*still holding the over-loaded tray*): Very good, sir. Who's going to occupy it, sir?

JOHN (*indicating*): Mr. Denver.

[A violent tremor shakes Linda from head to foot. She moans, closes her eyes, and staggers backwards as she clenches her teeth in an effort to retain consciousness, as John shouts:]

Put the tray down!

BOBBY (*to Linda*): Put your head between your knees!

[With a mighty effort, Linda digs her heels into the carpet and stands still for half a second. Then with another moan and increasing speed she totters sideways across the room towards John and Bobby. With cries of dismay, they fling themselves through the open French windows, and Linda follows, almost on top of them. A second's pause, a terrific crash, and shouts from the garden and:

The curtain falls]

Scene 2

Scene: The same. The following morning. About 9 a.m.

All evidence of the previous night's party has been tidied away. On a chair at the side of the drinks table there is an overcoat and a hat. The French windows are closed, the curtains open.

John is discovered, full length on the settee and fast asleep. He is covered by a blanket, his head rests on a cushion. He is dressed as for the previous Scene. His hair is ruffled. A moment, and the telephone rings. John mumbles, without moving.

JOHN: Hullo. Hullo!

[He opens his eyes, groans and props himself up.]

(Holding his head.) Phew!

[Suddenly he realises that the telephone is ringing, and still half asleep and with a hangover he rises and staggers to the telephone, trailing and tripping over the blanket.]

(Hoarsely, having lifted the receiver): Hullo? . . . Hold on.

[He rests the receiver, moves to the stairs and shouts upwards:]

Bentley!

[John suddenly "does a take", hurries back to the telephone, lifts the receiver and says:]

Speaking.

[Linda enters with a cup of tea—as John continues:]

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

Who? . . . Michael Kenley? . . . (*Immediately brisk and alert.*) Is Gwen still with you? Good! . . . Yes, get a taxi at once. . . . Goodbye.

[*John replaces the receiver as Linda asks:*]

LINDA (*as she puts the tea on the settee table*): Is she all right, sir?

JOHN (*holding out the blanket to Linda*): Yes. She'll be here in a few minutes.

LINDA (*taking the blanket*): Is she still with that reporter?

JOHN (*taking up the cup of tea*): Mind your own business. What's the time?

LINDA: Nine o'clock, sir.

JOHN (*pointing*): Whose overcoat?

[*John sips his tea, as Linda replies:*]

LINDA (*as she folds up the blanket*): Mr. Denver's, sir. A chauffeur brought it from the Savoy Hotel. I didn't like to take it up to his bedroom.

JOHN: Is Mrs. Bentley up?

LINDA: Oh, yes, sir. She went out nearly an hour ago.

JOHN: Did she look as though she might be going for good?

LINDA: How do you mean, sir?

JOHN: Well, did she take her mink coat with her?

LINDA: Oh, no, sir.

JOHN: She'll be back.

LINDA (*moving towards the stairs, with the blanket*): Will you be sleeping upstairs tonight, sir?

JOHN (*holding his head*): I hope not! For the rest of my life I shall regard that bedroom as the headquarters of the Spanish Inquisition.

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

LINDA (*unhappily*): Very good, sir.

[*Linda exits to upstairs, and John turns to find that Stella has entered to the archway. She is dressed for out-of-doors.*]

STELLA (*with a charming smile*): Good morning.

[*John, at left centre, remains silently staring at her. Stella moves to him. She kisses him on the cheek.*]

JOHN (*surprised*): Oh, no! This isn't true! I'm delirious!

STELLA: You deserve to be. Any news of Gwen?

JOHN: Yes. Michael's just phoned. They were at Baker Street. He was just getting a taxi.

STELLA: Thank heaven for that.

JOHN: Where have *you* been?

[*Stella removes her hat and places it on the settee table, as she replies.*]

STELLA: Visiting your *pseudo fille de joie*.

JOHN (*amazed*): Do you mean Pearl?

STELLA: Of course.

JOHN: You actually called on her?

STELLA: Certainly. I knocked three times and she opened the door at once. We had a cup of tea, and a little chat, and parted most amicably.

JOHN: Did she explain?

STELLA: Everything.

JOHN (*amazed*): And you believed her?

STELLA: Absolutely.

[*John puts a hand to his forehead, and crosses to sit on the settee.*]

What's the matter?

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

JOHN: For six hours last night I swore on my oath and on my knees, and you wouldn't believe a word I said. This morning, you have a cup of tea and a little chat with a comparatively complete stranger and you accept the same explanation lock, stock and barrel.

STELLA (*moving to sit at his left*): This morning I *knew* I was being told the truth. No woman can successfully lie to another woman. Over a cup of tea we instinctively see through each other. (*Taking his hand.*) I think we can be happy again.

JOHN: I hope so. I'll try and make life a bit brighter for you. Take you to theatres and night clubs. We'll start tonight!

STELLA: Oh, no, we won't! When I looked at myself in the mirror this morning I thought I looked tired and ugly. (*Pause.*) I said I thought I looked tired and ugly.

JOHN (*meekly*): I'm not arguing, dear.

[*Linda enters to descend the stairs.*]

LINDA (*as she sees Stella*): Oh, thank heaven you've come back, ma'am. (*As she makes for the archway.*) Mr. Bentley was trying to work out whether you might have gone for good.

[*Linda exits as Stella gives John an old-fashioned look.*]

JOHN (*forcing a laugh*): She put that very badly.

STELLA: Yes. Now, you have a shave and pull yourself together! And when Gwen arrives for heaven's sake behave as though nothing had happened.

JOHN (*rising and moving to centre*): You mean I'm not to question her about walking round London all night?

STELLA: Of course not! (*Rising and moving to near*

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

French windows.) She was with Michael, and he phoned us at least six times to tell us she was all right.

JOHN: Why didn't he bring her home? Why didn't he tell us where we could find her?

STELLA: She wanted to be alone. Can't you understand that there are moments in even a child's life when the words father and mother make her want to scream?

JOHN (*as he crosses to left of Stella*). My God, Shakespeare knew what he was doing when he wrote "Blow, blow"—whatever it was. And I ought to know better than to be upset by it. The only way to raise children is to have at least seventeen, give them all numbers, and as soon as they've attained the age of reason—throw them out!

[*Linda hurries in through the archway with a newspaper.*]

LINDA (*as she enters*): Oh, sir! Look at this! It's all about Miss Gwen and Bobby Denver!

[*John takes the newspaper.*]

STELLA (*to Linda*): What d'you mean?

LINDA: He's phoney, ma'am!

STELLA (*to John*): What does it say?

JOHN (*quoting*): "Struggle on Embankment. Famous crooner mentioned. Late last night, near Chelsea Bridge, Police Constable Riley went to the assistance of a man struggling with a young girl who appeared to be trying to throw herself into the Thames. When questioned, the girl, she seemed quite heartbroken, sobbingly assured Constable Riley that the tears of Bobby Denver, the well-known crying crooner, were produced with the aid of an onion. Enquiries at the Savoy Hotel elicited no reply from Mr. Denver. He was not at home."

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

STELLA (*at right, above settee table*): Thank God it doesn't mention *her* name.

JOHN (*unbelievably*): She tried to throw herself into the Thames?

STELLA: It doesn't *say* that. It says she *appeared* to be trying. And knowing Gwen, I'm quite sure she'd already made certain that the tide was out.

JOHN (*at left of Stella*): This'll finish Denver.

LINDA (*tearfully*): And so it should!

STELLA: Get on with your work, Linda. It's nothing to do with you.

LINDA (*tearfully, at left of John*): Oh, yes, it is! He's broken *my* heart as well as hers. I've never fallen for *any* man as often as I've fallen for him!

[*Sobbing freely, Linda turns towards the archway and happens to see Bobby as he enters to descend the stairs (still in evening dress). She gives a loud howl and hurriedly exits.*]

BOBBY (*as he descends*): What's the matter with her? (*To John.*) Is Gwen back?

STELLA: She'll be here in a few minutes.

BOBBY (*as he leaves the stairs*): Good. (*Smilingly.*) I thought you'd had bad news.

JOHN: No—we're all right—but I don't know about you. (*Holding out the paper.*) Have a look.

[*Bobby takes the paper and moves away to the left, as John continues:*]

I'll get you a drink. You'll need it.

[*John moves to the up-stage table and pours a whiskey. Bobby looks up from the paper.*]

BOBBY (*quietly*): It looks as though I've had it.

[*Stella moves down, past the right end of settee, to right centre in front of settee, as she says:*]

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

STELLA (*over-cheerfully, to Bobby*): I don't think it'll do you much harm. After all, it's wonderful publicity, and everyone knows they use glycerine for tears on the films.

[*Bobby sits left centre as John moves towards him with the whiskey, as he says:*]

JOHN (*irritably, to Stella*): It's not the same thing at all. Bobby earns his living making people cry. When they read about this, they'll laugh. (*To Bobby.*) Did you really use an onion?

BOBBY: Yes.

JOHN (*holding it out*): Have a drink.

BOBBY (*with something of a smile*): No, thanks.

MICHAEL (*loudly, off-stage*): Gwen, for heaven's sake, take it easy!

GWEN (*loudly, off-stage*): I won't be bullied! I haven't done anything wrong!

JOHN: Ah! Here she is!

STELLA: Now, John, be tactful!

JOHN: I know how to deal with her!

[*Gwen enters through the archway, followed by Michael. There is an air of defiance about her. She is wearing an old overcoat thrown over her evening dress and is carrying her shoes. John continues:*]

And about time too! Now listen to me, Gwen——

GWEN (*coldly*): Are you still drinking?

JOHN (*angrily*): No, damn it, I am not! (*Placing the glass on the piano.*) I poured it out for Denver!

STELLA (*moving to right of Gwen*): Shall I take your shoes?

[*Stella takes them and looks at them.*]

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

My, my, you won't want these again, will you?
Where did you get the overcoat?

MICHAEL (*as he takes the overcoat from Gwen's shoulders*).
It belongs to an old boy who runs a coffee stall in
Hammersmith.

JOHN: Hammersmith? What the devil—

STELLA (*interrupting, to Gwen*): Let's fix a nice hot
bath, shall we?

[*Gwen nods—then looks at Michael, as she says, quietly:*]

GWEN: Thank you for looking after me.

MICHAEL: Keep the old chin up. I'll be seeing you.

STELLA (*to Gwen*): Come on, honey.

[*Stella puts her arm round Gwen and they move a step
towards the stairs. Gwen stops suddenly and moves to
Bobby.*]

GWEN (*quietly*): Have you read the papers?

BOBBY: One of them.

GWEN (*fighting back tears*): I'd give my life—not to
have done that.

BOBBY (*rising*): Aw, skip it, Gwen. It's not going to
knock me out. I'll be happier making people laugh.

GWEN (*breaking down*): I didn't *mean* to do it, Bobby!
I didn't mean to!

[*Breaking down completely, Gwen turns and moves to
Stella, who puts an arm round her shoulders, as they ascend
the stairs together, with Stella saying:*]

STELLA: Old Mr. Skeffington's been looking for you.
I found him on your bed this morning. I bet you
get a lovely welcome.

[*Stella and Gwen exit. John immediately swallows the*

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

whiskey, bangs down the glass, takes out his handkerchief and moves up-stage centre as he blows his nose.]

MICHAEL (*to Bobby*): I know what you're thinking, but I didn't.

BOBBY: Didn't what?

MICHAEL: Give it to the papers. They collect those bits of news automatically.

BOBBY: That's all right.

JOHN (*to Michael*): Will there be any trouble about that river business?

MICHAEL (*smiling*): No, sir. You may have some chap call round, just to check up, but there's no question of attempted suicide. It was only a four foot drop from the Embankment, and the tide was out. (*Having glanced at his watch.*) Well, I'd better get to the office. Cheer-up, Bobby.

BOBBY: So long, Michael.

JOHN: Shall we be seeing you again?

MICHAEL: I'm afraid so, sir. Gwen's going to write a novel and she wants me to help her with it.

JOHN: What about your job?

MICHAEL (*laughing out loud*): I've had that! Bobby was my assignment, and with me not cashing in on the onion they'll probably put me on to reporting stocks and shares or something.

JOHN (*enthusiastically*): Stocks and shares? Oh, my dear fellow! Come round as often as you like. Make this your home!

MICHAEL: Thank you, sir. That's the first time I've been invited back anywhere!

[Laughing out loud, Michael exits through the archway.]

JOHN (*to Bobby*): Nice fellow. Plenty of guts, too. So have you. I seem to be the only one without any.

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

[Unseen by John, Stella enters to descend the stairs, as he continues:]

The youngest child is always the favourite, and mine hates me.

STELLA (*from the stairs*): She'll love you again when she hears the truth about Pearl.

JOHN (*to Stella, having turned*): Well, why not tell her now?

[John moves to join Stella on the stairs but, as he reaches the foot of them, the telephone rings. He grabs the receiver.]

(*At the telephone.*) Hullo? . . . Hold on. (*To Bobby.*) It's for you. Somebody called Charlie.

BOBBY (*making for the telephone*): Oh, Lord, that's my agent. This is going to be tricky. (*Having taken the receiver from John.*) Hullo, Al. . . . Yes, I've seen it. . . . It's true. . . . (*Suddenly and excitedly.*) Are you fooling? . . . Sure! I'll be right round!

[Bobby slams back the receiver.]

(*Excitedly, to John and Stella.*) I've had an offer to play America! All cards on the table—and billed as "The Crooner who kidded London."

[Bobby grabs his hat and overcoat, as he continues:]

(*Excited top of his voice—Al Jolson style.*) California, here ah come!

STELLA (*as with John she moves from upstairs*): When are you going?

BOBBY: Right now!

JOHN: Oh, my dear fellow, I'm so sorry. (*Happily, as he hurries to the archway.*) I'll get you a taxi.

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

STELLA (*moving to him*): Goodbye, Bobby.

BOBBY (*giving her a peck on the cheek*): Goodbye, darling.

JOHN (*impatiently waiting in the archway; to Bobby*):
Get a move on!

STELLA (*to Bobby*): Come and see us as soon as you
get back.

BOBBY: You bet!

STELLA: Don't forget!

BOBBY (*singing*): I won't forget to remember, Darling
mine——

[*He turns and moves to the archway, as he continues:*]

(*Singing.*) Dearest, I didn't know——

[*In the archway, he is at left of John, as he turns to Stella,
as he continues:*]

(*Singing.*) How quickly those few hours would go——

JOHN (*as he gives Bobby a jab in the behind with his knee*):
Oh, get out!

[*Responding to the jab, Bobby makes an undignified exit—
followed by John—but he continues to sing off-stage.*]

BOBBY (*his singing fading to the distance, off*): Since first
I kissed your lips so red——

[*Stella looks a little sad. Then, she looks at the piano,
sees the microphone still in position near the keyboard, and
smiles. She moves to the microphone and switches it on.
She sits at the piano—and plays and sings quickly:*]

STELLA: When your sweetheart sends a letter of
Good-bye-bye-bye,
It's no secret you'll feel better if you Cry-cry-cry——

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

[*John comes hurrying back through the archway, as Stella continues:*]

When waking from a bad dream——

JOHN (*loudly*): Stella!

[*She stops.*]

(*Continuing desperately.*) I've reached the end of my tether! (*Emphatically.*) *One more straw* on the back of my camel—and the slender thread of my sanity will snap!

[*Very excited, Linda comes galloping in through the archway—to right end of settee—as she gasps:*]

LINDA: Oh, sir—ma'am! Miss Corinne's arrived—with her husband!

[*John slaps a hand to his forehead, and staggers to collapse on the settee, as he shouts:*]

JOHN: Oh, no!

[*Stella has risen from the piano—and she moves to left centre as Corinne comes hurrying in through the archway. She is dressed in modified cowgirl outfit, with modified Stetson.*]

CORINNE (*excitedly, as she immediately moves to embrace Stella*): Seventeen hours ago, we were in New York! Barnaby's sold that darned horse and we're staying right here just as long as we can!

[*John gives a loud moan and Corinne swings Stella round with her embrace as Barnaby, over six feet of dude cowboy,*

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

with ten-gallon Stetson and all the trappings, comes striding in through the archway. He makes straight for Stella—who has her back to him—swings her round, and lifts her high in the air, as he bellows:]

BARNABY (*lifting and lowering*): Hi-ya, Mom!

[John reacts and goes all to pieces and, as Barnaby moves to him to grab a hand and shake the daylights out of him, John is gibbering, cross-eyed, twitching and shaking as Barnaby bellows:]

Mr. Bentley, sir—you sure am jerst as ah pictured yew!

The curtain falls

BIRTHDAY HONOURS

by

PAUL JONES

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Birthday Honours was staged at the "Q" Theatre on February 27, 1953, with the following cast:

ELIZABETH WILTON	<i>Jane Aird</i>
MARY TITHERADGE	<i>Iris Baker</i>
BEATRICE TITHERADGE	<i>Jean St. Clair</i>
ALEC BESTWOOD	<i>Hugh Latimer</i>
MONICA BESTWOOD	<i>Mary Mackenzie</i>
PETER VARLEY	<i>Bryan Coleman</i>

Directed by Peter Dearing
Setting by Elizabeth Taplay

Donald Albery presented it at the Criterion Theatre on October 6, 1953, with the following cast.

MARY TITHERADGE	<i>Marian Spencer</i>
ELIZABETH WILTON	<i>Beryl Baxter</i>
BEATRICE TITHERADGE	<i>Jean St. Clair</i>
ALEC BESTWOOD	<i>Hugh Latimer</i>
MONICA BESTWOOD	<i>Morra Lister</i>
PETER VARLEY	<i>David Stoll</i>

Directed by Nigel Patrick
Setting by Hutchinson Scott

CHARACTERS

ALEC BESTWOOD
MONICA BESTWOOD
MARY TITHERADGE
BEATRICE TITHERADGE
PETER VARLEY
ELIZABETH WILTON

SCENES

ACT ONE

One morning in May

ACT TWO

Late afternoon. A few days later

ACT THREE

Morning. Two weeks later

*All the action of the play takes place in the Bestwoods'
house in London*

Time: The Present

ACT ONE

The living room of the Bestwoods' house in London. About ten o'clock on a sunny May morning.

It is a charming and very well-furnished room with doors centre leading to other parts of the house, French windows left which look out across the street to the trees of the park, and a door right which leads into Alec's consulting room.

When the curtain rises, a faint haze hangs over the park, and the windows are open allowing a gentle breeze softly to stir the curtains. The room is empty but for Elizabeth Wilton who is arranging some flowers that stand in a vase in front of the windows. She is an extremely attractive woman of just over thirty, slim, rather tall, with an air of quiet charm and efficiency about her. The dress she is wearing, like most of her clothes, is simple without being severe, and she wears it as she does everything, with unconscious style. Elizabeth is Alec Bestwood's secretary-receptionist. After arranging the flowers she glances at her watch, and then stands looking out of the window. The doors centre are opened and Mary Titheradge comes into the room. Mary is a smallish, pretty woman in her fifties, very smartly dressed, with her grey hair tinted the colour of cigarette smoke. She is a witty, charming busybody with a dominant personality.

MARY: Good morning, Miss Wilton.

ELIZABETH (*turning*): Oh, good morning, Mrs. Titheradge.

MARY: Is the doctor in?

ELIZABETH: No. He's flying back from Paris this morning.

MARY: Of course. I'd forgotten he was in Paris. Lucky thing.

ACT ONE

ELIZABETH: He wasn't really due back until this evening; but things went better than he expected. Is there anything I can do?

MARY: Where's my daughter? She's the one I really came to see. Elsie said she was out.

ELIZABETH: I believe she is.

MARY: But it's only just after ten. Monica's never been out so early in her life before, unless she's gone to the hairdresser's.

ELIZABETH: I don't think she's come back yet.

MARY: Not come back. Where's she been then?

ELIZABETH: She did say something about not being in last night. I thought she said she was spending the night with you.

MARY: It's the first I've heard of it.

ELIZABETH: Then I expect I've got it wrong. She must have said Miss Titheradge.

MARY: Why on earth would she want to spend the night with Beatrice?

ELIZABETH: I've no idea.

MARY: Must have taken temporary leave of her senses. I'll ring her up.

[She crosses to the telephone and dials a number.]

Isn't it a heavenly morning? I saw any number of people in the park as I came along. I heard a rumour yesterday, in fact it was more than a rumour. I was dining with Lady Lexton last night and she said she had heard from someone or other who knows about these things that they're going to give Dr. Bestwood a knighthood.

ELIZABETH (*surprised*): Really? How marvellous.

MARY: Isn't it? That's why I rushed over this morning, to see if he had told anybody yet.

ELIZABETH: What would he be made a knight for?

BIRTHDAY HONOURS

MARY: For that operation he did on a royal personage. I mean it was extremely delicate, and he made a success of it. She's quite normal again now, I believe.

ELIZABETH: But it was only because Sir Thomas Langley was indisposed.

MARY: That makes it all the more likely. Stepping so magnificently into the breach like that.

ELIZABETH: Oh.

MARY: No answer. They must be on their way over here now. (*She replaces telephone and turns to face Elizabeth—confidently.*) It will be in the Birthday Honours List. Won't it be wonderful for Monica? Lady Bestwood. It just suits her. I don't mind telling you I had my doubts when they married. Alec's a dear and all that, but I felt someone with Monica's gifts could have done so much better for herself.

ELIZABETH (*rather defensively*): Doctor Bestwood is one of the foremost endocrinologists in the kingdom.

MARY: He is now. But he wasn't then. Then he was just a very good-looking, very poor young house physician who hardly knew one gland from another. But now, with this honour I consider he has at last justified his marriage.

ELIZABETH (*turning away*): Will you excuse me? There are one or two matters I want to have cleared up before the doctor gets back.

MARY: Of course, my dear. You carry on. I'll make myself comfortable here.

[*She settles herself in armchair. Elizabeth glances at her then goes quietly through the door up right. The doors centre are opened and Beatrice comes into the room. Seeing Mary she hesitates for a moment. Beatrice is a quite large, healthy-faced woman of about thirty, with awkward hands and feet, little dress sense, a deep-rooted fear of her mother,*

ACT ONE

a slightly envious respect for her sister, and a heart just bursting with love.]

BEATRICE: Good morning, Mother.

MARY (*looking round*): Oh, here you are, Beatrice. Where's Monica?

BEATRICE: Isn't she here?

MARY: If she were here I wouldn't be asking you where she was now, would I? Do use your head, Beatrice, dear, it's big enough.

BEATRICE: Where is she, then?

MARY: That is what I am asking you. Did you come in together?

BEATRICE: No, I've just come round from my flat. I naturally thought she would be here, or at your place. She was spending the night with you.

MARY: Don't talk nonsense. She was spending the night with you.

BEATRICE: She was not. When I rang her up last evening she told me definitely she was staying the night at your flat.

MARY: I haven't seen her for two days. Well, if she didn't spend the night at your place, and she didn't at mine, whose place did she spend the night at?

BEATRICE: I don't know.

MARY: And I daren't think.

BEATRICE: Have you seen the *Tatler*? (*She holds it in front of her.*)

MARY: No. When you reach my age you no longer care what your friends are doing. I wonder where Monica can be?

BEATRICE: There's a photograph of her in here.

MARY: Is there? How sweet of them. Show me.

[*Beatrice opens the magazine and indicates the photograph.*]

Delightful. I'm sure she was far and away the most

BIRTHDAY HONOURS

glamorous woman in the place. Who's that with her? It's not Alec.

BEATRICE: It's Peter Varley.

MARY: Who's he?

BEATRICE: He's a bachelor, he hunts, and he's a close friend of Monica's.

MARY: He's very good-looking.

BEATRICE: He and Monica are having an affair.

MARY: Beatrice! What a dreadful thing to say about your sister.

BEATRICE (*defiantly*): Everybody knows it. They say it's been going on for months.

MARY: Now don't get carried away. No wife who wants to be photographed ever dines out with her husband, you should know that. (*She has another look at the photograph.*) I must say he's very good-looking.

BEATRICE: Don't you object?

MARY: Of course I object. I object very strongly to anything going on without my knowledge.

BEATRICE: Now you can guess where Monica was last night.

MARY: Only someone suffering from extreme physical repression could jump to such a wanton conclusion.

BEATRICE: What conclusion do you jump to, then?

MARY: My jumping days are over, Beatrice. I expect she's gone over to Elaine Cartwright's place. Now, please tell me why you are here so purposefully armed with the *Tatler*?

BEATRICE: I came round to confront Monica with this photograph and to ask her if there was any truth in the stories that are going around, that's all.

MARY: And if there was?

BEATRICE: I was going to tell her that she must stop it.

MARY: You have a nerve!

BEATRICE: She's my sister!

ACT ONE

MARY: What right does that give you to order her social life?

BEATRICE: It's not fair on Alec.

MARY: Don't be silly. Of course it is. You don't think he knows, do you?

BEATRICE: Whether he knows or not doesn't matter.

MARY: My dear, that's the whole crux of the thing. A test of a good wife is whether or not she can hide her private life from her husband.

BEATRICE: A wife should have no secrets from her husband.

MARY: But that's positively immoral. Beatrice, where do you get all these stupid ideas from?

BEATRICE: That's what I believe.

MARY: I suppose that's what all nice spinsters believe.

BEATRICE: Must you call me that?

MARY: Spinster or bachelor girl—the effects are just the same. Anyway, that's what you are. Monica is an indulgent wife and you—a reluctant spinster.

BEATRICE: What are you?

MARY (*promptly*): A triumphant widow.

BEATRICE: I think Monica is a beast. And you encourage her.

MARY: I know one thing, I wouldn't have to encourage you.

BEATRICE: I should be a good wife. If I were married. . . .

MARY: Now, now. Enough of these pipe dreams. You know they're not good for you.

BEATRICE (*far away*): I would cosset and nurse a man. I would make him things.

MARY: You would make him very, very unhappy, dear, that's all. Now calm yourself.

BEATRICE: I was only. . . .

MARY (*firmly*): Calm.

BEATRICE (*hanging her head*): I'm sorry.

BIRTHDAY HONOURS

MARY: Let me tell you my little piece of news. Alec is going to be presented with a knighthood.

BEATRICE: No!

MARY: It will be in the Birthday Honours List.

BEATRICE: I say, how absolutely ripping.

MARY: I was just saying approximately the same thing to Miss Wilton. How nice it will be for Monica. I think she's earned it, don't you? And then. . . .

(*she stops suddenly*): Oh, dear!

BEATRICE: What's the matter?

MARY: Peter Varley. That's what's the matter. Suppose Alec got to hear of that. There might be a divorce. Oh, my God, I couldn't bear it. Not now. Before, of course, it didn't matter, but now. . . . It just doesn't bear thinking about. And if it got around, if there was a breath of scandal about Doctor Bestwood's wife, that also might put paid to Alec's chances.

BEATRICE: But surely what Alec's wife does, doesn't affect. . . .

MARY: The path to a knighthood is simply riddled with pitfalls. My dear, a cousin thrice removed, convicted for loitering could dish you. Oh, they're terribly particular. It's a constant wonder to me how so many outwardly normal people do manage to pull it off.

BEATRICE: Monica doesn't deserve to have a title.

MARY: Foolish girl—it's her birthright. And I shall do everything in my power to see that she gets it. This Peter Varley nonsense will have to stop.

BEATRICE: It's been going on quite a time.

MARY: Then that should make it all the easier to discontinue. Of course, Alec must never hear a word of this. And I'm not only thinking of Monica now—I'm thinking of him. It would be too cruel if he ever came to know there had been someone else.

ACT ONE

BEATRICE: He loves her so dreadfully.

MARY: It would absolutely finish him.

[Elizabeth, now wearing a crisp, white overall, comes back into the room and looks out of the window.]

BEATRICE: Do you think she's in love with. . . ?

MARY: Be quiet, you stupid girl.

ELIZABETH: Here's the doctor now. He's just paying off his taxi.

MARY: Oh, is he? Oh, dear!

ELIZABETH: Did I make a mistake about where Mrs. Bestwood was last night?

MARY: Yes, you did. She was with my daughter. Wasn't she, Beatrice?

BEATRICE (*stupidly*): Was she?

MARY: Of course she was.

ELIZABETH: Is she in now?

MARY: No. She had to go out again.

ELIZABETH: I see.

[Elizabeth goes back into the consulting room. Mary looks at Beatrice.]

MARY: Do try to keep in touch with the situation a little more, will you, dear?

BEATRICE: I'll try.

MARY: Alec's back, and Monica still hasn't come in. The situation is grave. I'll tell him she's gone out shopping—you will just keep quiet. Or only speak when spoken to, and then only in monosyllables.

BEATRICE: Yes, Mother.

MARY: If Alec finds out about this we're lost. Now hold your head up and smile. Oh! And for God's sake get rid of that *Tatler*.

[Before Beatrice can move the door centre is opened and Alec comes into the room. He is in his fortieth year, quite tall,

BIRTHDAY HONOURS

slim, with good features, and blessed with a quiet, natural charm. Dressed in a dark lounge suit and carrying a brief case, he stands just inside the door, smiling.]

ALEC: Hello.

MARY: Alec, darling!

BEATRICE: Good morning, Alec.

ALEC: Good morning. I didn't expect a reception committee, but I'm very pleased. How are you.

[He bends and kisses Mary's cheek, but not Beatrice's.]

MARY: How lovely to see you.

ALEC: One would think I had been to Alaska for a year, instead of Paris for three days.

MARY: Is that all it is? It seems so much longer. Anyway, I'm always glad to see you, darling, you know that.

ALEC: Stop flirting with me, and tell me why you're here.

MARY: We've heard some wonderful news about you.

ALEC: Am I going to be a daddy?

MARY: Don't be so mundane. You're going to be something much, much better than that. You're going to be a knight.

ALEC: A what?

MARY: Oh stop pretending you don't know. You're going to receive a knighthood, dear.

ALEC: What on earth for?

BEATRICE: For service to your country.

ALEC: I've never done a damn thing.

MARY: You performed a miraculous operation on a person of royal blood.

ALEC: It was an extremely simple operation. A child of two could have done it.

MARY: I refuse to believe that. Anyway, you did it. Your services are going to be rewarded.

ACT ONE

ALEC: Oh, good.

BEATRICE: Aren't you thrilled?

ALEC: Unspeakably.

MARY: Just think of it. Sir Alec and Lady Bestwood. Lady Bestwood and Sir Alec. Lady Bestwood.

ALEC: Just where is Lady Bestwood by the way?

BEATRICE: That's what we want to know.

MARY (*hastily*): She had to rush out to do some shopping.

[*Elizabeth enters.*]

ELIZABETH: Good morning, doctor.

ALEC: Oh, good morning, Miss Wilton.

ELIZABETH: A good trip?

ALEC: Excellent. Everything went off very well.

[*Elizabeth takes his brief-case.*]

Things all right this end?

ELIZABETH: Perfectly. Mr. de Frece wants you to get in touch with him. It's about the Raleigh boy. And there are one or two reports.

ALEC: Right, Miss Wilton. I'll be with you in a few minutes.

[*Elizabeth smiles and carrying his bag goes through door right.*]

MARY: Alec, do you mean to say that you hadn't an inkling of this wonderful news?

ALEC: Not an inkling, dear. And I don't for a moment think there's a word of truth in it.

MARY: But of course it's true. Oh, I have so many plans. You will not be able to continue living here, of course. You'll have to get a much larger place.

BIRTHDAY HONOURS

ALEC (*lighting a cigarette*): I couldn't afford a larger place.

MARY: Then you'll just have to do more work, or raise your fees or something. I should think you'll be able to raise your fees easily enough. People will flock to you now.

ALEC: You'll be telling me I can put "By Appointment" on my plate in a minute.

MARY: Why not? Fortnum and Mason's do.

[*Alec picks up the Tatler.*]

ALEC (*turning pages*): Where did you say Monica was?

MARY (*in agitation*): She's gone to the hairdresser's. Oh, don't look at that.

ALEC: Why ever not?

BEATRICE: It might not be good for you.

ALEC: It's hardly likely to be bad for me. Nothing could be more innocuous. A glossary of glossy people on glossy paper, through which, when one has nothing better to do, one glosses.

BEATRICE: Tell us about Paris, Alec.

[*Alec idly turns the pages of the magazine.*]

MARY: Oh, yes. Where did you stay? The Meurice, or the George Cinque?

ALEC: Neither. (*He suddenly stops.*) Good Lord! Look at this.

MARY: Alec, darling, you mustn't look.

BEATRICE: You'll only hurt yourself.

MARY: I'm quite sure there's some very simple explanation.

ALEC: Bunny Cummings, of all people. And to a girl who not only looks sane, but extremely pretty as well.

ACT ONE

MARY: What are we talking about?

ALEC: Bunny Cummings. He's married.

MARY: I couldn't care less.

ALEC: Funny old Bunny. He always used to say that until the law of the land was changed and a man was allowed not one wife but three, he would remain a bachelor.

MARY: What would he want with three wives?

ALEC: He always maintained three were the necessary number. One to live with, one to play with—and one to be seen out with.

MARY: I hope you don't share his ridiculous view.

ALEC: Myself I think one is enough. I wonder which category Bunny puts his bride in? Now I must go and do some work. I hope Monica won't keep you waiting long.

[*He crosses to window.*]

MARY: You know what these dressmakers are.

ALEC (*looking out*): Such weather. Some people wear the oddest clothes for such a day. (*He stretches.*) You know this is one of those mornings which beguile you into thinking England is the most splendid place in the world. And perhaps it is at that. It is on mornings like this that I feel an irresistible urge to sing. You will forgive me, won't you?

[*Alec breaks gaily into song, and smiling at them goes through the door right. Mary and Beatrice look at each other, then Beatrice bursts into tears.*]

BEATRICE (*sobbing*): Singing! As if he were happy. If he only knew. . . . Oh, Alec, poor ill-starred Alec. What foul trick has Fate played upon you.

MARY (*impatiently*): Oh, stop blubbing, you great

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fool. I thought he was on to us for a moment. That wretched magazine. . . . The candid camera is the biggest threat to domestic bliss yet invented.

[She picks up the magazine and sits on it.]

BEATRICE: Oh, where is Monica?

MARY: If we knew I don't suppose it would make us feel any better.

BEATRICE: How can she behave like this?

MARY: It's quite understandable. She obviously didn't expect Alec back before this evening. And then, of course, she didn't know about the knight-hood.

BEATRICE: Oh, Mother, you're so heartless. People's happiness is not based on money and social position.

MARY: It is when you're married.

BEATRICE: Monica thinks it's clever to flirt with other men.

MARY: And it is if she's successful. It's a means to two ends. Feminine pleasure and matrimonial security. Do you think for one moment that if Monica weren't so extremely attractive to men Alec would be so madly in love with her? Do use your head, Beatrice.

BEATRICE: I wish you wouldn't keep on referring to my head. There's such a thing as love.

MARY: Beatrice, you are driving me to the irrevocable conclusion that you are oversexed.

BEATRICE: Mother! What a horrid thought.

MARY: Yes, I find it rather repellent myself. *(She cocks her head.)* Listen. I hear someone coming.

[They both turn towards the doors centre as they are opened and Monica in evening gown and wrap sweeps into the room. She is about thirty-five and beautiful. There are other

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things about her, her undoubted glamour, her sophistication, her clothes; but the fact that she is beautiful strikes one first; everything else—her charm of manner, her assurance—springs from that one fact. She is humming "I'm just Wild about Harry". Seeing Mary and Beatrice she stops abruptly.]

MONICA: Oh!

MARY: Yes, you may well say "Oh!"

MONICA: Mother! Beatrice! What are you doing here?

BEATRICE: We're waiting for you.

MARY: It's eleven o'clock. Where on earth have you been, you dreadful girl.

MONICA (*recovering herself*): What a lovely surprise! Both of you. How are you? (*She kisses them lightly.*) Have you had a drink? If not, let me give you one immediately.

[*She walks quickly to the sideboard.*]

MARY: Where have you been?

MONICA: I have been to a party, darling. A very good one, too. What would you like? "Mother's ruin"?

MARY: You're a mother's ruin, and I don't want a drink. You'd better hurry up and change. Alec's back.

MONICA (*startled*): What!

MARY: He's in the consulting room now.

MONICA: That's awkward.

MARY: It's much more than awkward. Your whole future depends on how quickly you can remove that dress.

MONICA: Did he ask where I was?

BEATRICE: You were jolly lucky. We stood by you. We told him you had gone out.

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MARY: Darling, Alec's getting a knighthood.

MONICA: How lovely. Why?

MARY: "When" is more to the point.

MONICA: When, then?

MARY: Soon. A couple of weeks. So you see it's absolutely imperative that you don't blot your copy book now. Whatever happens Alec must never know about this. Now hurry up and . . . what was that?

[There is the sound of someone whistling, "I'm just Wild about Harry" and Peter Varley walks gaily into the room. He is about thirty-five, or so, athletic, very good-looking and wearing a dinner jacket. Seeing others he comes to an abrupt halt.]

PETER: Oh!

MARY: Well!

BEATRICE: You see.

MONICA (*valiantly*): Darlings, you don't know Peter, do you? My mother, my sister Beatrice—Peter Varley.

PETER (*swallowing*): How do you do.

MARY: We've seen your photographs.

PETER: Oh, good show. It looks like it's going to be a warm day, doesn't it?

MARY: It certainly does.

MONICA: Darling, there's no time for pleasantries. Alec's back.

PETER (*jumping*): Good God!

MONICA: Keep your voice down. He's in the next room.

[The following dialogue is spoken in almost hushed whispers.]

PETER: I thought he wasn't coming back until this evening?

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MONICA: So did I. He must have come by an earlier plane.

PETER: How inconsiderate of him.

MONICA: He's often like that.

MARY: Don't stand chattering, you ridiculous things. Where've you two been? Why are you so late?

MONICA (*quickly*): We had a breakdown near St. Albans and had to abandon the car. Fortunately Peter knew a man who runs a hotel nearby and he was able to fix us up for the night.

MARY (*driily*): Very fortunate.

MONICA: Yes, wasn't it? I don't know what we would have done without him. We came back by Green Line this morning.

PETER: That's right.

MONICA: We felt so silly dressed like this on a Green Line.

PETER: You see, we were the only ones in evening clothes.

MONICA: We got a taxi from Marble Arch and well . . . here we are.

PETER: That's right.

MONICA: Darling, I think you had better go right away. If Alec finds you here there will be murder.

MARY: There certainly will. Go away, you very charming young man. You mustn't ever see my daughter again. Now hurry, hurry.

MONICA: I'm sorry it had to end like this.

PETER: That's all right, darling. I understand.

MONICA: Go now. Ring me this afternoon, will you?

PETER: At about four. Well, good-bye. . . .

[*Before he can move towards the door, the consulting room door is opened and Alec comes into the room.*]

ALEC (*amiably*): Good morning.

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[*They all turn to look at him.*]

MONICA: Alec!

MARY (*softly*): You're on your own, now, dear.

ALEC: Hello, darling. How are you? You're looking very glamorous for such a time of the morning.

MONICA: Darling. Welcome home.

[*She runs to him and kisses him.*]

Did you have a good trip? You're very early getting back.

ALEC: Well, the early bird, you know. . . .

MONICA (*hastily*): How are you?

ALEC: Fine. By the way, do I know your friend?

MONICA: Oh, no, of course you don't. This is Peter Varley. Peter, my husband Alec.

ALEC (*with great charm*): How do you do.

PETER (*uneasily*): Oh, how do you do.

[*They shake hands.*]

ALEC: You're looking rather splendid too. Where are you going?

PETER: Nowhere in particular.

MONICA: Darling, it must sound awful, but we've just come in.

ALEC (*in great surprise*): Really?

MONICA: It is silly, isn't it? You see, I've been to a party. . . .

ALEC: I thought you were out shopping. That's what your mother said. You had gone to the hair-dresser to do some shopping while you were waiting for a dress to be finished.

MARY: I must have made a mistake. I was so excited by my bit of news. . . .

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MONICA: Oh yes, congratulations, darling.

ALEC: Thank you very much.

MONICA (*in her best social manner*): Peter, you didn't know, did you? Alec is to receive a knighthood.

PETER: Oh, jolly good show.

MARY: We're all very thrilled.

MONICA: And nobody deserves one more.

PETER: I think I'd better be going.

ALEC: Oh, no, don't go. You haven't told me where you've been yet.

MONICA: Oh, darling, don't jump to hasty conclusions.

ALEC: I'm not.

MONICA: It's all very simple really.

PETER: Perfectly straightforward.

MONICA: You see, Peter and I are old friends, only we hadn't seen each other for ages.

PETER: Not for years.

MONICA: And yesterday by an amazing coincidence we ran into each other again.

PETER: Just like that.

MONICA: Out of the blue. And so we went and had tea together at Gunter's.

ALEC: But the school holidays are on.

MONICA: No, they're not. Anyway, we talked over old times and then Peter said he was going to a party the other side of St. Albans last night and asked me if I would like to go with him. I was feeling rather lonely without you and I thought it might be rather fun.

ALEC: And was it?

MONICA: Oh, yes.

ALEC: I'm glad.

MONICA: But on the way back Peter's car broke down.

ALEC: What was the trouble?

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PETER } Carburettor.
MONICA } (*simultaneously*): Ignition.

ALEC: Exceedingly tricky. .

MONICA: As a matter of fact, we don't really know what it was.

PETER: We just had to abandon the thing and walk.

MONICA: We walked miles!

PETER: Miles!

MONICA: But fortunately Peter knew somebody who ran a hotel near St. Albans and . . . and we were able to put up there.

ALEC: Did you have a good night?

[*He walks to the window.*]

PETER: Rather. (*Pause.*) It was a three star hotel.

ALEC (*looking out*): Nice car you have, Varley.

PETER: Yes, not bad.

ALEC: Do you find they heat up. . . ?

MONICA (*hastily*): That's not Peter's. That's a hired car, darling. We came back in it.

BEATRICE: You said you came back by Green Line.

MARY (*kicking her*): Be quiet, Beatrice!

[*There is an uncomfortable silence. Alec stands looking at them. Monica suddenly runs to him.*]

MONICA: Oh, darling! Sorry. So sorry, my darling. I know I've hurt you terribly.

ALEC: It's quite all right.

MONICA: Say what you like. I deserve it. Go on, say it. Oh, I'll never forgive myself for doing this to you.

PETER (*coming forward*): Look here, Bestwood. I'm most awfully sorry.

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ALEC: Don't mention it.

MONICA: Darling. I would rather have cut my right arm off than have this happen to you. Peter, you must go.

PETER: Very well.

ALEC: No, don't go. Stay and have a drink.

MARY: No, go. Go at once. This is dreadful. Don't you realise that if the Prime Minister got wind of this it would all be up? Go away, young man.

ALEC: There's a little Scotch.

MONICA: Darling, you're being magnificent—and I'm proud of you.

ALEC: Or would you prefer gin?

MARY: No one wants alcohol, the situation calls for something stronger.

ALEC: I think I may have a little adrenalin in the other room.

[*Monica stretches out a hand to Peter.*]

MONICA: Good-bye, Peter. For ever!

PETER: Why be ostriches? Now that it's happened, can't we talk about this like rational adults?

MONICA: No, we can't. How can you be so cruel?

PETER: Look here, Bestwood. I know you must think I'm a cad; but please believe me, my feelings for Monica, for your wife, are strong and utterly sincere. I just wanted you to know that.

ALEC: It's a great comfort. Thank you.

MONICA: Oh, Peter, how can you? Don't make it any more difficult than it is. Think of my position. I don't want to hurt anyone; but you must understand that my duty is to my husband.

PETER: I'm sorry.

MONICA: Good-bye, my dear. You've been very sweet. Bless you.

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ALEC (*raising his glass*): Cheers.

PETER: If that's the way you want it, Monica.

MONICA: That's the way it must be.

[*Monica and Peter stand facing each other. Alec crosses to Mary and Beatrice and takes them by the arms.*]

ALEC: Come with me. I have something to show you.

MARY: Alec, what are you doing?

ALEC (*firmly*): Come along.

BEATRICE: Where are you taking us?

ALEC: To the consulting room, he said, with a villainous laugh.

MONICA: Darling, don't. There's no need.

PETER: Bestwood, I'm going.

[*Alec is propelling Mary and Beatrice towards door right.*]

MARY: Alec, don't be so silly. I refuse to leave this room in the middle of the drama.

ALEC: Come along "Mother-in-law".

MARY: Don't ever call me that again.

MONICA: Alec, please.

ALEC: Come along, ladies. I have some really delicious X-Rays to show you. (*To Monica and Peter.*) You will excuse me, won't you? Good-bye, Varley. Nice to have met you.

[*Alec, Mary and Beatrice go through the door into the consulting room. Monica turns to Peter.*]

MONICA: Oh, Peter. He's so hurt.

PETER: Are you sure? He seemed quite unmoved to me.

MONICA: That's his superb self-control. He's noted for it. Oh, darling. What rotten luck.

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PETER: Beastly.

MONICA: There's only one course left for us now. It's good-bye, Peter.

PETER: I suppose so.

MONICA: I can't bear deceit. As long as he didn't know, of course, it was a different matter. But now. . . . Poor Alec. To have done this to him. I could cry, I could really.

[She touches her eyes with the tips of her fingers.]

PETER: You mustn't, sweet, you mustn't.

MONICA: What else am I expected to do?

PETER *(holding her)*: Oh, you darling. You adorable darling.

MONICA: Hold me tightly just for a moment.

PETER: If it could only be for a lifetime.

MONICA: It could have been; but not now. Not now, darling.

PETER: Let's make a clean breast of it, and go away together. Just we two.

MONICA: Don't paint rainbows in front of my eyes.

PETER: Will you?

[Monica shakes her head and smiles sadly up at him.]

MONICA: No, Peter. We haven't only ourselves to think of now. We have him. Therefore, our moment must end.

PETER: Moment? It's been nearly a year.

MONICA: It only *seems* like a moment.

PETER: But if you love me. . . .

MONICA: Oh, I do.

PETER: Then surely it would be more honest to tell Alec, and we'll go away together.

MONICA: How simple you make it sound.

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PETER: But it is simple.

MONICA: Nothing in life is simple. My dear, you should know that. No, Peter, in a moment you must go out of my life and you must never come back, do you understand?

PETER: What, never?

MONICA: Never.

PETER: It's too cruel.

MONICA: Life is cruel.

PETER: Don't keep on about life. Life is what you make it. Life is a bowl of cherries. Life is a kick in the pants.

MONICA: Don't spoil our last moments by being testy, darling. My life from now on will be devoted to my husband. I have learned my lesson, there will be no room for anyone else. I'm sorry.

PETER: I say, you are not being influenced by this knighthood business, are you?

MONICA: Peter!

PETER: No, that was base of me. I take it back.

MONICA: I can say on my word of honour that the idea of a knighthood leaves me cold. Human relationships are what count in life. . . .

PETER: If you say that word again I shall scream.

MONICA: You never had Alec's control.

PETER: I don't want his control. I want his wife.

MONICA: But now you may never have her. She has gone as she came, like thistledown on the wind. Good-bye, my darling. Think of me occasionally.

PETER: You will never be out of my thoughts.

MONICA: Please go before I cry. No, kiss me first.

[*Peter takes her in his arms.*]

Bruise me a little so that I may remember.

PETER: Oh, darling!

MONICA: Oh, darling!

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[*They are locked in a passionate embrace as Elizabeth comes out of the consulting room.*]

ELIZABETH (*calmly*): Oh, excuse me.

MONICA: That's all right, Miss Wilton.

[*Elizabeth goes out of the doors centre. Monica looks at Peter.*]

Don't let's prolong this. I couldn't bear much more.

PETER: You love me, and yet you allow me to go out of your life.

MONICA: I must.

PETER (*visibly moved*): You're a very wonderful woman.

MONICA (*nodding*): There will be a scene with Alec in a minute. But I shall not dodge it, just as I have not dodged the bitter poignancy of saying good-bye to you.

PETER: So brave.

MONICA: No, not really. Just a fatalist, perhaps. Good-bye, my dearest. Take care of yourself, and perhaps, one day, we may meet again. You have my 'phone number, haven't you?

PETER: Next to my heart.

MONICA: Good-bye, then. One brief kiss and then oblivion.

[*She leans up and kisses him on the mouth.*]

Go now. Don't look back.

[*Peter nods dumbly and turning walks heavily to the door. At the door he pauses and half turns round.*]

Don't. . . .

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[Peter shakes his head. Turning away, he walks slowly and blindly out. Monica stands where she is looking after him.]

(Whispering.) Farewell, my love.

[The door of the consulting room opens and Mary and Beatrice come back into the room.]

MARY: Well! Of all the tactless young women. In my day wives always bade their lovers farewell in the porch. Or at least in the summer house.

BEATRICE: There's no summer house here.

MARY: I'll thank you to keep your nose out of this, Beatrice. Anyway, that just shows how manners and morals are changing. In my day. . . .

MONICA: Oh, Mother, do be quiet. Things are turbulent enough without you drooling on about your day. How's Alec?

MARY: How can you expect him to be? He's being absolutely wonderful under the circumstances.

MONICA: I must go to him!

MARY: Not before you've changed, you don't. That gown with its stale perfume, its tiny creases, its air of stolen enchantment—my dear, you would be just asking for a divorce.

MONICA: I'll change right away.

MARY: Have you banished that delightful man from your life?

MONICA: For ever!

MARY: I hope he won't go and do anything desperate to himself. He was so good-looking.

MONICA: It wasn't easy; but I couldn't bear to have Alec suffer any more than he has already.

MARY: Not now that he's getting a knighthood, anyway.

MONICA: Mother, once and for all let me make this

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quite clear. I am not one whit interested in Alec's proposed knighthood.

MARY: But Lady Bestwood. . . .

MONICA: Blast Lady Bestwood! Mother, you have a social register for a heart.

MARY: Only since I passed fifty.

MONICA (*dramatically*): I know what Alec feels for me. I know what it would do to him if there were another man. Therefore I am prepared to sacrifice Peter's love, not because I don't love Peter, or because I'm anxious to acquire a title, but just because after ten years of married life I still happen to have some feeling left for my husband.

BEATRICE (*appreciatively*): That was absolutely splendid, Monica.

MONICA: And now I'm going to change.

MARY: Something simple. I would suggest, my dear. Something rather young and virginal.

MONICA: Mother, aren't you rather letting your imagination run away with you?

[*Exit Monica. Mary looks at Beatrice.*]

MARY: This is all your fault.

BEATRICE: Why?

MARY: Don't ask ridiculous questions. Pour me a quick gin before I collapse. I am utterly unnerved.

BEATRICE (*going to sideboard*): I think it's jolly unfair of you to blame me.

MARY: Well, if you won't go and get yourself married then you must serve some useful purpose in life.

BEATRICE: I tell you, Mother. I'm getting fed up.

MARY: Don't be so ungrateful. You have the benefit of my almost daily companionship. What else can a girl like you expect?

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BEATRICE: I behave a jolly sight better than Monica; and yet you are constantly criticising me and condoning everything that Monica does.

MARY: Oh, you are a churlish girl, you are, really. You're just like your father. Just like Bertie. Everything I do and say is done with your interests at heart. I don't want you to go through life as a wallflower, an also ran. I want you to be happy, Beatrice. A big success. I know I'm asking rather a lot, but I shall not rest until I've achieved that object.

BEATRICE: Sometimes I think that's the last thing you want.

MARY: Oh, Beatrice. Wanton child!

BEATRICE: I mean, I know I haven't Monica's beauty and charm and all that sort of stuff; but I love animals, and as you yourself know, I'm a jolly good cook.

MARY: None better. But since the war, after twelve years of rationing, men's stomachs have shrunk; therefore one can't attach as much importance to that route as in my day, you do see that, don't you, dear? Anyway, there's little point in marrying a man who can't even afford a cook.

BEATRICE: I shouldn't care what a man had as long as I loved him. And I'd love any man who would marry me.

MARY: This obsession of yours for love, Beatrice, it worries me. I wish to heaven you had never given up lacrosse.

[*Alec enters from the right.*]

ALEC: Still here? Varley's gone, I suppose?

MARY: Monica got rid of him right away. Just sent him packing.

ALEC: Where is she now?

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MARY: She has just gone to change her frock. Don't be too hard on her, Alec. She's a little young and impetuous as yet.

ALEC: I quite understand. Thank you for coming round and telling me about my impending knight-hood and for being so wonderful in my hour of need.

MARY: Any mother-in-law would have done it.

ALEC: But not with half as much relish. Good-bye, Mary. Good-bye, Beatrice. I'm sorry to hurry you off like this, but I'm sure you will appreciate my feelings when I say I should like to be alone now.

MARY: Of course, Alec. Come, Beatrice. We'll go along to Fortnums and have coffee.

BEATRICE: Good-bye, Alec. I'm so awfully sorry. But as Mother says, if Monica were not so attractive to other men, you wouldn't love her half as much as you do.

MARY (*taking her arm*): Come along, Beatrice. You are taking me to lunch at the Berkeley.

BEATRICE: You just now said we were going to have coffee at Fortnums.

MARY: A good lunch is small compensation for the blow you have just dealt me. I shall begin with lobster. Good-bye, Alec.

[*Exit Mary. Beatrice hesitates and looks at Alec for a moment.*]

BEATRICE: Alec, I'm so sorry that this should have happened. If there's anything I can do, if there's any little thing that you might want at any time, I would just like you to know that I should be more than delighted. Good-bye.

[*Exit Beatrice. Alec sighs and helps himself to a drink. Elizabeth comes in from the centre.*]

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ELIZABETH: Doctor, is this true that you are going to be presented with a knighthood?

ALEC: Miss Wilton, can you keep a secret?

ELIZABETH: It's against the dictates of my sex—but I can try.

ALEC: My mother-in-law is one of the silliest women in London.

ELIZABETH: Oh.

ALEC: She's an echo of a bygone day. Would you like a drink?

ELIZABETH: Oh, no, thank you.

ALEC: Please do. I know it's a little irregular; but this is a most irregular morning.

ELIZABETH: May I have some gin, then?

ALEC: I'm so glad you suggested that—because that appears to be all we have. Oh, no, wait a moment, there's some sherry if you would prefer it.

ELIZABETH: Gin, please.

ALEC: Vermouth, tonic water, or just plain water? Or sherry? Gin and sherry's quite exciting. It's just the sort of drink to start you off when you have decided to do something that perhaps you shouldn't, something rather gay and abandoned. Something that the world would censure you for, but something you know will be so wholly delightful that you don't give a damn. Gin and sherry. A prelude to gaiety.

ELIZABETH: I'll have a gin and water, doctor.

ALEC: And so will I. Your choice betrays good taste, as well as good sense, Miss Wilton. There you are.

ELIZABETH: Thank you.

ALEC (*raising his glass*): God bless.

[*Elizabeth raises her glass and they drink.*]

By the way, my mother-in-law says I must earn

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more money, so that my wife may live up to her proposed title. Therefore I suggest you bring pressure to bear on all those people with outstanding accounts.

ELIZABETH: There are quite a number.

ALEC: There always are. Miss Wilton, tell me, how long have you been here, now?

ELIZABETH: Three years.

ALEC: As long as that? Well, I insist that you give me six months' notice of when you intend to leave me. Good secretaries are hard to get.

ELIZABETH: I have no intention of leaving you.

ALEC: That's what all my secretaries have said, but they've gone all the same—usually to get married.

ELIZABETH: I've been married.

ALEC: Have you?

ELIZABETH: My husband was killed in the war.

ALEC: I'm sorry.

ELIZABETH: So long as you don't intend to give me the sack, I shall stay.

ALEC: You haven't any children, have you?

ELIZABETH: No.

ALEC (*looking thoughtfully at her*): What do you do with yourself? Don't you get lonely? You do forgive me asking, don't you?

ELIZABETH: I don't really know what I do; but I'm never lonely. I read, knit a little, go to the pictures once a week. Oh, and I also go to the theatre quite a lot.

ALEC: That's more than I can afford to do.

ELIZABETH: I go in the Pit. And sometimes the Gallery.

ALEC: Nowadays, I believe the best people do.

ELIZABETH: Anyway, by the time we have finished some evenings it doesn't leave a lot of time to do anything, does it?

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ALEC: If that's a veiled hint that I work you too hard you'd better have another drink.

ELIZABETH: It wasn't, and I don't want another drink, thank you.

[Monica enters centre. She has changed into a very attractive and smart day dress.]

MONICA: I'm sorry to have been so long, Alec. Would you mind leaving us, Miss Wilton, please? I wish to speak to the doctor.

ELIZABETH: Of course. Thank you for my drink.

ALEC: Not at all.

[Elizabeth goes through into the consulting room. Monica looks at Alec.]

MONICA: Well, Alec?

ALEC: Just a moment, darling. I've just remembered something.

[He goes to the door of the consulting room.]

ALEC: Miss Wilton. Would you remember to order some Methyلاتropine Nitrate?

ELIZABETH *(off)*: I've already done so.

ALEC: Oh, good.

[He turns back. Monica has adopted an attitude and stands waiting. Alec suddenly turns back to the consulting room again.]

Oh, and we want some pituitary extract from Burroughs.

ELIZABETH *(off)*: I'll order it right away.

[Alec nods and closes the door then crosses to sideboard.]

ALEC: Are you going to have a drink, darling?

MONICA: I couldn't drink at a time like this.

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ALEC: Then I must drink alone.

MONICA (*running to him*): Oh, Alec, Alec.

[*She buries her face into his shoulder. Alec looks mildly surprised.*]

Forgive me. Forgive me, darling.

ALEC: Very well. Let me just pour this drink.

MONICA: Oh, darling. I hate myself so much.

ALEC: You mustn't do that.

MONICA: I know I don't deserve it, but just tell me I'm forgiven. Please, I couldn't bear it otherwise. I'll do anything you say, darling, but just tell me I'm forgiven.

ALEC: You're forgiven.

[*Monica releases him and steps back a pace.*]

MONICA (*vehemently*): No, I'm not. You're just saying it. Just being wonderfully brave, while inside your heart is bleeding.

[*She flings her arms around his neck and holds him tightly.*]

ALEC: I am not being brave. I have never been brave in my life, I am not a brave man. And as to a bleeding heart, I can assure you it has never been more robust. Now do let me help myself to this drink before I go mad with thirst.

MONICA: Alec, you don't know how low you make me feel, by behaving so magnificently. You're fifty times the person I am. I'm nothing more than a worthless slut. If you want to beat me, you can.

[*Alec has succeeded in pouring himself a drink and now he turns to face her.*]

ALEC: I suppose all this emotion springs from the

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fact that I know you and Peter Varley were out all night, last night?

MONICA: Please don't even say it.

ALEC: In other words that you spent the night together.

MONICA: Alec. Don't torture yourself.

ALEC: I'm not torturing myself. I would just like you to know that it's quite all right, therefore, darling, there's no reason at all for you to feel badly about it. I'm sure you enjoyed yourself and if you did, then I'm glad. So don't let's say any more about it. Will you have a drink now?

MONICA (*raising her head*): I see. I understand, Alec. And I'm grateful to you. I see that you are determined to avoid a scene at all costs. Thank you, my dear. I appreciate that. I agree that we shouldn't have a horrid scene over something that was so transient, so worthless.

ALEC: I'm giving you gin and tonic, but there's no lemon.

MONICA: I would like you to know that Peter's gone, now. Gone for ever.

ALEC: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

MONICA: Coming back into my life as he did yesterday, something happened, a flame was suddenly kindled, it burned bright, then just as suddenly it died again.

ALEC: Here's your drink, darling.

MONICA: Thank you, darling. It was a moment of madness, that's all. We're intelligent people, you and I, Alec. We can discuss this thing coolly and rationally, can't we?

ALEC: My dear, I have no intention of discussing anything, I have told you that.

[*He sits on the arm of the sofa and picks up the Tatler.*]

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What happened last night is quite unimportant, believe me. Now let's talk about something else, shall we? Oh, by the way, Bunny Cummings has got married.

MONICA (*slowly*): Do you mean that?

ALEC: It's in here. There's a photograph.

MONICA: I mean about Peter.

ALEC: Oh. Certainly I mean it. Your moment of madness as you call it doesn't affect me in any way at all. Really it doesn't.

MONICA (*her voice changing*): Doesn't it?

ALEC: Of course not.

MONICA: You may be interested to hear, then, that it wasn't just a moment.

ALEC: Oh?

MONICA: It's been going on for nearly a year now. Nearly a whole year!

ALEC (*nodding*): I thought it was about ten months.

MONICA (*aghast*): What?

ALEC: Don't look so surprised. I've known for quite a while now. I didn't know who the man was; but then that wasn't important—to me, at any rate. I felt sure he would be someone rather charming. You have always had good taste, darling.

MONICA: Alec. Aren't you feeling well?

ALEC: Never felt better.

MONICA: How could you possibly have known?

ALEC: You told me. In the way you walked, the way you talked, the look in your eyes. Your vivacity, your gaiety. I haven't seen you looking quite so attractive for years. The adventure and slight danger of deception lent an edge to your personality which was quite delightful to look upon. And then again—you were so awfully charming to me.

MONICA: Of course, this is just sophisticated bravado, isn't it?

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ALEC: Not at all. I've been quite grateful for your attachment. Because of it our relationship became so much more pleasant, you were so much easier to live with. You didn't make demands upon me, you allowed me time to myself; and then on those occasions when you were with me you were always the soul of consideration and kindness. I've appreciated it.

MONICA: I think you must be raving mad.

ALEC: Darling, we've been married ten years now, I hope we shall remain that way for another ten, and more. We're happy, we suit each other; but you're not in love with me.

MONICA: I am.

ALEC: No, you're not.

MONICA (*after a moment*): I love you.

ALEC (*gently*): That's not quite the same thing, is it? You haven't been in love with me for at least three years now.

MONICA: Three years, yes, that's about right. Oh, darling. I didn't think you knew.

ALEC: Of course I knew.

MONICA: Oh, my sweet. My sweet darling. I feel so utterly wretched for you.

ALEC: That's all right, because I fell out of love with you two years before that.

MONICA (*standing up*): You did what?

ALEC: You outlasted me by two years, I should say.

MONICA: You're obviously drunk.

ALEC: Nevertheless, I think we've done very well. Taking everything into consideration, I think we are entitled to call ours a very successful marriage. We had love at the beginning, we had a lot of love; and I think it lasted as long as, if not longer than most marriages. I must admit I found it a bit of a strain

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when I fell out of love with you, and you were still madly in love with me, but later when yours died and you faced up to the fact that it had, everything became quite pleasant and normal for us again. And I am glad to say it has stayed that way. I sincerely hope it will continue to do so.

MONICA: I think you're despicable.

ALEC: You just told me not five minutes ago that I was magnificent and brave and fifty times the person you were.

MONICA: I didn't know you for what you were then. My eyes were blinded by mists of trust.

ALEC: It's all my fault for coming back early. If for one moment I had thought that you were bringing Varley here, I would, of course, have caught a later plane. I hope you'll forgive me. But once back I was curious to see what sort of a chap he was, so I came in here to meet him. He seemed rather nice.

MONICA: I'm in love with him.

ALEC: Good.

MONICA: I intend to go on seeing him.

ALEC: Oh, good, I'm so glad. I was worried for a moment.

MONICA: You . . . you really do want me to go on with Peter?

ALEC: Of course I do, darling. Why should you give him up? He's amusing, he's charming. You're obviously happy in his company. Far happier than you would be in mine, let's face it; and anyway, I'm so terribly busy, I just can't give a lot of time to you. Yes, I think it's an ideal arrangement—for all of us.

[Monica draws herself up and looks Alec straight in the eye. There is a pause.]

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MONICA (*very coldly*): I would like you to know that I shall never forgive you for this as long as I live.

[Turning on her heel she walks with great dignity out through the doors centre as

The curtain falls]

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The same. Afternoon, a few days later.

When the curtain rises, Mrs. Titheradge is discovered sitting on the sofa. Alec comes into the room from centre.

MARY: Good afternoon, Alec.

ALEC (*cheerfully*): Good afternoon, Mary. And how are you?

MARY: Oh, don't worry about me, dear, it's you I'm thinking of.

ALEC: That's very sweet of you.

MARY (*with great concern*): How are you, Alec?

ALEC: I'm fine, thanks.

MARY: Are you? Are you really? I know, dear, that it must have been quite a shock to you.

ALEC: Oh, I soon became reconciled to the idea. Tell me, have you heard any more about it? What does your friend Mabel Lexton say?

MARY: Oh! Oh, we haven't any further information about your knighthood, if that's what you mean.

ALEC: Well, keep working on it.

[House telephone rings. Alec picks it up.]

Very well, Miss Wilton. Just coming. I must leave you now because I have somebody waiting to see me.

MARY: Anyway, we shall soon know. The Honours List will be out in a fortnight.

ALEC: I do so hope I've drawn a horse. Good-bye, Mary. Keep a vigilant eye on all my interests, won't you?

[He opens door right.]

Ah! Mrs. Tankerton. . .

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[He disappears into the consulting room. Mary looks thoughtfully after him as Monica enters from centre.]

MONICA: I didn't know you were here, Mother.

MARY: I trust you didn't. Considering I have been sitting here for ten minutes. Well, how are things?

MONICA: The same.

MARY: How is he taking it?

MONICA: Very badly.

MARY: I have just been talking to him. I feel bound to say that he struck me as being in the best of spirits.

MONICA: It's all a pose. He's doing it with everybody. I think he's absolutely magnificent.

MARY: Of course, it's their training, isn't it? And then he was at Harrow. Churchill's the same.

MONICA: Oh, Mother, I don't know what I'm going to do. I feel so frightful about it all.

MARY: I suppose he drops the pose when you're alone?

MONICA: I can't tell you. Once behind locked doors he becomes positively savage. Well, he was for the first two days. Now he's just silent and brooding; and sometimes I see him looking at me with that hurt, reproachful look, like a . . . like a whipped dog. I wish he would be savage again, I wish he would beat me, anything, anything, rather than this dreadful silent reproach of his.

MARY: There would have been much more cause for anxiety if he hadn't taken it this way. In fact, that doesn't bear thinking about.

MONICA: I quite agree, Mother, it doesn't.

MARY: Just as long as he's not contemplating divorce. Now what about your other young man?

MONICA: Peter? I haven't seen him. I told you I

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had banished him for ever. As a matter of fact he's another thing I have on my conscience.

MARY: It's good for a woman's conscience to be troubled in that way. I never felt completely happy unless I was holding at least three men's destinies in my hands. I am afraid you and I are the same, Monica. We can't help ourselves. We are what are known as—*femmes fatales*.

MONICA: Sometimes I wish I were like Beatrice.

MARY: You would find it very uncomfortable.

MONICA: Her life is cosy, straightforward, simple, uncomplicated.

MARY: I should think it's unmentionable, too. No, dear, however grey things may look for you at the moment, you must certainly never wish such a fate upon yourself. Poor Beatrice. In her I have been grossly misrepresented.

[The doors centre open and Beatrice enters. She is carrying a square brown paper parcel. She starts on seeing Mary and Monica.]

BEATRICE: Oh, hello.

MONICA: Hello, Bee.

BEATRICE: Good afternoon, Mother.

MARY: Good afternoon, Beatrice. And just what are you doing here, may I ask?

BEATRICE: I didn't think you were here.

MARY: I see we are about to start one of our circular conversations. I asked you a simple question, dear. Without straining yourself unduly, could you possibly give me a simple answer to my question?

BEATRICE: I just thought I'd look in to see how everybody was, as I happened to be passing.

MONICA: We are all as well as can be expected in the circumstances.

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BEATRICE (*sitting*): How is Alec?

MONICA: Not too good, I'm afraid.

BEATRICE: Is he in?

MARY: What do you want to know if he's in for?
Anyway, what have you got in that parcel?

BEATRICE: Nothing.

MARY: Nothing?

BEATRICE: It's just a parcel.

MARY: I'm well aware of that, Beatrice. But what's inside it?

BEATRICE: There's nothing inside it. Why must you keep on questioning me?

MARY: Mother and daughter should have no secrets from each other, you should know that by now.

BEATRICE: Is Alec in?

MARY: Yes, but he has a patient with him. You are showing an uncommon interest in Alec, today, Beatrice.

BEATRICE: I'm not, I just wondered. After all, he lives here, it's only natural that I should ask, surely.

MONICA: Don't let's keep on about it, for God's sake. I have enough on my mind without you two bickering under my nose. If you want to bicker I think you had better go and bicker somewhere else.

MARY: I quite agree. Beatrice, I think you might show a little more consideration for Monica.

BEATRICE: Monica's all right.

MARY: She is not. She's under a strain.

BEATRICE: It's her own fault if she is.

MONICA: You wouldn't know about this, Beatrice. But sometimes in life there are things that are so compelling as to make one forget one's obligations, one's loved ones. Such a thing overtook me. I am now suffering a little for the suffering I have caused others, please try and understand and be a little more considerate.

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BEATRICE (*rising*): I'm going round to see Mrs. Fortescue. She's rather poorly. I thought perhaps if I looked in to see her it might buck her up.

[*She walks centre.*]

MARY: What a quaint idea.

BEATRICE: I may come back later.

[*Exit Beatrice.*]

MARY: Like a blimp that's lost its moorings.

MONICA: She's left her parcel behind.

[*She picks it up and looks curiously at it.*]

MARY: It's not very heavy. I wonder what it can be?

MONICA: I expect she's bought herself a hideous camisole or something.

MARY: No. I will say one thing for her. She always wears the most beautiful undies.

MONICA: Heaven knows why.

MARY: She's spent the last ten years of her life under the delusion that whenever she walks along the street there is a man following her. That's why she never takes a taxi.

MONICA: It's obviously a cardboard box. Give it a shake.

MARY (*shaking it*): No sound. She's a secretive little hussy. Deceitful, too.

MONICA: I wonder if we've stumbled on something. She's always off somewhere on her own. What does she do with herself, Mother? Where does she go in the evenings?

MARY: To Guides, I think.

MONICA: That may be a blind. Nobody can really

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be as quiet and non-committal as Beatrice without trying to hide something. Who knows—she might be a drug trafficker.

MARY (*rapturously*): Oh, if only she were. "

MONICA: Hashish might well account for that curious expression she wears permanently on her face.

MARY: Let's open it.

MONICA: Dare we?

MARY: Yes, let's.

MONICA: All right.

MARY: We'd better not cut the string. We'll just pick at the knots.

MONICA: Unless we cut the string and tie it up again with fresh string.

MARY: Too risky. Here, dear. You do it, your nails are less brittle than mine.

[*The doors are opened and Beatrice comes in, snatches up the parcel and without a word exits again.*]

MONICA: Damn!

MARY: That's typical of Beatrice. Instead of going away properly like any normal person, she has to come back again.

[*Peter Varley appears suddenly in the doorway centre.*]

PETER (*fervently*): Monica!

MONICA (*jumping*): Good God!

MARY: It's that man!

MONICA: Peter! What are you doing here?

PETER: I had to come. Please don't scold me. I had to see you.

MONICA: I gave the maid instructions not to let you in.

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PETER: I couldn't go another day without seeing you. I just had to see you. Can you understand that?

MONICA: Of course I can, darling. But you're taking an awful risk. My husband is in.

PETER: I must talk to you.

MARY: Oh, you headstrong, romantic young man. I expect you want to throw her over a horse and gallop away over the horizon, don't you?

MONICA: Mother, I think you had better go.

MARY: I think this wicked young man had better go, too. Unless we want to kiss our title good-bye. Come along, Mr. Varley, you may take me out to tea.

PETER: I don't want to take you out to tea. I want to speak to Monica. Darling!

MONICA: Go away, Mother, please.

MARY: I think it's most unfair. Whenever there's drama imminent I have to leave the room.

MONICA: Peter and I would just like a moment alone.

MARY: My dear young man, to me you are the spirit of chivalry and romance. Even though I stand to lose a title, I adore your action of forcing your way in here to see your lady. But I am a romantic, I admit it. I always have been. Through Monica I relive my own young married life. . . .

MONICA: Mother, do go away!

MARY: That may surprise you, but it's true. But although I see your actions in such a light there are others who won't.

MONICA: Mother!!!

MARY: Oh, very well, but I shall only go just outside the door. And I shall *listen*.

[*Exit Mary. Monica and Peter immediately embrace.*]

PETER: Let me look at you. Oh, darling.

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MONICA: Sweet Peter.

PETER: Has he been awful?

MONICA: Dreadful.

PETER: He's beaten you?

MONICA: Savagely.

PETER: The swine.

MONICA: Bruises. Bruises everywhere.

PETER: Oh, darling. I can't bear it. He didn't mark your face, though.

MONICA: He didn't want the world to know.

PETER: The utter, utter swine. And it's all my fault.

MONICA: I was just as much to blame.

PETER: Darling!

[*They embrace again. Elizabeth, without her overall, comes out of the consulting room and crosses centre.*]

ELIZABETH (*politely*): Excuse me.

MONICA (*shortly*): That's quite all right, Miss Wilton.

[*Exit Elizabeth.*]

His patient must have gone. He'll kill you if he finds you here.

PETER: Monica, I want you to come away with me.

MONICA: I can't, Peter. Where?

PETER: Venice.

MONICA: It's absolutely impossible. When?

PETER: Tonight. This afternoon. This minute.

MONICA: Oh, darling. How could I ever do such a thing to Alec? That would be the last straw—he would die. Anyway, I should have to have some new clothes for the Continent. Oh, sweetheart, you must see it's out of the question.

PETER: Why should he come between two people who love each other as we do? I'm going in there. I'm going to talk to him.

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MONICA: Darling, he'll kill you! Go away now, please. While there's still time.

[*The door of the consulting room is opened and Alec comes slowly into the room reading a sheet of paper. He doesn't see Peter and Monica. Peter throws his arm protectively in front of Monica.*]

PETER: Leave this to me.

[*Alec looks up.*]

ALEC (*happily surprised*): Hello, Varley. Nice to see you. How are you?

[*He comes forward and shakes Peter's hand enthusiastically.*]

I thought we were never going to see you again. Have you been away?

PETER: No.

ALEC: I didn't know you were here, or else I would have come in before. Well, how are you?

MONICA (*to Peter*): It's all bluff.

ALEC: What did you say, darling?

MONICA: I told Peter that you were bluffing. I was just putting him on his guard.

PETER: Look here, Bestwood. . . .

MONICA: Be careful, Peter. I wouldn't be at all surprised if he hadn't got a scalpel in his pocket.

ALEC: Dear heart, what *are* you saying now?

MONICA: It's no good, Alec. It's no use your pretending you're pleased to see Peter.

ALEC: But I am. Terribly pleased.

MONICA: You are not. You're livid, you know you are. Livid, livid, livid!

ALEC: How can you be so discourteous to our guest?

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I must apologise, Varley, but please pay no attention to Monica, I really am delighted to see you.

PETER: Look here, Bestwood. . . .

MONICA: You must go, Peter. I don't want blood on my hands.

ALEC: Monica, every time Varley comes here you are immediately at great pains to send him away again—why?

PETER: Look here, Bestwood. . . .

MONICA: Go, Peter!

ALEC: Monica, please let him stay, if only so that I may find out whether he is capable of saying anything else besides, "Look here, Bestwood."

PETER: Look here, Bestwood. . . .

ALEC: Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear.

PETER: Look here, Bestwood, I think the time has come for us to have a talk.

ALEC: Congratulations. You made it.

PETER: Bestwood, I'm in love with your wife.

ALEC: Good. Will you stay to tea?

PETER: Did you hear what I said?

ALEC: Very clearly.

PETER: Well, aren't you going to do anything?

ALEC: What would you like me to do?

PETER: Well—something.

ALEC: A cartwheel? A *pas de chat*? An arabesque? *Qu'est ce que vous voulez?*

PETER (*intensely*): I'm in love with Monica. I'm in love with her. I'm in love with your wife. Can you possibly understand that?

ALEC: Oh, I think so. One man's meat, you know . . . sugar?

PETER (*to Monica*): What did he say?

MONICA: He's just trying to be gay about the whole thing.

PETER: I want her to come away with me.

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ALEC: Where were you thinking of taking her?

PETER: I thought Venice.

ALEC: Very nice place, Venice. Is that where you want to go, Monica?

MONICA: Of course it is. There's no place I want to go to more.

ALEC: Yes, it's lovely there at this time of the year. I almost wish I were coming with you; but pressure of work and all that, you know. I am sure it will do you the world of good, darling. How long were you thinking of going for?

PETER: I hadn't got that far, actually.

ALEC: Well, you want to remember that you'll only have eighty quid between you. Although I think I might be able to give you a connection there who would advance you some lire.

PETER: That's jolly sporting of you.

ALEC: Not at all. Only too glad to help. Now when are you thinking of going?

PETER: Tonight. If that's all right with you.

ALEC: Of course it's all right with me, my dear fellow. I'll give Monica a letter to this chap about the money. Oh, and by the way. . . .

PETER: Yes?

ALEC: You must visit Guiseppe's. You haven't eaten Italian food until you've been to Guiseppe's. It's just off the Piazza. Anyway, you know where it is, don't you, Monica? I expect the old boy will remember you; but in case he doesn't just tell him you're friends of mine. Well, bye-bye, Varley. Have a wonderful time. I know I can trust you to take good care of her.

[*They shake hands.*]

Good-bye, darling. (*He kisses her gently.*) I won't

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detain you both any longer, because I'm sure you have a million things to do. Don't forget, I shall expect at least one postcard from you. Have a lovely time—you lucky things.

[*And with a charming smile at them both Alec walks into the consulting room again.*]

PETER (*slowly*): I can't believe it! (*Then suddenly becoming excited.*) Darling, do you realise what this means? (*He crosses to her.*) Oh, darling. It's all right. It's all right. You're mine. Isn't that wonderful?

MONICA: Oh, shut up!

PETER: What did you say?

MONICA: I said shut up, you great fool.

PETER: Monica!

MONICA: Don't you Monica me. I've had quite enough of you. Get out of my sight. Go home.

PETER: Darling! What's happened to you? What are you saying? We are going to Venice together.

MONICA: We're not even going to Clapham Junction together. Go away.

PETER: Darling.

MONICA: I've heard about men like you before; but fortunately I'd never met one. You appear to be completely without shame. There are no words to describe how despicable I think your type of man is. Coming here like this, trying to come between my husband and myself, trying to take me away from him. My God, you're low.

PETER: Monica, darling, what are you saying?

MONICA (*witheringly*): You cur.

PETER: What!

MONICA: Cur, sir!

PETER: I feel as if I'm dreaming. What's suddenly made you change like this? I don't understand.

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MONICA: I don't expect you to, your brain's no bigger than a shrivelled pea. Go away, I hate you. You're a cad, and you're also a very large bore.

PETER: Please. . . .

MONICA: I don't like you. I've never liked you, I never shall like you. To me you're the epitome of all the things that give me the willies. Now go away before I start screaming.

PETER: This is quite fantastic. We are supposed to be in love.

[Monica throws her head back and gives a high-pitched, scornful laugh.]

We have been for nearly a year. We were supposed to be going away together, just we two, to find happiness. And now, just when everything looks marvellous for us, for no reason at all you turn on me. I just don't understand you, Monica. I just don't understand you.

MONICA (*working herself up*): I must say it's a fine time to tell me. You didn't say anything about not understanding me when you wanted me to go away with you, did you? No. No, you tell me now, now that we're not going away. Isn't that just like a man?

PETER: But before I thought I did understand you.

MONICA: Oh, be quiet and go home, you stupid buffalo, you. You bore me. I don't want to ever see you again.

PETER: Very well. I'll go.

[Monica turns her back on him. Peter looks at her, then walks to the door. At the door he turns.]

I'm not quite sure what I've done, but I'm sorry for doing it, anyway. Good-bye, Monica.

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[Exit Peter. Monica angrily lights a cigarette. Mary pops her head round door centre.]

MARY: Darling, what happened? Did they fight?

MONICA: Oh, get out!

[She turns and is about to hurl a cushion at Mary who promptly disappears again. Alec comes in from the consulting room.]

ALEC: Hello. Still here? I thought you would be busy packing.

MONICA: You think you're very clever, don't you?

ALEC: Has Varley gone?

MONICA: Yes, surprisingly enough, he has.

ALEC: What time is he coming to pick you up?

MONICA: He is not coming to pick me up. We are not going.

ALEC: Why ever not?

MONICA: Because I don't choose to, that's why. Do you know a better reason?

ALEC: Well, you don't need this letter then.

[Alec puts the letter in his pocket.]

Are you going anywhere else? Brighton, or Felixstowe, or somewhere?

MONICA: We are not going anywhere at all. It's all off.

[Alec stands looking at her for a moment.]

ALEC (*seriously*): Darling, you haven't done this because of me, have you?

MONICA: All right, Alec. You can drop the mask now. The joke's gone on long enough. I am not

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going away with Peter, now or ever. I don't care if I never see him again. Now are you satisfied?

ALEC: I might be if I knew what you were talking about.

MONICA: In the parlance of melodrama—you are discovered, darling. I know your little game, it was a very clever little game, now may we stop playing little games and come back to normal?

ALEC: By all means. But I repeat, I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about.

MONICA: Will you or will you not admit that everything you have been doing and saying to me ever since you came back from Paris is all part of a very clever scheme to make me give up Peter?

ALEC: Oh, I see. How quaint. Darling, if I really minded about your association with Varley, the first thing I should do would be to tell you, and I see no reason to doubt that that would be enough.

MONICA: I trust you are not going into the realms of fantasy again by saying that you meant everything you said.

ALEC: Darling, will you do your utmost to get that little bird brain of yours under control for a few moments, just long enough for you to assimilate what I'm going to say to you. Monica, I'm afraid we two have now reached that flat spot in marriage which seems to come to the best of married couples after a certain period of time; but all the same, dear, I would like you to know that I wouldn't swop you for anyone in the world.

MONICA: That's very big of you.

ALEC: Not at all. You are still quite the most beautiful woman I know, I am sure you always will be; but I suppose because I've become used to it staring me in the face every day of the week, that beauty fails to excite me any longer. Instead of filling

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me with awe and wonder as it did once it now just pleases and satisfies me, as well as affording me a rather complacent feeling when we go out to dine. It's the same with all your other virtues. Satisfying but not exciting. But then, of course, it works both ways, for now your faults. . . .

MONICA: What faults?

ALEC: Your faults, dear. Well, they no longer irritate me to the point of madness as they used to. I am now able to view most of them with amused tolerance, in fact even with some pleasure, and that's something I could never do when I was in love with you.

MONICA: How grand you are, and how inexpressibly smug.

ALEC: The happiness of our marriage, the even tenor of its course, is due, I would like to point out, in no small measure to me, for the fact that I *am* no longer in love with you.

MONICA: Is it absolutely necessary for you to keep repeating that?

ALEC: We must face facts, dear. And therefore because of the fact that I am no longer in love with you I am able to allow you rope which you couldn't possibly expect otherwise—believing in the old-fashioned maxim that tolerance is better than divorce.

MONICA (*sarcastically*): You're old-fashioned?

ALEC: Extremely.

MONICA: Pompous ass!

ALEC: I think we are handling our flat spot elegantly and admirably while it lasts, because, of course, it doesn't last. It just comes after a certain period of wedlock, round about a certain age, usually forty, stays for a little while, then departs, leaving the couple to join together again in the final sweet harmony of approaching old age.

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MONICA: Lavender and lace and Auld Lang Syne.
How charming you make it sound.

ALEC: It is rather charming.

MONICA: Have you finished?

ALEC: I think so.

MONICA: Thank you so much. I've derived a lot of benefit from your lecture. It's helped me to see things a lot more clearly.

ALEC: I'm glad, darling.

MONICA: It's now quite obvious to me that there's another woman.

ALEC: I beg your pardon?

MONICA: Oh, you must take me for a fool, Alec. You really didn't hope to get away with all that stuff did you? All that psychological hoo-ha about flat spots and amused tolerance and what have you? My dear, I may be a little dim but you can hardly have expected me to fall for that one.

ALEC (*faintly*): I think I must sit down.

MONICA: Who is she, Alec? Who's the lady?

ALEC: The workings of that extraordinary brain of yours leave me speechless in wonder and admiration.

MONICA: My dear, I haven't reached the age I have without getting to know something about the ways of men. When a husband starts telling a wife that he wants her to enjoy herself, it's painfully obvious that he has a woman up his sleeve.

ALEC: Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!

MONICA: That's right, darling, play for time. The reason you didn't mind about Peter, the reason you encouraged us to go away together was nothing to do with me, it was all for your benefit, so that you might have the coast clear to carry on your nasty little intrigue. Also, I think you're quite despicable.

ALEC: And I think you're quite incredible.

MONICA: If there's one thing I can't stand in a man

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it's deceit. Anything else, perhaps; but not that. You've deceived me, Alec, I have no doubt you have been deceiving me for a long time now, and you would have gone on doing so if I hadn't been clever enough to find you out.

ALEC: You're clever all right. You're quite the cleverest woman I've ever met.

MONICA: Then you admit it?

ALEC: I admit nothing. There's nothing to admit.

MONICA: You still intend to try to make me believe that there's no one else?

ALEC: I don't intend to try to make you believe anything—I know my limitations.

MONICA: Who is she, Alec?

ALEC (*standing up*): Oh, for God's sake. There is no one, Monica. No one at all. Please get that into your silly, woolly little head, will you? There's no one. No one at all!

[*Elizabeth comes into the room from the doors centre and, smiling politely, crosses to the door right and disappears into the consulting room. There is a silence. Monica looks at Alec.*]

MONICA (*slowly*): I might have known.

ALEC: I might have known you would have known.

MONICA: Yes, I am a fool, aren't I, Alec? I've been one for a long time. So that's it. All the time while I was out with Peter, you were carrying on in the consulting room! Oh, could anything be more infamous?

ALEC: Stop being so utterly absurd. Miss Wilton is my secretary and my receptionist. I resent very strongly the insinuation that she might be anything else.

MONICA: Either that woman leaves this house or I

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do. Take your choice; but I am not living under the same roof as my husband's mistress.

ALEC: Oh, don't be ridiculous.

MONICA: Yes, that was ridiculous. I take it back. That's just what you want, isn't it? To get me out of the way so that you may continue this abortive intrigue at your leisure. No, I stay. She goes.

ALEC: She does not.

MONICA: She does!

ALEC: She does not! Miss Wilton is my secretary, she's a very fine secretary, she's the finest secretary I've ever had; but she's nothing more. Therefore she stays.

MONICA: She's very pretty.

ALEC: Is she?

MONICA: She has an excellent figure, and she always dresses well. Cheaply, but with taste.

ALEC: She could be habitually draped in the Union Jack for all I've noticed.

MONICA: I've always thought her most attractive in a rather obvious sort of way. (*She looks at him.*) She has rather nice eyes.

ALEC: If you told me she was boss-eyed with huge buck teeth I would believe you.

MONICA: Then she is not the woman?

ALEC: Of course not.

MONICA: Then there's someone else.

ALEC: Oh, God!

MONICA: And I intend to find out who she is. And when I do, when I do, there's going to be hell in this house.

ALEC: This is the most miserable afternoon of my life.

MONICA (*walking about*): You should feel miserable. How do you think I feel? Stop being so self-centred and imagine my feelings. It's all been a terrible

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shock. I feel betrayed, but I'm willing to give you the benefit of the doubt for the moment. I know what some of these predatory females are. But whoever she is, I shall find her, Alec, be sure of that, and when I do, she will wish she had never been born. Good-bye!

[*Exit Monica centre. Alec puts his hand to his head and groans. Then slowly he walks to the sideboard and pours himself a stiff drink. The doors centre are opened and Beatrice cautiously puts her head inside. Seeing Alec is alone in the room, she comes right in, closing the door behind her.*]

BEATRICE (*softly*). Hello, Alec.

[*Alec chokes and turns to face her.*]

ALEC: Oh dear!

BEATRICE: Are you alone?

ALEC: For the moment, yes. Quite alone. Would you like a drink?

BEATRICE: It's much too early, but you carry on. I know how you must feel.

ALEC: Do you really?

BEATRICE: I'm your ally. I understand the stress and strain you must be under in this, your darkest hour.

ALEC: My darkest hour. You've never said a truer word.

BEATRICE: Don't try and talk if you don't want to, it's all right. And have another drink, if you feel you must. But if I may give you a bit of advice, Alec—don't seek refuge in the bottle. It's not worth it. You have a career in front of you, a knighthood. Don't throw it away because of a woman's caprice.

ALEC: I'll try not to.

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BEATRICE: Remember that every cloud has its silver lining. I would like you to think of me now as your little silver lining.

ALEC: That's really most kind of you, Beatrice.

BEATRICE: I don't suppose I can do much, but if a sympathetic ear, a bit of advice, a cheery word will help in any way, then I'm at your service.

ALEC: I have a sneaking feeling that perhaps I shouldn't be here.

BEATRICE: I've brought you something. A little present to cheer you up. Come and sit on the sofa.

[Beatrice plumps herself down on the sofa and Alec a little uneasily follows suit.]

It's not much; but I thought it might help to know that somebody's thinking of you. Will you open it?

ALEC: It's very nice of you, Beatrice, to bring me a present.

[He begins to undo the string.]

BEATRICE: I know blood is thicker than water, but I can find nothing but condemnation for Monica for the way she has behaved. You don't deserve such treatment. In fact, if I must be quite frank I don't think Monica deserves someone like you for a husband.

ALEC: For my part, I don't think I deserve someone like her for a wife.

BEATRICE: One would expect you to say something like that. I take my hat off to you. You're a decent chap.

ALEC: I certainly couldn't ask for more. Ah! Here we are.

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[He removes the paper revealing a flat cardboard box.]

Shall I open it?

BEATRICE: Of course.

[Alec takes the lid off the box and reveals a folded garment, on top of which rests a card. Alec picks up the card.]

ALEC (*reading*): "To Alec. With my love. Beatrice."

How very charming. Thank you very much indeed.

BEATRICE: Take it out.

[Alec slowly holds up a huge maroon pullover.]

ALEC (*startled*): What is it?

BEATRICE: It's a pullover. Do you like it?

ALEC: I can't think what I've done to deserve it.

BEATRICE: Is the colour all right?

ALEC: Lovely. My favourite. Did you make this yourself?

BEATRICE: Yes.

ALEC: Wonderful. It's moss stitch, isn't it?

BEATRICE: No. Stocking stitch.

ALEC: Oh, yes, of course.

[A slight pause. Alec continues to stare incredulously at the pullover.]

BEATRICE: You really like it?

ALEC: I'm crazy about it. But Beatrice, isn't it . . . isn't it just a teeny wee bit *big*?

BEATRICE: Is it?

ALEC: It does seem to be a little on the biggish side. That is, at a quick glance.

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BEATRICE (*blushing*): Well, I had no way of telling just what your chest measurements were.

ALEC: Quite.

BEATRICE: I knew that you were a big, strapping sort of chap, and I knew therefore that you would have a pretty large chest.

ALEC: As a matter of fact I have a very tiny chest. Rather like a spring chicken. Still, I'm sure I shall be able to fill out now that I have such a wonderful incentive; it's very, very sweet of you. I just can't wait for the winter to arrive so that I can wear it. Thank you.

BEATRICE: I've been doing it in the evenings. It was meant to cheer you up.

ALEC: And it has done, enormously. You have no idea.

BEATRICE: I don't suppose Monica ever knits you anything.

ALEC: I believe there was a Balaclava helmet in the winter of forty-one. Rather close-fitting. We used it as an egg cosy in the end.

BEATRICE: Monica is beautiful and glamorous and has lots of personality, but I don't think she's a very good wife. I don't think that type ever is, especially for a man in your position. You need someone steadier, more reliable. . . .

ALEC (*hurriedly*): I am now quite certain that I shouldn't be here.

[*He makes as if to stand up but Beatrice takes hold of his hand.*]

BEATRICE (*very seriously*): Someone who could be a companion as well as a wife, someone who could cook you little delicacies when you were not well. Someone to nurse and cosset you. A woman whose head

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is not full of fashions and petty vanities, but a woman who can darn your socks and drink a pint of bitter with the next man. Someone who likes the smell of horses, and is good with dogs, too. Someone who armed with a stout stick can tramp the rugged moorland at your side revelling in the sting of rain upon her face. A woman like that is what a man like you needs, Alec.

[She puts her arms round his neck and kisses him. Elizabeth opens the door of the consulting room and comes into the room. Seeing the scene on the sofa she pauses.]

ELIZABETH: Oh, excuse me.

ALEC (*feebly*): That's quite all right, Miss Wilton.

[Elizabeth smiles slightly then goes back into the consulting room. Alec looks at Beatrice who is now looking rather shamefaced.]

Really, Beatrice!

BEATRICE: Oh, Alec. I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I don't know what came over me.

ALEC: That's quite all right, Beatrice. Don't give it another thought.

BEATRICE: You probably think I'm horrid and quite ridiculous.

ALEC: The thought never crossed my mind.

BEATRICE: Honestly, you didn't mind?

ALEC (*magnanimously*): A little kiss? Of course not.

BEATRICE (*embracing him*): Oh, you're splendid!

ALEC (*going under*): Help!

[Beatrice is purposefully kissing Alec again when Mary comes in from centre. Seeing them, she stops abruptly and puts her hand to her mouth in astonishment, then turning

ACT TWO

round she almost runs out of the room again. Elizabeth opens the other door.]

ELIZABETH: Doctor. You're wanted on the 'phone. It's urgent.

ALEC (*disengaging himself*): It certainly is. Excuse me, Beatrice.

[He gets up and runs into the consulting room closing the door behind him. Beatrice is looking a little flushed. Raising her eyes to Elizabeth, she almost giggles.]

BEATRICE (*after a moment*): I hope you're a woman of the world, Miss Wilton.

[Humming gently to herself, Beatrice exits centre. The door of the consulting room is opened and Alec peers into the room.]

ALEC (*whispering*): Miss Wilton.

ELIZABETH (*turning*): It's all right. She's gone.

ALEC: Oh, thank God for that.

[He comes into the room.]

There wasn't really a 'phone call, was there?

ELIZABETH: Emergency tactics.

ALEC: There was never a bigger emergency. This has been a perfectly incredible afternoon. If it keeps up I am quite certain I shall become hysterical.

ELIZABETH: Can I get you a drink?

ALEC: I don't think so. I think I'll go and have a nice quiet cup of tea in a moment. We haven't any more appointments this afternoon, have we?

ELIZABETH: No.

ALEC: Then let's call it a day.

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ELIZABETH: I still have some accounts to do.

ALEC: Leave them.

ELIZABETH: Remember Mrs. Titheradge.

ALEC: Blast Mrs. Titheradge. And the whole Titheradge family. You can knock off early. Go to the pictures, or go in the gallery somewhere. By the way, there's an awfully nice smell in here.

ELIZABETH: I expect it's my violets.

[*She indicates a little bunch pinned to the bosom of her frock. Alec looks at them and then at her.*]

ALEC: Very unprofessional—but very charming.

ELIZABETH: It's such a lovely day—and as I was coming back from posting those letters I saw a woman selling them, and I'm afraid I couldn't resist. And as it also happens to be my birthday I thought I was entitled to treat myself.

ALEC: Your birthday's today?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

ALEC: Many happy returns.

ELIZABETH: Thank you.

ALEC: You know, I am a swine. You always remember mine, though God knows how, and I haven't the faintest idea when yours is.

ELIZABETH: Why should you have? I've never told you.

ALEC: I could have found out.

ELIZABETH: There are more important things.

ALEC: I'll remember next year. In fact to make quite certain make a memo to be sure and remind me next year.

ELIZABETH (*smiling*): Yes, doctor.

[*Alec smiles back at her.*]

ACT TWO

Well, if we have really finished, I think I'll go and tidy up and then go.

ALEC (*suddenly*): No, don't go. Not for a moment.

[*Elizabeth pauses and looks enquiringly at him.*]

Stay and have a drink, or have some tea, or something.

ELIZABETH: No, thank you, Doctor.

ALEC: Oh, do.

ELIZABETH: It's much too early to drink, and I'm not really very keen on tea.

ALEC: Then have a cigarette.

[*He offers her his case. Elizabeth looks at him, then takes one.*]

ELIZABETH: Why?

ALEC: I want to talk to you.

ELIZABETH: If it's about the Raleigh boy . . .

ALEC: It's about you.

ELIZABETH: Have I done something wrong?

ALEC: Not that I know of.

ELIZABETH: Why are you looking at me like that?

ALEC: Because do you know I think I'm seeing you for the first time.

ELIZABETH: I don't think I quite understand.

ALEC: I'm finding it a little difficult to myself.

ELIZABETH: Doctor, I feel you're a little upset.

ALEC: I'm most upset. Three years. Well, well, well.

ELIZABETH: I've never seen you look like this before.

ALEC: In all honesty, I can say exactly the same thing about you. You know, you're not even a little bit boss-eyed, are you?

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ELIZABETH: I am delighted to hear it.

ALEC: And your teeth . . . your teeth . . . Miss Wilton, do you think you could laugh?

ELIZABETH: At this moment, very easily.

ALEC: Then please do so.

ELIZABETH (*smiling*): What on earth is all this about?

ALEC: Very white and perfectly even.

ELIZABETH: Doctor, before we go any further, you must really explain what this is all leading up to.

ALEC: Your eyes are very blue, aren't they?

[*Elizabeth looks at him, but says nothing.*]

They suddenly darkened then, suddenly became softer. They're almost the colour of amethysts now. They're really, very, very nice eyes.

ELIZABETH (*slowly*): If it wasn't such an unprofessional idea, I would say you were flirting with me.

ALEC: If it wasn't such an unprofessional idea I would be inclined to agree with you.

ELIZABETH: I must go.

ALEC (*taking her hand*): No, don't.

ELIZABETH: I must.

ALEC: Not for a moment.

[*Alec keeps hold of her hand and stands looking at her. There is a pause.*]

ELIZABETH (*softly*): Why are you doing this?

ALEC: I don't know. Something's been suggested to my mind, and I've suddenly discovered that my mind is extremely susceptible to suggestion. Please don't be angry.

ELIZABETH: I'm not angry. But a little surprised, a little bewildered.

ALEC: I know.

ACT TWO

ELIZABETH: What is it? Anger, pique, spite, jealousy? Or just boredom?

ALEC: Nothing like that.

ELIZABETH: Are you sure?

ALEC: I'm becoming more sure every moment.

ELIZABETH: I told you not very long ago that I'm very happy here. I would like to go on being that way.

ALEC: Would it make so much difference?

ELIZABETH: Every difference in the world.

ALEC: Will you have dinner with me tonight?

ELIZABETH: No.

ALEC: But it's your birthday.

ELIZABETH: No.

ALEC: You're very cruel.

ELIZABETH: I'm old enough to have found a little wisdom.

ALEC: Wisdom is a poor substitute for enchantment.

ELIZABETH: Enchantment is a poor substitute for all I have here at the moment.

ALEC: Please. We'll take the car. Drive out into the country, let a little air blow around us for a while. And I know the most delightful place to dine. Sixteenth century. All oak beams, and candlelight.

ELIZABETH: If you had asked me yesterday, or any time before today, I would have come with you like a shot. But not now.

ALEC: But why yesterday?

ELIZABETH: Because for nearly three years until today I've been a happy woman thinking how awfully nice it would be for us to dine together.

ALEC: My dear.

ELIZABETH (*exasperated*): I was so sure that you would never ask me—or if you did it would only be in the way of business. And now you've asked me, and it isn't in the way of business, and you've spoilt everything.

BIRTHDAY HONOURS

ALEC: I don't understand.

ELIZABETH: Don't you know dreams, forbidden, fugitive dreams, are so much more wonderful and so much more constant than reality? Why did you have to stop them? Why couldn't you have let me go on loving you a little and never doing anything about it?

ALEC (*startled*): Do you mean to tell me. . . ?

ELIZABETH: Any other man but you would have known two years ago.

ALEC: Good God. But this is amazing. This is wonderful.

ELIZABETH (*moving away*): I'm going now. And as soon as you can get someone to take my place I'm leaving altogether.

ALEC: But you can't go. That's impossible. I could never get anybody to take your place, you know that. And certainly I couldn't now. Oh, you can't leave.

ELIZABETH: But I must. You see, I'm allergic to triangles.

ALEC: How can four points make a triangle? You've seen what's been going on in this house.

ELIZABETH: I don't want to even talk about it.

[*Alec catches hold of her hand again and they face each other.*]

ALEC: But you've got to. Don't you see that this is suddenly terribly important?

ELIZABETH: It was, but not any more.

ALEC: If you go I shall follow you.

ELIZABETH: You're talking sheer nonsense.

ALEC: Yesterday it would have been. Today it's sublime, exciting, delightful nonsense.

ELIZABETH: It couldn't last.

ALEC: Nothing wonderful ever does.

ACT TWO

ELIZABETH: It does in dreams.

ALEC: Dreams are the realities of failures.

ELIZABETH: Then let me be a failure.

ALEC: Darling, I wouldn't let you be anything that you don't want to be.

ELIZABETH (*her lips on his*): I shall never forgive you.

[*Taking her in his arms, Alec kisses her softly. There is a pause. Elizabeth makes no move to free herself but stands looking at him.*]

ELIZABETH (*after a moment*): Where is this place with oak beams and candlelight?

ALEC: Not a hundred miles away.

[*He smiles at her. Elizabeth smiles back. Off Monica and Mary can be heard calling "Beatrice."*]

Come along, we'll go out through the consulting room.

(*He takes her hand.*)

ELIZABETH: But my dress.

ALEC: It's perfect.

[*At the door of the consulting room Alec pauses and looks at her.*]

ALEC: Miss Wilton.

ELIZABETH: Yes, doctor?

ALEC: Many happy returns of the day.

[*Hand in hand they go quickly out through the door as*

The curtain falls]

ACT THREE

The same. Morning. Two weeks later.

When the curtain rises, Elizabeth is standing by the window glancing at a copy of 'The Times'. Alec enters briskly from centre.

ALEC (*cheerfully*): Good morning, Miss Wilton.

ELIZABETH (*turning*): Good morning, doctor.

ALEC: Lovely morning, Miss Wilton.

ELIZABETH: Lovely, doctor.

ALEC: And you're twice as lovely as the morning, Miss Wilton.

ELIZABETH: Have you seen the papers?

ALEC: I certainly have! This is a very great day for England.

ELIZABETH: England will never know how great. My congratulations.

ALEC: I knew I could rely on your congratulations if no one else's.

ELIZABETH: Mrs. Titheradge alighted from a taxi not twenty seconds ago.

ALEC: Mrs. Titheradge will be very hot and very excited no doubt.

[The doors centre are opened and Mary hurries in.]

MARY (*panting*): Alec! Have you seen the morning papers?

ALEC: I have, my dear.

MARY: The Birthday Honours' List has been published. But your name isn't there.

ALEC: That's right, dear.

ACT THREE

MARY: But this is terrible, terrible. What can have happened?

ALEC: It would seem that Mabel Lexton's information wasn't straight from the horse's mouth after all.

MARY: I can't understand it. We were all so sure. Not only Mabel Lexton, but Fanny Carstairs, Enid Wetherall, all of us. It was absolutely certain—why, we've talked of nothing else for weeks. Do you think somebody might be in error?

ALEC: I am quite sure somebody soon will be.

MARY: One of the printers, or the Prime Minister or somebody. I have a damned good mind to ring them up.

ALEC: I should, dear. Get on to the palace right away and ask them what the devil they think they're playing at.

MARY: It's perfectly monstrous. And when I see some of the people who've made it. Do you know, they've even honoured a theatrical manager!

ALEC: Horrible!

MARY: It's most unfair.

[Mary seats herself on sofa.]

I had made all sorts of plans, and for what? For what? Oh, Alec, it makes one lose one's faith in human nature.

ALEC: You must try not to be too bitter.

MARY: It's enough to make one. What's the use of trying to help others, when they do things like this to you? Miss Wilton, be so kind as to pour me a small gin, I am not feeling at all well.

[Elizabeth goes to the sideboard and pours the drink.]

BIRTHDAY HONOURS

ALEC: My dear Mary, please accept my most heartfelt condolences. I know just how you must feel.

MARY: Oh, Alec, that's very sweet of you, but it will take a little time to completely recover from such a crushing blow. By the way, what about you? In the shock of everything I'd completely forgotten about you. My dear, you must be feeling very sad.

ALEC: The only feeling I have is one of the most tremendous relief. Ah! Here's Monica.

[*Monica comes into the room from centre.*]

MONICA: Good morning, everybody. Alec, darling, I've seen the papers. I'm most terribly sorry.

ALEC: Not at all.

MONICA: For myself I couldn't care less; but for you, it must be something of a disappointment.

ALEC: Your mother's thinking of writing a strong letter to the *Times* about it.

MARY: It seems to me I am the only one in this house who has a proper set of values, a proper sense of responsibility.

MONICA: Oh, rubbish, Mother. You have a highly developed social sense and nothing very much else.

MARY: I have maternal instincts.

MONICA: You must try to keep them under control, then, dear. Now let's forget the whole thing.

MARY: And it was all for you. Ungrateful. Just like your generation.

MONICA: Mother, if I know you, you'll soon find something else to concentrate your attention on.

[*The doors centre are opened and Beatrice comes in.*]

BEATRICE: Good morning. Oh, Alec, I've just seen the papers. And I rushed right round to say how sorry I am.

ACT THREE

MONICA: Be quiet, Beatrice.

MARY: It has nothing at all to do with you, Beatrice.

BEATRICE: I just wanted to say. . . .

MARY: You've said enough.

ALEC: Miss Wilton, I think we could be much better employed in the other room, don't you?

ELIZABETH: I'm ready.

ALEC: Then let's go. Excuse me, but Miss Wilton and I have one or two things to do in the other room. After you, Miss Wilton.

[Alec follows Elizabeth into the consulting room, closing the door behind him.]

MONICA: One or two things to do in the other room. I didn't like the way he said that.

MARY: You mustn't stop Alec working, dear. The least he can do now is to work his fingers to the bone after letting us all down so badly.

MONICA: It was nothing to do with him.

MARY: Well, it was certainly nobody else's fault. He was the one who was getting the knighthood, not us. I hold him entirely responsible for our disappointment.

BEATRICE: I think that's jolly unfair.

MARY: Be quiet, Beatrice. You're still in disgrace.

BEATRICE: I think we should feel sorry for Alec, and do everything we can do to make it up to him. He should have something to comfort him.

MONICA: I have a horrible suspicion that he already has.

[She begins to walk about the room.]

BEATRICE: I don't understand.

MONICA: You're not supposed to.

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MARY: You're not even supposed to be here, Beatrice. We have forbidden you to enter the house. How dare you disregard our instructions?

BEATRICE: I came to commiserate with Alec.

MARY: Do what with him?

BEATRICE: Commiserate.

MARY: Over my dead body. We've had quite enough of your commiserating as you are pleased to call it. Take yourself away.

BEATRICE: But I've only just come.

MARY: Which will make your visit a mercifully brief one.

BEATRICE: I don't want to go. I haven't anywhere to go.

MARY: Oh dear, what a burden you are. Well, if you're going to stay, you'd better make yourself useful. Refill my glass with gin and tonic, will you?

BEATRICE: Isn't it a bit early to be drinking?

MARY: Beatrice, are you questioning my habits?

BEATRICE: No, but. . . .

MARY: You'll be suggesting that I'm a secret drinker in a minute.

BEATRICE: There's no secret about your drinking.

MARY: Beatrice!

BEATRICE (*truculently*): Well. . . .

MARY: Did you hear that? Just like her father.

BEATRICE: Why do you always say *my* father? He was Monica's father as well, wasn't he?

MARY: Beatrice, I trust you made that remark in all innocence.

MONICA (*turning on them*): If you two don't shut up at once I shall ask you both to leave. Nag, nag, nag. Bicker, bicker, bicker. You might as well be married.

MARY: I quite agree. Stop being so fractious, Beatrice, and give me a drink.

ACT THREE

MONICA (*thoughtfully*): Miss Wilton seems to be looking a lot prettier of late.

[*She continues walking about the room.*]

MARY: I couldn't care less. Well, dear, we're right back where we started. And now that the question of the title no longer arises, there's no real reason why you shouldn't take up with Peter Varley once more and start to lead a normal life again.

MONICA: Oh, damn Peter. If I never see him again I shall be delighted.

MARY: I quite see your point. Why should you tie yourself to one man? I remember once when I was your age, or perhaps a little younger—it was just after Lindbergh flew the Atlantic—there was a young stockbroker—

MONICA: Mother, must you go on with this?

MARY: I just thought it might interest you, but if it doesn't. . . . Beatrice, where's my drink? What are you doing?

[*Beatrice turns away from the window and brings Mary her gin.*]

BEATRICE: I was just thinking what a topping morning it would be for a vigorous walk in the country.

MARY: Well, that's a healthier thought than some you have been entertaining in that head of yours, lately. Monica, if you find that Peter bores you, I shouldn't think it will be difficult to find someone equally attractive and more interesting. There are heaps of young men about. Or so it seems to me.

MONICA: I'm not interested in young men. I'm not interested in anybody but my husband.

BIRTHDAY HONOURS

MARY: Are you feverish, dear?

MONICA: Is it so strange to be in love with one's husband?

MARY: Not strange, dear. Just a little irregular.

MONICA: Mother, stop chattering and listen to me. I am now absolutely convinced that there is something going on between Alec and Miss Wilton.

MARY: Oh, rubbish, she's far too ordinary. Anyway, Alec's a gentleman.

MONICA: I think perhaps we have all tended to put too much reliance on that fact. I've suspected something ever since that day a fortnight ago when Alec's car broke down and he and Miss Wilton didn't come in until the small hours.

MARY: This is quite outrageous. How dare Alec behave like this? It just goes to show that you can never trust a man. Oh, faithless creatures!

BEATRICE: What's good for the goose. . . .

MARY (*with dignity*): Beatrice, please remember that blood is thicker than water. We, the family, must all stick together in matters of this sort.

MONICA: Well, anyway, there's going to be a show-down between that woman and myself. I'm not tolerating that sort of thing. I just won't stand for it.

MARY: I should say not indeed.

[*The door right is opened and Elizabeth comes in. Watched silently by the others she walks to a small table, picks up a folder, and is about to return to the consulting room when Monica speaks to her.*]

MONICA: Oh, Miss Wilton. Just a moment. I would like to speak to you.

ELIZABETH: Yes, Mrs. Bestwood?

MONICA: Mother, Beatrice, would you please mind leaving us?

ACT THREE

MARY: *I absolutely refuse!* Just when anything interesting is likely to happen. . . .

MONICA: Please go, Mother. And you, too, Beatrice.

MARY: Very well. I shall go; but I shan't go far. No woman could. Don't stand there, Beatrice. Come along.

[Mary exits followed by Beatrice. Monica turns to Elizabeth.]

MONICA: Will you have a drink, Miss Wilton?

ELIZABETH: No, thank you, Mrs. Bestwood.

MONICA: Cigarette?

ELIZABETH: No, thank you.

[Monica helps herself to a cigarette.]

MONICA: You've been with us quite a while now, haven't you? It must be two years.

ELIZABETH: It's three.

MONICA: Is it? As long as that. Well, it's obvious that you must like it here.

ELIZABETH: I do.

MONICA: Yes, the doctor's a very charming man. All his receptionists have liked it here. Of course, none of them have stayed as long as you have. Most of them were single girls, too; but naturally they were off to get married. It's the fate of all attractive girls, I'm afraid. Although of course they were all younger than you.

ELIZABETH: So I've heard.

MONICA: Don't you ever think of getting married, Miss Wilton?

ELIZABETH: The thought never crosses my mind, Mrs. Bestwood.

MONICA: Really? With most women when they

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reach your age the thought is never out of their minds.

ELIZABETH: I obviously must be an exception.

MONICA: Of course, marriage is just a means to an end. If one can achieve that end without marriage, why should one bother to get married?

ELIZABETH: There are quite a number of women who don't seem to see it as an end; but merely as a beginning—to other things.

MONICA: Really?

ELIZABETH: You know the type. The sort of woman who only sees marriage as a form of social security.

MONICA: You sound rather embittered, Miss Wilton.

ELIZABETH: Not for the reasons you choose to imagine, I can assure you.

MONICA: My dear, you have all my sympathy. It can't be much fun living in one room, with no future. Especially at your age.

ELIZABETH: You're quite wrong. It can sometimes be a lot of fun.

MONICA: Do you have a cat?

ELIZABETH: No. I've never liked cats—or their habits.

MONICA: You sound as if you are an authority.

ELIZABETH: I feel I soon might be.

MONICA: What do you find to do in the evenings? Does your landlady allow you to entertain gentlemen friends?

ELIZABETH: I live in a block of flats. There is no landlady.

MONICA: How convenient.

ELIZABETH: Yes, it is.

MONICA: I expect you have plenty of friends. Do you throw lots of gay parties?

ELIZABETH: No. I'm not the gay party type.

MONICA: Just what type are you, Miss Wilton?

ACT THREE

ELIZABETH: The old-fashioned type.

MONICA: I won't contradict you. Miss Wilton. I think you should know that I am in love with my husband.

ELIZABETH: I believe those are the normal feelings of a wife for her husband.

MONICA (*biting her lip*): You don't seem surprised.

ELIZABETH: I would have been much more surprised if you had told me you were not in love with him.

MONICA: You're very cool, aren't you?

ELIZABETH: It's frequently necessary to be in my job. One comes into contact with so many types of people.

MONICA: I'm sure one does. You must tell me all about your little job one day. Meanwhile, I am telling you once more that I am in love with my husband.

ELIZABETH: Is that what you wanted to speak to me about?

MONICA: That was one of the things. The others are that I am rather a selfish woman—I resent intrusion on property that is mine. In fact, I not only resent it, but I won't tolerate it. I am sure I've made myself clear.

ELIZABETH: Perfectly.

MONICA: Therefore I think it would be as well if you found yourself another situation.

ELIZABETH: As I told you a moment ago I am perfectly happy here, and as long as Doctor Bestwood finds me satisfactory, I have no intention of leaving.

MONICA: You refuse?

ELIZABETH: I can't really see how you expected me to do otherwise.

MONICA: I gave you my reasons.

ELIZABETH: But I don't believe them.

MONICA: You don't want to believe them.

ELIZABETH: On the contrary, I should like to very much.

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MONICA: Yes, I know. Spread a little happiness. You're just oozing the milk of human kindness, aren't you?

ELIZABETH: And unlike yours mine hasn't curdled yet!

MONICA: Why, you. . . .

[She makes a move towards Elizabeth but stops as the door right is opened and Alec comes in.]

ALEC: Can't you find it, Miss Wilton? (*Noticing folder.*) Oh, you have found it.

MONICA (*stepping forward*): Alec, either this woman leaves this house today or I do. There's not room for the two of us.

ALEC: Where were you thinking of going, darling?

MONICA: I? I'm not going anywhere.

ALEC: Well, Miss Wilton certainly isn't.

MONICA: How dare you!

ALEC: Good secretaries are very hard to get these days.

MONICA: Good wives are harder.

ALEC: I certainly shouldn't argue with you on that point.

MONICA: You utter beast! How can you do this to me?

ALEC: I am not doing anything to you, you are, as usual, doing it all yourself.

MONICA: Do you mean to try and tell me that you and this woman are not having an affair?

ALEC: It depends what you mean by the word affair.

MONICA: You know damn well what I mean.

ALEC: If you mean is it the same relationship as has been existing between you and Varley for the last ten months I am reluctantly forced to admit that it is not.

ACT THREE

MONICA: Please leave that fool out of this.

ALEC: I've found it difficult to leave him out of anything in this house lately.

MONICA: Am I to be blamed for life for one little mistake?

ALEC: Nobody's blaming you for anything. Nobody gives a damn. Your tiresome little affair with Varley leaves us all cold.

ELIZABETH: I'd better go.

[*Elizabeth quietly exits centre.*]

MONICA: My tiresome little affair with Varley as you call it was brought on by you, by your callous indifference and your complete lack of affection towards me, your wife.

ALEC: Nonsense. It was brought about because you're one of those vanity-ridden, empty-headed females with no thought or interest for anything or anyone but yourself.

MONICA: How dare you!

ALEC: You're silly, social and predatory as hell. You're just like your mother.

MONICA: Please keep my mother out of this.

ALEC: It would take a far more determined man than me to keep your mother out of anything.

MONICA: If I'd listened to my mother I wouldn't be here now.

ALEC: Then why the hell didn't you listen?

MONICA: Don't you swear at me.

ALEC (*warming up*): I'll swear at you and the whole damn Titheradge family if I want to—and I do want to. I've been wanting to for a long time. You're all a lot of misfits and it was a very sad day for me when I fell into your clutches.

MONICA: You positively bounded in if I remember.

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ALEC: Dazzled by your beauty I didn't see your mother and sister. I saw your father, though, but before I had time to get to know him he did the only sensible thing and died.

MONICA: God rest his soul.

ALEC: Your mother certainly never did.

MONICA: You perfect swine!

ALEC: Your mother should be chained to a bridge table for life, and some kind person should put Beatrice out to graze. As for you, you dazzling piece of tinsel, you should be allowed to revolve radiantly at some cocktail party for the rest of your life, a dry martini in one hand and an itsy-bitsy little thing on a stick in the other. You make me sick!

MONICA: I wish I were dead!

ALEC: So do I!

MONICA: Oh!

[She steps forward and smacks him across the cheek. Alec smacks her back. Monica immediately dissolves into tears as the doors centre are opened and Mary and Beatrice come in.]

MARY: What's happening? It sounds most exciting.

ALEC: Go to hell! Go to hell! Go to hell, go to hell!

BEATRICE: That was splendid, Alec.

ALEC: You, too!

MONICA (*running to Mary*): Oh, Mother, I married a lout. A subnormal, vicious lout with bestial instincts.

ALEC: I'm likely to unearth a few more bestial instincts before I'm through, if you don't all get out of here. I can feel them rising up inside me like an inferno. In a moment, I shall start running round and round this room, barking like anything.

MARY: He's obviously suddenly gone mad.

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ALEC: And I shall bite you all, starting first with you, my mother-in-law.

MARY: If you give me rabies, Alec, I shall never speak to you again.

ALEC: If I thought I could rely on that I would have no hesitation in giving you rabies on the spot. But to rely on you keeping your mouth shut for more than one-fifth of a second would be the positive zenith of wishful thinking. I'm sick and tired of you all. Every damn one of you. You're all a lot of ruthless, selfish, conniving, egotistical opportunists who've all come along just for the ride. Well, you've had a good run, but this is where you get off, because the ride is now over. Absolutely and completely and finally and utterly over. Has anybody anything to say?

[*Peter Varley appears in the doorway.*]

PETER: Look here, Bestwood. . . .

[*Alec jumps, startled, everybody turns to look at Peter.*]

ALEC (*at the top of his voice*): Oh, no. No! This is too much! Much too much!

[*He turns and running past Peter exits centre.*]

MONICA (*blazing to Peter*): What the devil do you want?

PETER: I came to say good-bye.

MONICA: Good-bye!

MARY: Good-bye!

MONICA: Now go. Before I turn the dog on you.

BEATRICE: You haven't got a dog.

MONICA: This is a fine time to get pedantic, Beatrice.

PETER: But Monica, please, darling, listen. I'm going

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away. I'm leaving London for good. I'm chucking everything up. I'm going farming. I'm going farming in the country.

MONICA: One would hardly expect you to go farming in the West End. Come along, Mother, we'll go up to my bedroom.

[She walks to the centre doors and exits. Mary follows her.]

MARY (*at door*): Home wrecker!

[Exit Mary. Peter looks after them stupidly.]

PETER: I don't know what to say.

BEATRICE: Don't try and say anything. I understand. I'm your ally.

PETER: Women are strange creatures—one moment so tender, the next . . . just the opposite.

BEATRICE (*closing the doors*): Not all women are like that.

PETER: I shall probably enter a monastery.

BEATRICE: I thought you were going to live on a farm?

PETER: It's the same thing.

BEATRICE: Farms can be a lot of fun. Anywhere where there are animals can be fun. Dumb animals are the best companions. I like dumb animals very much.

PETER (*looking at her*): You're not a bit like Monica, are you?

BEATRICE (*sitting on sofa*): I don't think I want to be.

PETER: She thinks the world begins and ends in Park Lane.

BEATRICE (*stoutly*): Don't worry about her, Peter. Or what's happened. It just wasn't worth it. You

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have a farming career in front of you. Don't spoil your chances because of a woman's caprice.

PETER: You're awfully understanding.

BEATRICE: I'm also a jolly good cook.

PETER: Monica can't even boil an egg.

BEATRICE: She'd be no good on a farm.

PETER: She certainly wouldn't.

BEATRICE (*earnestly*): A farmer's wife should be a woman who can take over in an emergency. A woman who could cook the farmer little delicacies when he was poorly, and look after him and nurse him and cosset him. A woman whose head is not full of petty vanities and fashions, but a woman who can milk the cows and drink a pint of bitter with the next man.

PETER: You've said it.

BEATRICE: A woman who could tramp the fields in muddy wellingtons and revels at the sting of rain upon her face. A woman who likes the smell of horses and is good with dogs, too.

PETER: That's exactly the type. But where can one find a woman like that these days?

BEATRICE (*lowering her eyes*): Well. . . .

PETER: I repeat, where can one find such a woman?

BEATRICE: Well. . . .

PETER: Exactly. You can't answer me. And why? Simply because such women just don't exist. They're all products of the beauty parlour today with feelings as false as their complexions. I want a real woman, a woman who's close to the soil.

[*He sits on sofa.*]

BEATRICE: A woman who can knit pullovers?

PETER: That's right.

BEATRICE: A woman who wants lots of children?

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PETER: Rather.

BEATRICE: A woman who likes horses and is good with dogs too?

PETER: That's the type.

BEATRICE: Take me, Peter. You have just made me the happiest woman in the world.

PETER: I never touched you!

BEATRICE: You'll never find a woman nearer the soil than me.

[*She presses her lips to Peter's in a long, lingering kiss.*]

PETER (*faintly*): My goodness! What an amazing kiss!

BEATRICE: I've been saving it up for a long time.

PETER: I feel quite weak.

BEATRICE: You didn't mind?

PETER: It was the most overpowering thing that's ever happened to me. What's your name?

BEATRICE: Beatrice.

PETER: Oh, yes, that's right. I say, Beatrice, would you like to live on a farm?

BEATRICE: It's just what I've always wanted to do. Milking the goats, feeding the pigs.

PETER: Pigs have a smell.

BEATRICE: It's like Chanel to me. And then the exhilaration of harvest time. Oh, I just can't wait to start the hay making.

PETER: I must say I'm beginning to look forward to it myself.

BEATRICE (*moving to windows*): I hate London, really. I never seem to have fitted in with things here, somehow.

PETER (*joining her at window*): Neither have I.

BEATRICE (*beseechingly*): Then couldn't we. . . ?

PETER: Let's.

ACT THREE

[*They are framed in the window in an embrace as Elizabeth, followed by Alec, comes quickly into the room. Neither of them notice Beatrice and Peter.*]

ALEC: Elizabeth, listen. Please, listen.

ELIZABETH: It's no good, Alec.

ALEC: Darling, you can't leave. You can't leave me at the mercy of these harpies.

ELIZABETH: You've been at their mercy for a number of years now.

[*Alec holds her arms.*]

ALEC: We'll go back to our old footing.

ELIZABETH: We couldn't. Not now.

ALEC: We could try.

ELIZABETH: But we both agreed that it couldn't last. I don't want to get married again; and you don't want to leave Monica; you've said so. And as to the other alternative, well, that might not work out, and you would have thrown up your practice and your life, and your friends. It wouldn't be worth it. Let's finish now, before we make a complete mess of things.

ALEC: It's awfully hard finishing something that still hasn't begun.

ELIZABETH: We're not children.

ALEC: Is it because of Monica?

ELIZABETH: Mostly, yes.

ALEC: Isn't there any way?

ELIZABETH: No. Not now that she's come back to you.

ALEC: I wish I could think of some way of making her go away again.

ELIZABETH (*finally*): I'm sorry. Don't let's talk about it any more.

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[*She walks into the consulting room. Alec turns away and sees Beatrice and Peter in the window locked in a fervent embrace.*]

ALEC: Good God!

[*Beatrice and Peter slowly release each other.*]

BEATRICE (*radiantly*): Hello, Alec.

ALEC: Good morning.

BEATRICE: We're in love.

PETER: Look here, Bestwood. . . .

ALEC: Now don't you start. As a matter of fact, I think I'm entitled to say—"Look here, Varley!" That's my balcony you are making use of so indiscriminately.

PETER: I came round to make my apologies to you for my recent behaviour to Monica.

ALEC: I'm not likely to forgive you in a hurry.

PETER: But I've given her up.

ALEC: That's why I'm not likely to forgive you.

PETER: Anyway, it's all over now. Beatrice has given me a glimpse of another life.

ALEC: The kiss of death. I know, I've tried a couple.

BEATRICE: We're going to be married and we're going to live on a farm.

ALEC: Congratulations. I hope you will both be very happy.

PETER: So you won't be seeing me again.

ALEC: The old place won't seem the same without you.

BEATRICE: And I shall miss you, too, Alec.

ALEC: You must just try and seek solace from the many diversions a farm life will offer. Varley, do tell me. What is this penchant you have for the Titheradge family?

ACT THREE

PETER: In their different ways they're amazing women.

ALEC (*feelingly*): You can't tell me. I married them. Good luck.

[*Exit Alec right. Peter looks at Beatrice.*]

PETER: Come round to my house now, and I'll show you some photographs of the farm.

BEATRICE: All right.

PETER: I do hope you'll like it.

BEATRICE: I'm sure I shall.

PETER: Let's get married as soon as possible.

BEATRICE: The sooner the better.

PETER: I'll get a special licence.

BEATRICE (*happily*): Lovely.

PETER: Isn't it amazing the way some things happen? Where shall we go for our honeymoon?

BEATRICE: I don't mind, as long as we go together.

PETER: What about Venice?

BEATRICE: It sounds wonderful.

PETER: Bestwood recommended me to a place there—Guiseppe's. So that's fixed. We'll honeymoon in Venice.

[*He looks at her.*]

I say, what's the matter? You've got tears in your eyes.

BEATRICE (*blinking*): Have I?

PETER: I say, you are happy, aren't you?

BEATRICE (*chokingly*): Oh, Peter.

[*She pulls him to her and they are kissing as the doors centre are opened and Mary comes in.*]

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MARY (*seeing them*). Beatrice!

[*Neither Beatrice nor Peter take any notice.*]

Beatrice! What is the meaning of this? What do you think you're doing? *Beatrice!*

BEATRICE (*looking up*): Oh, shut up!

MARY: What!?

[*Beatrice settles down to kissing Peter again. Mary walks quickly forward and taps her on the shoulder.*]

Beatrice, have you taken leave of your senses? Stop this disgraceful exhibition at once. At once, I say.

BEATRICE: Go home.

MARY: Beatrice!!! Have you gone mad? Do you realise who you're speaking to?

[*Beatrice lets go of Peter and turns to look at Mary.*]

I repeat, do you realise to whom you are speaking?

BEATRICE (*calmly*): Yes. The biggest busybody in London.

MARY: What did you say?

[*Beatrice stands facing her mother with an unwavering eye.*]

BEATRICE: The one person in this world who more than anyone else has deliberately and consistently made my life hell.

MARY: How dare you speak to me like this?

BEATRICE: The one woman who has knocked every bit of confidence out of me, and has made me conscious of all my shortcomings, has held me up as a figure of ridicule as long as I can remember.

MARY: Beatrice, you obviously are not well.

ACT THREE

BEATRICE: On the contrary, I feel marvellous. I'm saying something that I've wanted to say for a number of years; when I was a child you had no time for me, you were too engrossed in the social whirl of your own little life as well as systematically driving my father to an early grave to bother about me.

MARY: I don't think I feel awfully well. Be good enough to pour me a small gin.

BEATRICE: Pour it yourself.

MARY: I think I must sit down.

BEATRICE: That's right, make yourself comfy. Peter, I hope this is not embarrassing you too much?

PETER: Not a bit. You carry on, old girl. I'm enjoying it.

BEATRICE: So am I. By the way, your offer still stands, doesn't it?

PETER: Even more so now.

BEATRICE: That's all I wanted to know. Mother, you are a nosy, self-centred, sadistic, silly old woman.

MARY: Help!

BEATRICE: You've ridden rough shod over me for more than twelve years and how you've enjoyed doing it, but it's all over now, because I'm leaving you. Leaving you for good and all. I'm doing what you have been telling me to do for years. I am using my head!

MARY: Listen, Beatrice, listen. No good will come of speaking this way to your poor old mother. I have done everything for you, Beatrice, everything. My greatest ambition since you were the most repulsive debutante of the year has been to get you happily settled. It's been an uphill struggle, but one from which I have not flinched, and I shall not do so until I have finally achieved my ambition, which is to see my little daughter happily coiled in the bonds

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of matrimony. When that great day dawns I shall then be able to die in peace.

BEATRICE: Well, I suggest you start making your funeral arrangements now.

MARY: I beg your pardon?

BEATRICE: Peter and I are going to be married.

MARY: What!!!

BEATRICE: We're honeymooning abroad, and then we're going farming together.

MARY: Beatrice. How dare you!

BEATRICE: Aren't you thrilled?

MARY: You wicked girl, telling such lies.

PETER: It's the truth, as a matter of fact, Mrs. Titheradge. Beatrice and I have finally found each other.

MARY: Have you taken leave of your senses? You can't marry this dreadful girl. No one could.

PETER: Well, I'm going to. See you about harvest time.

[He moves to centre doors.]

BEATRICE: Good-bye, Mother. Try not to get hysterical with happiness.

[She joins Peter at centre doors.]

MARY (*in a frenzy*): Beatrice. Wait. You can't go. What am I going to do without you?

BEATRICE: Have a large gin and use your head.

[Beatrice waves to Mary and then goes quickly out of the doors followed by Peter.]

MARY (*calling*): Beatrice! Come back!

ACT THREE

[*Mary stands for a moment looking at the door, then faints gracefully on to the sofa. Alec comes in quickly from the right.*]

ALEC: What the devil's going on in here? Is it war?

[*He sees Mary stretched out on the sofa*]

Drunk again.

MARY (*opening one eye*): How dare you!

ALEC: What's the matter?

MARY: I'm very ill.

ALEC (*over his shoulder*): Miss Wilton, will you bring some smelling salts?

[*Monica enters quickly from centre*]

MONICA: Alec, there are some things I want to say to you.

ALEC: Yes, and there are a few things I have to say to you, too.

MONICA: Go away, Mother.

[*Elizabeth appears right.*]

ALEC: Miss Wilton, take Mrs. Titheradge into the other room and revive her, she doesn't appear to be very well.

MARY (*weakly*): Monica, I must speak to you.

MONICA (*impatiently*): Later, Mother. First I want to talk to Alec.

ELIZABETH: Come along, Mrs. Titheradge. Let me help you into the consulting room.

[*She takes Mary's arm.*]

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MARY: MONICA, I have some dreadful news.

MONICA: Later, Mother.

ALEC (*to Elizabeth*): If she doesn't respond to smelling salts, administer brandy—she's almost certain to respond to that.

[*Leaning heavily on Elizabeth, Mary allows herself to be helped into the consulting room.*]

MONICA: All right, Alec, let's drop all the small talk and get down to fundamentals.

ALEC: That's just what I am going to do. What about Varley?

MONICA: He's gone.

ALEC: But when's he coming back, that's the point?

MONICA: If he has any sense he won't come back at all.

ALEC: I would like to believe that.

MONICA: I don't understand. What are you talking about?

ALEC: I'm talking about Vailey, of course! He's done his level best to wreck my marriage. What am I supposed to do? Ignore it?

MONICA: You've made quite a good job of it so far.

ALEC: Don't mock me. Anything else, but not that.

MONICA: I thought Varley was an old pal of yours?

ALEC: MONICA, listen. Listen to me. Varley must go.

MONICA: He's gone. For ever and ever. Amen.

ALEC (*going to her*): Oh, darling! Honestly, darling Varley has finally gone? Never to return?

MONICA: Never to return; but I don't quite see. . . .

ALEC: Oh, MONICA, I've waited a long time to hear you say those words and know that you meant them.

MONICA: But. . . .

[*Alec takes her in his arms and kisses her.*]

ACT THREE

ALEC: My own darling. Oh, these last few weeks have been hell. Torture!

MONICA (*slowly*): But you didn't mind about Peter.

ALEC: Didn't mind! I was insanely jealous.

MONICA: Darling, you really did care, after all?

ALEC: I can't tell you how much. It was just because I was so hurt, so bruised, that I pretended to be indifferent.

MONICA: And your heart really was bleeding?

ALEC: Profusely.

MONICA (*radiantly*): Oh, my dear!

ALEC: Do you love me still? Can you love me still?

MONICA: More than ever. What about you?

ALEC: Passionately.

MONICA: You didn't mean a word of all that flat spot nonsense, did you?

ALEC: That pseudo-psychological poppycock? What a hope!

MONICA: And all those horrible things you said to me a few minutes ago.

ALEC: Rage! Ungovernable jealous rage.

MONICA: Oh, darling. I feel so happy. Kiss me.

[*Alec kisses her tenderly.*]

(*Looks at him.*) By the way, what about Miss Wilton?

ALEC (*in great surprise*): Miss Wilton?

MONICA: You've been seeing her.

ALEC: You had hurt me. I wanted to hit back at you. I wanted to hurt you in some way. I didn't care how. It was all part of this insane jealousy. Anyway, she's leaving. She's just given me fifty-two weeks' notice.

MONICA: Poor dear. I suppose she sees herself as the other woman. I've a good mind to tell her to stay.

ALEC: I shouldn't bother.

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MONICA: I won't. It would be too cruel. I'll leave her with her little illusions—she hasn't much else.

ALEC: Don't let's talk about either of them any more. Let's just concentrate on us. We're back together again.

MONICA: For keeps. (*She rests her head against his shoulder.*) Will you love me when I'm old and grey?

ALEC: I am quite sure I shall love you even more then.

MONICA (*sighing*): It's just like old times again.

ALEC: I must go and do some more work.

MONICA: All right, darling. I won't keep you.

ALEC (*kissing her*): Angel.

MONICA (*kissing him*): Sweetheart.

ALEC: Everything's worked out much better than I ever dared to hope for.

MONICA: I'm so happy now.

ALEC: So am I.

[*At the door right he turns and blows her a kiss, Monica blows him one back; and then, smiling broadly, Alec disappears into the consulting room. Directly the door has closed, Monica turns and darts to the telephone and begins to dial a number. She glances over her shoulder, then speaks into telephone.*]

MONICA: Is that you, Peter? . . . Darling, it's me, Monica. Oh, sweet, such good news. . . . It's all right. Everything's fine. Alec loves me. When can I see you? . . .

[*The door right is opened and Mary comes slowly out of the consulting room leaving the door slightly open behind her. Monica doesn't see her, but continues talking into telephone.*]

Darling, stop chattering. Listen, I've told you it's all

ACT THREE

right. We'll go to Venice. Make up for all these dreadful weeks of separation. . . . Darling, have you missed me dreadfully? . . . I said are you missing me? . . . Darling, are you light headed? . . . The day after tomorrow? . . . But this is fantastic. Who to? . . . Beatrice! . . . Beatrice who? . . . WHAT! Oh, no, I can't believe it. . . . (*She stands dazed, the telephone to her ear.*) The simple life . . . worthwhile. . . . Good with dogs, too. . . . I think I shall have hysterics in a moment. . . . Peter, listen, listen before it's too late. . . . You don't know what you're doing. . . . Peter. . . . Peter. . . .

[*Monica stands quite still staring in front of her, then, as if in a dream, she slowly replaces the receiver.*]

MARY: That's what I was trying to tell you.

MONICA (*looking at her*): You knew?

MARY: I shall never forgive Beatrice for doing this to me as long as I live.

MONICA: I shall never forgive her, either.

MARY: You're all right. Alec just came in and told me that everything was all right between you and him again.

MONICA: Oh, damn Alec. It's Peter I'm thinking about. Whatever shall I do without him?

MARY: Oh, stop thinking only of yourself. Spare a thought for me. Whatever shall I do without *her*?

MONICA: I loved Peter.

MARY (*indignantly*): I loved Beatrice.

[*They both look miserably at each other for a moment.*]

MONICA: What are we going to do?

MARY: God knows.

MONICA: I feel too miserable to cry.

BIRTHDAY HONOURS

MARY: I can't stand this place any longer. Her ghost will be everywhere. What I need is a long holiday.

MONICA: So do I. Anything to get away from here.

MARY: Where shall we go?

MONICA: The South of France?

MARY: No, too common.

MONICA: Let's go to Venice then.

MARY: Yes, I think I should like that. I haven't been there for twenty years.

MONICA: We'll go as soon as possible. I'll have to have some new clothes, of course.

MARY: And I must have my hair done.

MONICA: I wonder if I shall be able to get anything to fit me ready made?

MARY: I want some large straw hats.

MONICA: Let's go along to the Ritz bar now and talk about it over a drink.

MARY: Then we'll plan where we're going to stay

MONICA: And what we're going to do.

MARY: Shall we fly?

MONICA: Oh, I think so.

MARY: Venice—Queen of the Adriatic!

MONICA: Dinner at Guiseppe's every night!

MARY: Darling, let's be utterly selfish for once and really enjoy ourselves, shall we?

MONICA: Oh, Mother! It'll do us the world of good.

MARY: And certainly no one deserves it more. Come along, darling. There's not a moment to lose!

[Mary and Monica go hurrying off centre. Alec comes out of the consulting room and walks to the centre doors and closes them. Then he picks up telephone.]

ALEC: Hello, Miss Wilton. Would you care for a drink? Good.

ACT THREE

[*He replaces telephone and humming complacently crosses to sideboard. After a moment Elizabeth joins him.*]

(*Pouring.*) After careful deliberation, I have decided that I have been working much too hard, and that what I need is a good holiday.

ELIZABETH: It would seem to be a fitting reward for all your endeavours.

ALEC: And after further careful deliberation I have decided that you also have been working much too hard and are in need of a good holiday. What will you drink?

ELIZABETH: Gin, please.

ALEC: Gin and water?

ELIZABETH: Gin and sherry.

ALEC: So will I.

ELIZABETH: I see that you have already mixed them.

ALEC: After what I've done to achieve victory I couldn't bear even to consider defeat.

[*He hands Elizabeth her drink and they face each other.*]

ELIZABETH: Where shall we go?

ALEC: What about Venice—Queen of the Adriatic?

ELIZABETH: I believe it gets awfully crowded there at this time of year.

ALEC (*smiling*): I believe it does. (*He raises his glass.*) To England.

[*They touch their glasses and are drinking as*

The curtain falls]

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