

PLAYS OF THE YEAR

Volume 10

1953-54

PLAYS OF THE YEAR

CHOSEN BY
J. C. TREWIN

THE PRISONER
Bridget Boland

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES
Molière, adapted by Miles Malleson

MEET A BODY
Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat

WAITING FOR GILLIAN
Ronald Millar

BOTH ENDS MEET
Arthur Macrae

VOLUME 10

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THE PRISONER

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FOR WENDY

Who Appreciates

INTRODUCTION

I

Once more this is a collection of recent plays almost fantastically diverse in subject. One is a comedy about income tax; another is a sharp study of mental torture; a third is a new version of a Molière comedy by one of the most distinguished English actors of his time; and the fourth and fifth are, respectively, a comedy-drama with a body in the piano, and a highly competent straight play that derives from a novel.

The action of THE PRISONER passes at the present day in a mediaeval castle that has become a prison. There are two settings, the Interrogation Room and the prisoner's cell. Ingeniously and economically, they were shown in London in a double set. The producer—or director as we must say now—might, I think, have considered the lines of sight. There were one or two expensive seats in the theatre from which it was impossible to see some of the action in the cell. But that is by the way: I mention it because certain London theatres have seats—especially in the dress-circle—that should be marked with a black cross on any box-office plan.

Still, this is nothing to do with Bridget Boland's chilling play: one—though not everybody realised it at the time—for three voices only: those of the Prisoner, the Interrogator, and the Warder. The Prisoner is a Roman

Catholic Cardinal "with considerable pride of bearing". The inquisitor has "a genuinely pleasant manner". So, at least, we meet them at the beginning of a play which shows how a man can be destroyed by psychiatric interrogation. The Cardinal, once a hero of the Resistance, must be softened. Another resistance must be worn down; he must be made to say whatever the Government wishes. His inquisitor practises a dangerous trade. Listening, I remembered those lines on one "who slew the slayer, and shall himself be slain".

George Orwell (in his Nineteen-Eighty-Four mood) might have appreciated the craft of THE PRISONER. Here the questioner's weapon is the voice, that unceasing voice with its tormenting catechism, on, on, through the days and nights. It is, in effect, a water-drip torture. Select your place, your sore spot, however small; concentrate upon it unremittingly, and sooner or later your strong-man victim must gibber. Everyone has some hidden fear; once it is revealed, the end approaches. When I met the play I yielded sooner than the Cardinal. After about an hour there was little I would not have confessed. The play is a document in the madness of the world: as presented at the Globe by Alec Guinness, as the Cardinal who finds gauze after protective gauze stripped away from his mind, and by Noel Willman, as the interrogator who destroys his own nerve, it was a lesson in the player's craft. I remember, too, Wilfrid Lawson's bold, chuckling flourish as an earthy, condemned-cell warder far larger than life. Miss Boland hits him off in a phrase. He has "the robust manner that goes with a mind untroubled by thought".

The most terrifying speech in the play is simply this, the Interrogator's:

That's the way if only we can find it—the human weakness, the chink in the plate armour. You've told me the strength of your defences—we should save more of the small hours of these long nights, my dear Cardinal, if you would help me to the weakness. Plate armour. It

isn't even that, you know. It's chain mail, a clattering skin of linked weaknesses, all holes just twisted together. It's the using of flails and battle-axes that's a mistake. The fine point's what's needed. Not even a rapier. A bodkin. That's why the women win. . . .

THE PRISONER is, alas, acutely a play of our time.

II

I wonder very much what future ages will make of another play of our time, Arthur Macrae's farcical comedy, BOTH ENDS MEET. Will the subject be current, say a century on, or will playgoers have long ceased to laugh at it? It may be then, of course, a theme for tragedy: dramatists may write of tax inspectors with a real and agonised fervour. Thalia will have yielded to Melpomene.

On the afternoon before the London première, I saw Valentine about to extract Crampton's teeth in You Never Can Tell. Shaw unkindly dropped the curtain too soon on the best first act ever set in a dental surgery. I thought of this at night when Mr. Macrae devoted the whole of his comedy to a single-minded discussion of official dentistry as practised by the Commissioners of Inland Revenue. At present this is accepted as a matter for wry jesting. We laugh grimly at ourselves while the teeth are drawn, and delight to pretend that the average tax inspector is a kind of Front-de-Boeuf: "Tell down thy ransom, and rejoice that at such rates thou canst redeem thee from a dungeon, the secrets of which few have returned to tell." Theoretical tax evasion is a kind of parlour game. How to make a happy return? How far can one get before the dragon pounces?

I am sure that these dragons are the mildest sort of people. True, I don't know my own tax collector, though we have had some absorbing, if guarded, correspondence. Having heard the revelation in BOTH ENDS MEET, I can guess what he is like (if he is at all typical): a haunted man who hates to use the red-hot tongs, and who moans as he searches for the drill. You might say that, like the Walrus, with sobs and tears he is sorting out those

of the largest size. This tax collection is a tricky business. Nobody enjoys a public admission that he spends his life skinning his neighbours. Hence the touching embarrassment of Arthur Macrae's Mr. Wilson as he serves a writ. Hence, too, a young man's desire to call himself an "accountant" instead of a tax official—a cowardly move that forces him to bear, against his will, the methods of tax evasion favoured (in theory and practice) by his potential fiancée's guardian. and by a very knowing solicitor.

I had hoped we might see some senior official. Mr. Macrae could have had his fun with those dogmatic documents, those minatory Final Demands. The pleasure is denied. All the other "buff-envelope boys" are off-stage. We are left with the taxpayers as they tax their brains—both in seeking how not to pay, and then in trying to recover when they have said too much, given themselves away before Authority.

There is no secondary theme. We cannot enter the "bays and backwaters" that, as Mr. Masefield has said, are often the most delightful parts of a narrative. All is confined to this matter of tax—and absorbing it is. I came from the theatre with plenty of ideas, though I cannot very well re-marry my wife in a bucking collier in the North Sea. (Besides I am at sea, in two senses about this.) I sympathise with Maggie:

I am a woman. I want to be married in Church, wearing white. You say, No. Because of the laws, that's to be given up. You are not going to wait in a morning coat for me to come down the aisle in white satin. No! In a coaling ship, somewhere off Clacton-on-Sea, you and I are to be brought before the Captain on stretchers. . . .

TOM: Why on stretchers?

MAGGIE: Because we're in the North Sea and are both, if you remember, very poor sailors. There, in front of the Captain, we two—miserable, sea-sick, and presumably covered in coal-dust—are to be united forever in a furtive secrecy unmatched since the marriage of Mary

Queen of Scots and Lord Darnley. . . . No! You can forget that. No!

At the first-night interval I began to wonder whether Mr. Macrae could keep it up. He appeared to have said everything that could be said, used all his ammunition. Then, quite suddenly, he trained upon us the fire of his big guns: Miles Malleon and Alan Webb, a pair of veterans who in their day had heard the Parisian chimes at midnight. (I had at first a wild hope that they might prove to be two of the Commissioners of Inland Revenue in person.) Always I have held that Mr. Malleon is the best living Shakespearean comedian; and he can be uncommonly funny in modern dress. In BOTH ENDS MEET he arrived in a buff-and-a-puff and a cheerful apoplectic frenzy as a Blimp with a past and, maybe, a future. Alan Webb, more of a Foreign Office type, joined him gloriously in remembering both the pranks in a bygone Paris—what wheezings, and what recriminations!—and also certain little matters of a later day that no doubt would excite the Commissioners. Thanks to this pair, the fiscal comedy—directed by Peter Brook—kicked up its heels until the last. As the text will show, it does not try to overreach itself: it gets all the fun it can from its situation, and then stops.

From the Apollo production I remember also Mr. Macrae himself; Brenda Bruce, who can put a whole Bodleian in a look, and who delivers a series of orations by twitching an eyelid now and then or slightly pursing her mouth; and Cyril Raymond, as a comfortably Anglo-Saxon solicitor, endeavouring with elephantine coyness to explain his revelations as so much fantasy—the vapourings of a mind given to that sort of thing, exaggeration bred, no doubt, of his Latin blood.

III

And now Mr. Malleon himself—continuing his partnership with Molière. THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES (L'Ecole des Femmes) is the fourth of these

free, but now definitive, theatre-versions that we have had the pleasure of printing in this series. Molière, I am sure, would have appreciated Malleçon. The latest version—it was produced at the Bristol Old Vic—has the quality I noted in *The Miser*: “In its suppleness and vivacity it makes others seem buckram-stiff.”

The verse comedy was produced in 1662, when Molière was forty. He has had to endure much in English dress. Let me (as I have done before) borrow a few speeches from Baker and Miller, whose 1739 prose translation has been said, oddly, to have “more of the spirit of the original” than anything more modern could give. Here are Arnolphe and Chrysalde in the first scene:

CHRYSALDE: . . . Would you have me open my heart to you as a friend? Your design makes me tremble with fear for you, and what way soever you consider the matter, to marry is in you a very great piece of rashness.

ARNOLPHE: My friend, that's true. Perhaps you find reason at home to be apprehensive for me. Your own brows make you imagine, I suppose, that horns are everywhere the infallible appurtenances of matrimony.

CHRYSALDE: Those are accidents nobody is secure against, and the care people take on that account seems to me to be exceeding foolish. But when I'm afraid for you, it's because o' that raillery which a hundred husbands have endured the sting of. For in short you're sensible that neither high nor low have been exempted from your reflections. . . .

And here is Horace in Molière's fifth act:

. . . They went away very much terrified; and as I was considering how to get off, young Agnes, whom my pretended death had frightened, came to me in great concern. (For she had heard what the people said to one another, and being less observed during all this bustle, she easily slipped out of the house.) But finding I was not hurt, she appeared in a transport hardly to be expressed. What shall I say more t'ye? At last this charming creature has followed the dictates of her love, and being

unwilling to go home any more, has committed herself entirely to my trust. You may find a little, by this harmless proceeding, how much the gross impertinence of a fool exposes her, and what a dreadful risk she might have run had I a less sincere regard for her. . . . And now, with relief which you will share, I commend you to Malleston. One day I hope we may see his versions (which are appreciated in France) presented in West End repertory, with their author himself in the cast.

IV

No play staged in August 1940 could be on top of the world. One of the London productions during that ominous month was a "comedy-thriller" by Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat, called *The Body Was Well Nourished*. It went on at the Lyric, and, inevitably, came off within a few weeks when the London theatres had to shut down during the blitz. But it was too good a specimen of its kind to be forgotten. Fourteen years later, in a new version called *MEET A BODY* and described, rightly, as an improbable adventure, it arrived at the Duke of York's with Brian Reece at the head of the cast, the discoverer of a body in a grand piano. Let me add what I wrote about it that summer night:

"The scene is St. John's Wood. Up there in N.W.8 one seldom finds more than a couple of corpses in a grand piano during an average week. Mr. Reece, as a stranger, was naturally surprised. He was still more surprised, a little later, when the corpse tottered in to see him. Now, when Mr. Reece is surprised, odd things happen. He seems to open out like a telescope, just as Alice did when she had eaten the cake. As he grows before us, we can almost hear him saying, "Good-bye, feet!" On the heights his eyelids twitch in anguish. His mouth is compressed. He performs a variety of ballet movements. We feel, watching him, that if any more bodies get into any more pianos in St. John's Wood or elsewhere—or, for that matter, if anybody surprises Mr. Reece again in the

slightest fashion—the Duke of York's Theatre will have to get a new roof.

“The play in which these things occur is by Frank Launder and Sidney Gilliat. In the third act a bomb will very probably explode in a radio set at the side of a bar-parlour: that of the Green Man at Newcliffe—on the South Coast, I believe. Do not ask why the student of old clocks wants to blow up the Member of Parliament. In fact, if you are wise, do not ask anything, but take the play as it comes. Watch Mr. Reece as he demonstrates with magnificent nonchalance a vacuum-cleaner about which he knows less than we do, or else gibbers at the sight of pools of blood and stray corpses. He appears to be saying, ‘How is’t with me when every noise appals me!’ and the more he is appalled the better we like it.”

Mr. Reece would agree that the authors provided the right brand of text for his personality; and it is a text that now reads well. As an American Professor said to me, it is “kinda dear”.

V

In the year 1951 Nigel Balchin published a novel called A Way Through the Wood. It was supposed to be written in the first person, by one of its principal characters, James Manning, who said, in a preface:

“In the middle of the way of life, I found myself in a dark wood.”

This is the only way in which I resemble Dante. No one looks at me as I pass and whispers, ‘There is the man who was in Hell.’ If they say anything it is, ‘Old Jim Manning’s had a rough time lately.’ And they don’t say it with awe. Very properly. For there is nothing awe-inspiring about a personal mess. It is a thing for the sensible man to forget, rather than to try to remember.

But though it is all over now I am still desperately confused; and I am tired of confusion. There is still a

great deal about the whole business that I don't understand, and it is very important to me that I should understand it; for not to do so is not to understand people—how they will think and feel and act. Until this happened, I thought I understood people tolerably well. Now I am in the dark wood, in which it seems that anything might happen. . . .”

In his play, WAITING FOR GILLIAN, another treatment of the theme of Mr. Balchin's novel, Ronald Millar showed how Manning and his wife passed through the dark wood. The play was summarized at the time of its St. James's production: "Incompetent wife snarled up with impeccable husband and little cad who has the prefix 'Honourable'. A motor accident complicates further." This is a sincere and theatrically ingenious drama. The way in which Mr. Millar works it out must have surprised those who had read the book and who thought they knew what to expect.

J. C. TREWIN

Hampstead,
October, 1954

I am grateful to The Illustrated London News and The Sketch for permission to quote.

THE PRISONER

by

BRIDGET BOLAND

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Applications for the performance of this play 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.

On April 14th, 1954, by arrangement with Peter Glenville, Tennent Productions Ltd. presented the play at the Globe Theatre, London, with the following cast:

THE INTERROGATION ROOM WARDER

Colin Douglas

THE PRISONER

Alec Guinness

THE INTERROGATOR

Noel Willman

THE SECRETARY

Timothy Findley

THE CELL WARDER

Wilfrid Lawson

THE DOCTOR

Kenneth Edwards

THE BARBER

John Gill

A WARDER

Richard Easton

AN OLD WOMAN

Lilian Moubrey

Directed by Peter Glenville

Setting by Felix Labisse

Technical Adviser to Felix Labisse: Michael Northen

Incidental music composed by Roberto Gerhard

CHARACTERS

THE PRISONER

THE INTERROGATOR

THE WARDER

A SECRETARY

A DOCTOR

A BARBER

WARDERS

AN OLD WOMAN

} none of whom speaks

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE

- SCENE 1. *The interrogation room of a continental prison*
- SCENE 2. *The prisoner's cell*
- SCENE 3. *The interrogation room*
- SCENE 4. *The cell*
- SCENE 5. *The interrogation room*

ACT TWO

- SCENE 1. *The cell*
- SCENE 2. *The interrogation room*
- SCENE 3. *The interrogation room*

ACT THREE

- SCENE 1. *The cell*
- SCENE 2. *The cell*

Time: The Present

ACT ONE

Scene I

Scene: The interrogation room of a continental prison.

The set suggests a cell, furnished only with essentials. There is an impression of a barred window, through which at present daylight streams, and two desks, with a swivel chair for the prisoner in front of the main one. There is a telephone on the extra desk and a typewriter, and an old fashioned house telephone on one wall. There is a steel filing cabinet and a row of extra chairs. Throughout, whether daylight is indicated or not, a practical overhead light shines over the prisoner's chair.

The door is opened by the Warder, a man of uninteresting appearance, with one startling characteristic: a loud and unpleasant sniff, which punctuates the succeeding scenes at inappropriate intervals. He looks round the room, goes into the passage again, jerks his head beckoningly. There passes him into the room the Prisoner, a man of middle age, in the cassock of a Roman Catholic Cardinal. He has considerable pride of bearing. He looks about him and smiles wryly.

The Warder sniffs heartily and goes out, closing the door. The Prisoner feels the chair before the desk, as the lodger feels his bedsprings, and sighs. He looks up at the overhead light, finds the switch and turns it over with a grin. He stands quite still for a moment listening, then turns to face the door. It is opened by the Warder, who stands back to let the Interrogator pass. The latter is much the same age as the Prisoner, with a genuinely pleasant manner. He is followed by his Secretary, a bustling, important little man. The Prisoner looks mildly surprised at the identity of the Interrogator.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

INTERROGATOR: My dear Cardinal! Fantastic, isn't it, after all these years? How are you?

[*He holds out his hand. The Prisoner hesitates, and then takes it.*]

PRISONER: Very well—at the moment.

[*The Warder has just noticed the light. With a shocked cluck he turns the switch off again.*]

INTERROGATOR (*to Warder*): All right. All right. (*To Prisoner.*) Been here before, eh?

PRISONER: Near enough.

INTERROGATOR: Ludicrous, aren't they? Still using electricity for all it's worth, as though nothing had been invented since. (*To Warder.*) All right, all right. (*He gestures him out.*)

[*The Warder goes, closing the door.*]

Do sit down, won't you?

[*The Prisoner remains standing. The Secretary, with much important jangling of keys, is unlocking one of the filing cabinets.*]

What's all that about? Oh, for heaven's sake, Stephen, we don't need any more bumf.

[*The Secretary transfers his attention to the arrangement on the desk of the papers he has brought with him. Whenever he can do so unobtrusively he stares with fascination at the Prisoner, who once catches him at it and bows.*]

It's not going to take us long to straighten this out. I can't think why the authorities didn't simply arrange for you to come up to my office at the Ministry of Justice—or I could have slipped over to the Cathedral some time. Still a bit new to power,

THE PRISONER

you know, and inclined to use a battering ram when a door-knocker would do. All right, Stephen, I shan't need any of that, you know. (*To Prisoner.*) You've been out of town, though, recently, haven't you?

PRISONER: To Rome. With a return ticket.

INTERROGATOR: You flew though.

PRISONER: It's quicker—both ways.

INTERROGATOR: But aeroplanes do worry them so, at the Ministry of the Interior. We progressive governments are inclined to distrust the march of science—like any other march, unless we are issuing banners. Thank you, Stephen. I'll use the house 'phone if I need you.

[*The Secretary goes, remembering halfway that he hasn't locked the filing cabinet, and coming back with a jingle of keys to do so.*]

(*To Prisoner.*) Cigarette?

PRISONER (*laughing*): Thank you—no.

INTERROGATOR: Given it up? I keep trying to.

PRISONER: If I might smoke my own—while they last?

INTERROGATOR: Oh, now I do resent that. Drugged cigarettes already? You don't give me much credit for the art of conversation.

PRISONER: On the contrary, I remember you as a young barrister conducting some of the most brilliant cross-examinations I've ever heard. When I was studying voice-production for the pulpit, the ecclesiastical authorities thought the law courts less disedifying than the theatre. That was in the days when cross-examinations were held in public, of course. Nowadays I—smoke my own.

INTERROGATOR: Goodbye, Stephen.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

[*The Secretary goes out. The Interrogator lights both cigarettes.*]

Now look here, Eminence, stop treating me as a police inspector, and relax.

PRISONER: You can hardly blame me, under the circumstances.

INTERROGATOR: I've told the Powers that Be that your arrest is the worst gaffe they've made yet. You're a national monument. "Please do not deface."

PRISONER: Please, do not deface.

INTERROGATOR: I'm sorry. This is humiliating for you and it's shaming for me. You're not just a national figure. Since the war, since all your work for the Resistance under the Occupation, you've been a man to every man of us. I have, if you'll allow me to say so, a deep personal respect for you—combined, of course, with a fanatical loathing of what, for some reason, is always called your cloth! Come now—

PRISONER: Well, I'm in your hands.

INTERROGATOR: Let's get down to it. (*He opens a file on the desk, and turns pages.*) Official blather—higher official blather—"eyes grey, hair thinning."

PRISONER: I also have a tonsure.

INTERROGATOR: Born here in the capital—were you? I never knew that.

PRISONER: Just off the fish market.

INTERROGATOR: Local boy makes good. I'd have said a country town, a lawyer's or a doctor's son.

PRISONER: I could have told you more about yourself. We had the acreage of your father's estate in your service dossier, in the Resistance. Arable, pasture, and forest. Fishing too—but a long way from fish markets. A noble inheritance.

INTERROGATOR: Heavens, don't tell the Government. You'll get me the sack. "War record—see separate

THE PRISONER

file." A file to itself. There aren't many of us who'd need that.

PRISONER: You did well enough, in your district.

INTERROGATOR: Do you ever regret those days?

PRISONER: Among the wars, I prefer those in which one is on the same side as one's fellow countrymen.

INTERROGATOR: Ah, here it is. (*He looks over a paper in silence for a moment.*) I'm sorry. Do sit down.

[*The Prisoner leans on the chair or on the spare desk, but remains standing.*]

(*Still among the papers.*) I see you issued a statement to be published if you weren't back at the Cathedral within five hours, that any information you gave or confession you made would be the result of drugs or torture, and was not to be credited.

PRISONER: "The result of human weakness" was what I said.

INTERROGATOR: Have you a human weakness? Well, I don't suppose you object to answering how many ordained priests there are in the country?

PRISONER: Certainly not. Roughly four thousand odd.

INTERROGATOR: Granted most of the population was Catholic in the past, what about remaining members of recognised Catholic Societies and organisations?

PRISONER: Why not look it up in the directory?

INTERROGATOR: Why not, indeed?

[*The Interrogator sits casually on the edge of his desk to write the answers, leaning over with his back to the Prisoner.*]

PRISONER: Counting the League of Decency and the Mothers' Unions?

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

INTERROGATOR: Oh, definitely, I should say.

PRISONER: Divide the Catholic population by four, and then divide by three again, because they're all the same ladies wearing different hats, multiply by—call it eighteen thousand.

INTERROGATOR: Twenty?

PRISONER: It's a rounder figure.

INTERROGATOR: Members of underground Catholic Societies and organisations. (*After a pause.*) That's what it says.

[*They both laugh.*]

Yes, they're a bit premature with that one. Members of the Christian Workers Trade Organisations?

PRISONER: Offhand, a hundred and fifty-eight thousand. Disbanded. Suppressed—remember?

INTERROGATOR: So I'd heard. Propaganda centres, anti-government?

PRISONER: None. No, wait—how many pulpits have we?

INTERROGATOR (*making a note*): That seems to be that lot.

PRISONER: Well, the last one was a gift, the booby prize. (*Not at all sorry.*) Forgive me, that was unkind.

INTERROGATOR: Your Eminence—

PRISONER: I know. This is more awkward for you than it is for me.

INTERROGATOR: Hardly that, I suppose.

PRISONER: Oh, I don't know, in spite of your political creed it's you who are the gentleman. Degrees as a lawyer and a doctor, born a gentleman, of an ancient house. No titles nowadays, of course, but yours was a noble line.

INTERROGATOR: You're a Prince of the Church, aren't you?

THE PRISONER

PRISONER: A temporal, practically a diplomatic appointment. We think more highly of the spiritual grades I have never achieved. Look, don't think I don't enjoy fencing with you, but your masters are in a hurry, I fancy. People who are going to make heaven on earth always are, so hadn't we better come to the point?

INTERROGATOR: A man attacking a fortress tries to get a plan of the defences.

PRISONER: My dear sir, you should have asked for it! I am reasonably acute, my mind works fast, if not very deeply, I am tenacious, wary, proud, and have few of the finer feelings.

INTERROGATOR: Proud?

PRISONER: Quite sinfully—of my record in dealings with your predecessors, the Gestapo. I am difficult to trap, impossible to persuade, and even more impossible to appeal to. Also, I've been here or hereabouts before, and I know the ropes. I am, besides, tolerably inured to physical pain.

[*The Interrogator looks at him for a moment, and then goes to the house 'phone on the wall.*]

INTERROGATOR: Three one . . . Stephen, bring me down the completed confession, will you? (*He hangs up and turns back.*)

PRISONER: Already?

INTERROGATOR: You might care to hear it. I don't think it a very good one, myself, but it'll give us some sort of agenda to work from.

PRISONER: The State isn't fussy about just what we say I've done?

INTERROGATOR: Cards on the table? No.

PRISONER: There's no particular plot, counter-revolution, or underground movement that they're anxious to unmask?

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

INTERROGATOR: Not unless you happen to know of one—in particular.

PRISONER: They believe us harmless, but require us discredited. And the point of arresting me?

INTERROGATOR: To—deface the national monument. We can no longer afford you at home or abroad, for your own followers or foreign journalists to watch and quote.

PRISONER: I am not, you know, beloved. I am not a likeable man.

INTERROGATOR: No. In an odd way, that's the point. It's not the personality of a demagogue we're up against, it's the record of a hero. That's what we have to destroy. You see, I take you at your own valuation, and show you my hand from the start.

PRISONER: Oh you're wise to skip the preliminary skirmishing.

INTERROGATOR: It might have been amusing, if we'd had time. What a pity you're on the wrong side.

PRISONER: Tell me, you yourself, can you admit no possibility of good on—the other side?

INTERROGATOR (*with complete honesty*): No. Very little good on either, but on your side not even right. And we can't allow you the right to be wrong.

PRISONER: Ah. That's the root of it.

INTERROGATOR: Don't tell me your side aren't the same in the parts of the world where they're on top.

[*The door is opened by the Warden, and the Secretary brings in a thick sheet of typescript. Both he and the Warden stare with startled interest at the Prisoner.*]

I expect this will have fluttered the doves. You wouldn't care to sign it right away, and really shake them? You know, you might just as well.

PRISONER: I'd love to read it first, if I may.

INTERROGATOR: Thank you, Stephen.

THE PRISONER

[*He gestures to him to hand the typescript to the Prisoner and he does so, though clearly shocked by the break from routine.*]

I know, I know, it's not even supposed to exist yet. We're just starting at the wrong end, that's all, in order to save time.

[*The Interrogator sits down. The Secretary is about to remove the papers he placed earlier.*]

No, no—I may need those. Run along. And, Stephen, I shall want you to stand by tonight.

[*The Prisoner looks up quickly with a wry smile. The Warden, who has stood through this interchange, sniffs mournfully and holds the door open—for the Secretary to go out—closes it and puts a chair against the wall by it on which he sits, composing himself for a long session.*]

Sit down, your Eminence.

[*At his tone, the Prisoner obeys with a little bow of formality. Their official relationship is established.*]

Curtain

Scene 2

Scene: The Prisoner's cell.

Time: Night.

There is a chair, table and bench, but no bed. There is a high, barred window and an overhead practical light which is always on.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

The Prisoner is kneeling as the curtain rises. He is muttering, giving an air of prayer without piety. (It is for this effect that the formality of the Latin is suggested, though not essential).

PRISONER: “. . . May He not slumber that keepeth thee. Behold He shall neither slumber nor sleep that keepeth Israel. The Lord is thy keeper, the Lord is thy protection upon thy right hand. Save us, O Lord, while we wake and guard us while we sleep, that we may watch with Christ and sleep in peace. In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.”

[He makes the sign of the cross (the automatic gesture of habit) on the last words, as he rises. He sits down and composes himself elaborately. He looks up at the light and grimaces. He relaxes carefully. There is a slight pause. Then the door opens briskly.]

[The cell Warder comes in. He is a competent professional of rather more than middle age, though time-less as a machine, and with the robust manner that goes with a mind untroubled by thought.]

WARDER: Ah! None o' that. Mustn't drop off, y'know. Can't have that. You walk up and down a bit. Nothing like walking up and down for waking you up.

PRISONER: It must be thirty-six hours since I slept.

[He gets up and moves about as the Warder directs.]

WARDER: That's right. Being difficult, are you?

PRISONER: I hope so.

WARDER: Beats me. Always does. “Human nature”, they say.

THE PRISONER

PRISONER: What is.

WARDER: "Not guilty." Every time, "Not guilty."

PRISONER: You must have heard a good deal of that, certainly since the new government took over.

WARDER: Since the new. . . ? Know how long I've been in the Prison Service? Thirty-one years.

"Not guilty, officer, I'm not guilty. It's a put-up job, my enemies wanted me out of the way, my wife wanted me out of the way. I'm not like other prisoners. Me, I'm not guilty." Nor you neither, I suppose?

PRISONER: That's right.

WARDER: Keep walking a bit, I should, it stirs the circulation.

PRISONER: If I preferred to sit down?

WARDER: Well, it's regulations, you see. Every so often.

PRISONER: Yes, I remember.

WARDER: Been inside before, have you?

PRISONER: A criminal type, you'd say?

WARDER: There's as many criminal types as there's men and women in the world. I've found that out in thirty-one years. Guilty. Everyone. Something on their conscience. Whatever they've been arrested for, something on their conscience. And what's the other thing they have in common? "Not guilty." It's only what they're guilty of there's any variety in.

PRISONER: And what would my type be?

WARDER: Political, you're in for. Well, that's not a very interesting line, but there's generally more to it than meets the eye. Only being a priest puts you out of a lot of likely classes, of course.

PRISONER: Good.

WARDER: Larceny, for instance. Petty larceny, that is. You folk live too well to need to pick pockets, eh? And if you do rob your own poor boxes, who's to

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

know? Same with violence. You don't need to, do you—knock an old crone down and snatch her bag—she'll put it in the plate, Sunday, what they call the widow's mite. Rape? Why should you bother, with all the pretty girls coming into the dark confessionals in the dark corners of your dark churches, mm? Oh, you cunning old lechers, eh?

PRISONER: Do you really believe that?

WARDER: Come on! "Confessions six to nine." Evenings, always, isn't it? Dusk. City girls, coming home from work, sharp, smart, neat little things, with their well-brushed hair and their silk stockings—up the Cathedral steps, two at a time, with their tight little skirts clinging to their behinds—I've watched 'em—nice, eh? "Confessions six to nine"—and absolution thrown in, that's where you have the pull.

PRISONER: You've stood and watched them? Did you ever look at their faces?

WARDER: Not specially. Did you? No, no need for rape. I'd put you in the confidence trickster class.

PRISONER (*quickly*): What?

WARDER: Oh, I know you're political, otherwise I'd say that's your type.

PRISONER: Why do you say that?

WARDER: Hide yourself up your sleeve, that's your type.

PRISONER: Thirty-one years' experience. You must have gone on serving under the Occupation then.

WARDER: 'S right.

PRISONER: Governments may come and go—

WARDER: But crime goes on for ever. That's the way of it.

PRISONER: And what are you guilty of?

WARDER: Me? I'm in the prison service.

PRISONER: "Not guilty."

THE PRISONER

WARDER: Don't be silly, of course not. All right, you can sit down now, but no dropping off, mind. Very strict, your Interrogator, no dropping off, no talking to no one but me and him, not even the doctor. Psychology, they call it. Modern. They say he always gets what he wants, for all his fancy ways of going about it. Not dropping off, are you?

PRISONER: No. Just sitting still. Still as a still-room maid, without face or occupation.

[There is a knock on the door. The Warder, who was just crossing to it, opens it.]

WARDER: Hello, company.

[He stands for a moment in whispered conversation with someone outside, and then ushers in the Doctor. The Prisoner is asleep in his chair.]

Medical examination. Here——!

PRISONER (*alert quickly*): A night call, doctor? Am I so sick?

WARDER: No talking to the doctor. No talking by anyone to anyone. Orders.

[The Doctor signs to the Warder. The Doctor examines the Prisoner.]

PRISONER: Am I allowed to say "ninety-nine" to him? What's it all for? I was examined the day I was arrested.

WARDER: Routine.

PRISONER: Routine? In the middle of the night?

WARDER: Lot of work done at night here.

PRISONER: So I've noticed. . . . Oh, I'm due for a long spell of interrogation on end, is that it? We

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

haven't had that yet. You start at two in the morning, when resistance is at its lowest, and finish up about two tomorrow morning, by which time it should be lower still. And I'm not to die on your hands before I've said anything to cover you. Yes. I shouldn't worry, doctor.

[He puts on an elaborate bedside manner.]

The pulse fairly regular . . . that little flutter's not anything to be alarmed about, it's caused by the natural human impulse of fear, you often find it among cases under threat of torture—physical or mental—and, of course, death, just a simple reflex, uncontrollable, but not at all serious. . . . The heart's very sound, yes, very sound indeed—I hope. Lungs quite all right, nothing to worry about there. Continuous confinement is not usually recommended, of course, particularly if the quarters are at all damp—

WARDER: Here, let me tell you, there isn't a damp cell in this prison! And you're not supposed to be talking to the doctor.

PRISONER: He's talking to me. Didn't you recognise his bedside manner?

[The Doctor signs to him to cross his knees. He tests his reflexes.]

No. No sign of hysterical paralysis—though it's not a bad idea at that. Tell me—have you examined the Interrogator? Because if I'm in for a long session—so is he.

Curtain

THE PRISONER

Scene 3

Scene: The Interrogation Room.

Time: Night.

The Prisoner is leaning back in his chair, tired, but physically relaxed. The Interrogator, in shirtsleeves, with his coat over the back of his chair, is restless at his desk, and shows the effect of nervous strain more than does the Prisoner. The interrogation room Warden sits by the door, dozing.

INTERROGATOR: Very well then. Do you at least admit that the whole weight of your authority must logically be directed against this Government.

PRISONER: Logic is a system of avoiding false conclusions, not a motive for action.

[The Interrogator makes a violent movement of irritation. The Warden starts.]

You've woken the management!

INTERROGATOR: I don't know how one tries the patience of a saint, but for a saint you begin to have a disastrous effect on mine.

PRISONER: Relax. Even though you sleep between-whiles, and I'm not allowed to, you can't keep it up—on the edge of your chair. You want what you want too badly and too soon. An interesting boyish quality.

INTERROGATOR (*mildly*): Now lay off me. Warden, black coffee, strong. And tell them to keep a brew going.

[The Warden goes.]

ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

Where did you learn the trick of it? Yogi? or a circus?

PRISONER: My first curacy.

INTERROGATOR: Whatever for?

PRISONER: Stage fright. I was always sick before I went into the pulpit.

INTERROGATOR: You were? A human weakness.

PRISONER: The old parish priest taught me how to relax for ten minutes beforehand in the sacristy. It's a trick. You——

INTERROGATOR: Why were you sick before you went into the pulpit?

PRISONER (*briskly*): I've no idea.

INTERROGATOR: Mm. No idea. A weakness. That's the way if only we can find it—the human weakness, the chink in the plate armour. You've told me the strength of your defences—we should save more of the small hours of these long nights, my dear Cardinal, if you would help me to the weakness.

[*The Warder returns with a tray of coffee things, which he takes to the desk.*]

Plate armour. It isn't even that, you know. It's chain mail, a clattering skin of linked weaknesses, all holes just twisted together. It's the using of flails and battle-axes that's a mistake. The fine point's what's needed. Not even a rapier. A bodkin. That's why the women win.

[*The Warder, from where he is, can see the Prisoner's face, which the Interrogator can't. He looks up quickly at the Interrogator.*]

Well? Oh, is he?

[*He puts out a hand to stay the Warder from waking the*

THE PRISONER

Prisoner. He himself presses the Prisoner lightly behind the ear, speaking as he does so.]

What are you afraid of?

PRISONER: Thank you. Very refreshing.

[The Warder sniffs loudly, then goes back to his chair. The Interrogator pours out coffee.]

Coffee?

PRISONER: Thank you. No.

[The Interrogator takes the glass from the water carafe.]

INTERROGATOR: From the same pot as I use myself, from a glass you've used before?

PRISONER: I've been asleep since I last drank from it.

INTERROGATOR: Oh, you keep your wits about you, with your eyes shut.

[He pours some coffee from his own cup into the glass, drinks from it, and fills up both glass and cup from the pot. He holds out the cup.]

Some coffee, your Eminence?

PRISONER: Oh. Thanks. *(He takes it.)* My health.

[They both drink.]

INTERROGATOR: Afraid I shall slip you the "truth drug"?

PRISONER: For instance.

INTERROGATOR: I know the truth already.

PRISONER: I was forgetting. It's a confession, not the truth, we're after.

ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

INTERROGATOR: Oh, I could drug you into stumbling out some form of words that had been forced into your mind. Old tricks, and the foreign correspondents wouldn't be any more impressed than they would by our sawing a lady in half.

PRISONER: Older methods?

INTERROGATOR: Racks and thumbscrews?

[The Prisoner holds up his hands and turns them about.]

PRISONER: Old, but not so long outdated.

[The Interrogator looks at his hands and then at his own.]

INTERROGATOR: They never caught me. . . . You know, I'd give anything for it not to be you that I—

PRISONER: Oh, don't apologise.

INTERROGATOR (*goaded*): Well, you might be broken now. You're an older man that you were, you've lived in the odour of popular esteem since the war, which is as enervating as a hot bath. But confession from a broken body seldom looks really spontaneous, so we shan't be trying that.

PRISONER: My dear man, if you really meant that you'd never be fool enough to relieve me of even the fear of pain. Come now—

INTERROGATOR: Who do you think you're dealing with? Some mad sadistic moron in the Gestapo? Some filthy butcher with power to play with flesh and blood for his lust? I tell you even the sight of physical exhaustion after these sessions revolts me so that I'm sick. I wouldn't have you touched, I was a doctor before ever I was a lawyer, your body is sacred to me. I wouldn't even have you sit there and think of the possibility of pain at my suggestion.

THE PRISONER

PRISONER: You're speaking the truth, I believe. No drugs, no torture? What can you hope for?

INTERROGATOR: Conversion.

PRISONER: And yet you're not mad.

INTERROGATOR: No. And I'm right. You're wrong, and you're dangerous because you mislead the poor, the uneducated, and the silly. Sentiment may drive me to regret that it has to be done, but sentiment won't be allowed to stop me——

PRISONER: To stop you——?

INTERROGATOR: —getting in the end a free and open confession that will dispel the black magic of your name and wreck your mistaken cause, at home and abroad, a confession made in public by you, yourself, you, whole in body and in mind. It's your mind we want.

PRISONER: I'm a fool to admit it, but for the first time since I came into your prison, I'm afraid.

INTERROGATOR: You think of prison as the rack, in one form or another. It's stupid of me to get annoyed because you think of me as the inquisitor.

PRISONER: How do you expect me to think of you?

INTERROGATOR: As your doctor. To me, you're on a couch in my consulting room. You're an enemy of society, but only because you're wrong-headed. You're dangerous, like the schizophrenic or the paranoiac can be, but we can get to the root of the trouble and you can be cured.

PRISONER: You can cure me?

INTERROGATOR: I'm trained in the skill that this age has developed more than any other—the medical knowledge of the human mind. And then there's yourself, you're not like a voluntary patient who wants at heart to co-operate—and that makes it more difficult—in the early stages. But we shall get to the heart of it in time. In time. Science must succeed.

ACT ONE, SCENE FOUR

PRISONER: You believe it. . . .

INTERROGATOR: Yes. I do believe it.

PRISONER: God give me cunning against your skill.
God keep my watch.

Curtain

Scene 4

Scene: The Cell.

Time: Night.

The Prisoner, dressed in a shirt, without dog-collar, stands leaning against the wall, his eyes shut. He recites from the Psalms monotonously in an effort not to think.

PRISONER: "Consider and hear me, oh Lord my God, lighten my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death . . . lest mine enemy say: I have prevailed against him." (*Louder, shouting down his thoughts.*) "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall I shall rise, when I sit in darkness the Lord shall be a light to me."

[*The door opens and the cell Warder comes in, yawning. The Prisoner prepares to follow him.*]

(*Reciting words of habit rather than prayer.*) "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, keep thou the door of my lips."

[*The Warder signs, and is followed into the cell by the Barber, another professional, whose salon habits are unaffected by his present milieu.*]

THE PRISONER

Another medical inspection? What's this? Am I mad, or is he?

[*The Barber sets about his preparations with elaboration.*]

WARDER: You are, or you'd tell your Interrogator whatever it is he's after, and give us all a proper night's sleep.

PRISONER: A barber? Execution.

WARDER: Lord, we don't shave 'em to hang 'em! Come on, come on.

[*He hustles the Prisoner into the chair.*]

PRISONER: Why, then?

WARDER: Look, if you were going to be hanged, which you aren't—or not tonight, anyhow—you couldn't put it off by refusing to be shaved. A corpse looks silly enough with a rope round its neck, believe me, without wondering whether its chin's a bit blue. Special orders, this is.

PRISONER: There'll be no tip, I'm afraid.

[*The Barber sets about shaving the Prisoner.*]

Safety razor, I notice. For his protection, though, I suppose, rather than mine.

WARDER (*yawning*): 'S right.

PRISONER: Disappointing weather. Well, and what do you make of our new government, Alfonse?

[*The Barber is startled and his hand jerks.*]

Oh, Alfonse! You've cut me!

[*The Barber applies lotion and cotton wool, much agitated.*]

ACT ONE, SCENE FOUR

WARDER: Well, it's your own flaming fault. Oh God, now you've upset him and he'll be hours. You did that on purpose.

PRISONER: Sorry, Alfonse.

[There is a knock on the door. The Warder goes to open it.]

WARDER: It's his perfession to turn you out looking proper.

[He unlocks the door. The interrogation room Warder appears with a clean collar, a bottle of cleaning spirit, and a clothes brush. He gives the collar to the cell Warder and looks about him.]

PRISONER: A clean collar!

WARDER: Here, get up a minute. Oh, get out from under my feet, Alfonse.

[He gets the cassock from where it is lying over the chair on which the Prisoner has been sitting, and gives it to the other Warder, who starts cleaning it.]

PRISONER: What's all this about. Last time I saw my friend the Interrogator he was a bit blue about the chin himself. It's a new man! They've changed him! Tell me, tell me, have they changed him?

WARDER: What? No, no. Same man.

[The Prisoner is relieved, though he is not yet aware himself of his growing dependence on the Interrogator.]

PRISONER: Oh. . . .

WARDER: Now, how does this damn thing work? *(He tries to help with the collar.) (To the other Warder):* Never mind the back, man. Brush it.

THE PRISONER

PRISONER: Wonderful service you get in these State hotels nowadays. What is it all for? You can't be staging the trial yet, you know—you haven't got a confession.

WARDER: And whose fault's that?

PRISONER: A visit! Is that it? The foreign press coming to see how I'm being treated?

WARDER: Not likely!

PRISONER: Well, I've no consul to make a fuss on my behalf—this is my own dear homeland—perhaps the Vatican? No, you'd hardly lock up the native clergy and then let a Papal Nuncio—

[The Barber nearly trips over the Warder.]

WARDER: All right, all right, Alfonse—that's enough of that. Never mind that cut, he won't bleed to death, he's not scheduled to go that way.

[With dignity the Barber collects his things.]

PRISONER: Thank you. Thanks.

WARDER: Come on, they're waiting.

[He lets the Barber out—and then helps the prisoner into the clean shirt.]

And your Interrogator's in a black rage, let me tell you, spitting blue blood.

PRISONER: Why should he be angry? What's happening? What is it?

WARDER *(to the Prisoner.)*: Seems they're upsetting his schedule, and his schedule's scientific and theirs isn't. Oh God, look at those shoes. Here, got a rag?

[The other Warder hands over a large grubby handkerchief.]

ACT ONE, SCENE FIVE

The cell Warder kneels down and starts rubbing over the Prisoner's shoes.]

They're upsetting my schedule too, for what that's bloody well worth—my night off duty. It's the high-ups in a hurry. Well, any political of mine looks decent. I'll be damned if they don't, any hour of the day or night. All right, bring it here.

[The other Warder brings the cassock, and the Prisoner puts it on.]

My God, all those buttons! Well, you'll have to do them up as we go.

PRISONER: I refuse to co-operate by doing up another button.

[There is a silent battle of wills ending in the Warder buttoning.]

Curtain

Scene 5

Scene: The Interrogation Room.

Time: Night.

The room is in darkness. There is a sound of laughter. The interrogation room Warder comes in and switches on the light and the Prisoner and the Interrogator come in together, laughing. The Secretary, looking extremely shocked, follows. The Prisoner is still carried by the over-excitement of the scene he has just been through, but reaction is near.

INTERROGATOR: No, that was wonderful! That was

THE PRISONER

really wonderful! I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

PRISONER: Well, I wouldn't quite say that, perhaps, but it was worth a lot. Their faces!

INTERROGATOR: Hey, look at Stephen's face now!

PRISONER: Oh, my dear boy, cheer up! It was their own fault, you know, they asked for it. Confronting me publicly in the middle of the night with enough badly faked evidence to make a laughing stock of the police department for months.

INTERROGATOR: I warned them! I was furious when they demanded to have the show put on. At about two hours' notice, too.

PRISONER: What? It must have taken days to get all that nonsense together!

INTERROGATOR: Days? They've been working on it for months, poor darlings!

PRISONER: Oh, dear!

INTERROGATOR: Those maps! And that lovely photograph of the secret arsenal they'd so carefully planted for you in the Cathedral crypt!

PRISONER: And I went and remembered that the date they'd hit on to say they'd found the place bristling with guns was the feast of St. Fontenal, the one day in the year when the crypt is open to the public.

INTERROGATOR: Cigarette? I've never seen two Field Marshals, three Ministers and a Judge all looking so silly at the same time. Lord, if the dear public had seen them.

PRISONER: Why did they suddenly want to do it?

INTERROGATOR: Oh, it's the old business—you confront the prisoner with a mass of irrefutable evidence against him, in the presence of overpoweringly important people, and he realises his only chance is to throw himself on their mercy by pleading guilty.

ACT ONE, SCENE FIVE

PRISONER: It is behind that rafter, isn't it—the microphone? And the switch under the rim of your desk——

[*The Interrogator obligingly switches it on and off. They both laugh.*]

The fake confession on the tape recorder was the part I liked best. I'm sorry I had to run such rings round the way you joined the bits together, Stephen, to make a confession out of flat denials—but honestly, you'd have looked far sillier producing a botched up job like that in open court.

INTERROGATOR: Now, that's very unsporting of you. You know it's against the regulations for the poor boy to answer you back. All right, Stephen—run along.

[*The Secretary goes—the Warder remains by the door.*]

PRISONER: You don't feel what a strain the excitement's been till it's over. Tell me, though, weren't you moving some of my pieces in the game this evening? I felt as though we were both playing on the same side.

INTERROGATOR: Well, I was so damned angry with them. Suddenly wanting to put the pressure on because of some footling crisis or other——

PRISONER: What crisis?

INTERROGATOR: —and insisting they could do more in an hour than has taken us months, with their box of child's tricks and antique police laboratory fakes! You told them why they wouldn't get all that nonsense past the foreign journalists, but my God, I'd already told them they wouldn't even get it past their own illiterate followers!

THE PRISONER

PRISONER: Well, I don't suppose they liked that. Do they trust you?

INTERROGATOR: Fools . . . that's what you get if you join a movement from the wrong side of the fence—imbecile suspicion. Well, I wasn't born one of them, but I give them all I can. I give them absolute devotion. Why not use it? Why not use my skill? My brain can serve them better than their text books. My brain——

PRISONER: —is consumed with intellectual pride.

[The Interrogator laughs and relaxes.]

I hope for your sake the microphone was switched off for that little outburst. Shall I get some sleep tonight? You and I—how odd it is, a kind of bond's growing between us. I suppose it only comes of no one else being allowed to speak to me, but to me you seem like the only real human being in a world of shadows.

INTERROGATOR: You were beginning to think that, were you? Oh, God, the fools.

PRISONER: I don't know, I'm tired, perhaps I'm starting to play your game, but I could have sworn you were playing mine tonight.

[The Secretary comes in with a note for the Interrogator, who reads it.]

[The Secretary confers with him in a whisper.]

What? I tell you I won't have it—oh, come outside.

[The Warder closes the door behind them as they go out. The Prisoner tries to rest while talking for the benefit of the vigilant Warder.]

ACT ONE, SCENE FIVE

PRISONER: No, I shan't sleep. Not till I know what the next move's to be. Chess. Chess, you know—game with figures of painted ivory, red and white—or black, of course—I'm black. He's got all the knights and castles, and I've only the king's bishop left. Not even a bishop, really. Not a proper chess man at all. (*He is dropping asleep.*) Not asleep. Still talking. Still playing chess with my friend.

[*The Interrogator comes back into the room with the Secretary.*]

INTERROGATOR: I'll stop them——

[*He goes to the telephone, but as he approaches it, it rings.*]

Yes. . . ? Speaking, speaking. . . . Damn. . . . I said "damn", and you can tell them. . . . All right. . . . (*He hangs up.*) (*To Stephen.*) Too late, they're here. Go on. (*To Warder.*) Get out there, they'll need you.

[*The Secretary and the Warder go, leaving the door ajar.*]

(*Gently.*) Wake up. (*Harshly.*) Wake up!

[*Two Warders, carrying a coffin on their shoulders, come in. During the ensuing scene, dawn lighting is brought up. The Interrogator turns his back for a moment, and then, interest overcoming revulsion, he watches the Prisoner as the men set down the coffin.*]

PRISONER: Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit. I am tired. I hadn't let myself feel how tired. Shall I be allowed time to pray?

[*The Interrogator signs to the two Warders. One goes out—leaving only the regular man by the door.*]

THE PRISONER

INTERROGATOR: This is not your death.

PRISONER: Not death? You must give me time to take that in. I let my mind feel how tired it was, and now it won't. What must I do now?

INTERROGATOR: My orders are that you open the coffin.

PRISONER: Open it?

INTERROGATOR: Lift the lid.

PRISONER: You don't like your orders.

[*The Prisoner lifts the lid of the coffin. Slowly he raises his head.*]

My mother. My mother. How old she looks. Old and innocent. *Requiem aeternam dona*—I never learned to pray for her. I never could pray for her. Oh, God, let me pray. (*He kneels by the coffin. He prays the words of habit, his mind elsewhere.*) Out of the depths have I cried to thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my prayer. Let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication, and let my cry come unto thee. If thou, O Lord, shall be extreme to remark what is done amiss . . . what she did amiss . . . her sin. . . .

INTERROGATOR: It's your mother. Shouldn't you bless her?

PRISONER: I, bless her? (*Coming back to the present and realising he is being watched.*) Yes, of course. She's dead. (*He touches her in blessing.*) Warm. She's still quite warm. (*He gets up and backs away. Then suddenly he turns on the Interrogator.*) She's only just dead. It was because I played at being cleverer than you all just now that you did it. You killed her, I never wished her death, it wasn't my doing, it wasn't my fault, I never knew anything of it!

INTERROGATOR (*interested*): No. . . ?

PRISONER (*quickly*): And you killed her, the doctor to

ACT ONE, SCENE FIVE

whom my body was so sacred. Let's talk of that. My body was of—was of—that flesh!

INTERROGATOR: Well?

PRISONER: Of that flesh! I am admitting it, do you hear? We were of the same flesh, she and I! When you had her killed, you killed part of my life. You said you wouldn't have a hair of mine touched—if it's only to shame you I'll claim my body and hers are one. I am her son, the child of her womb, look how I kiss her hand! The pulse—the pulse—she's alive! (*He drops the hand and backs away again.*)

INTERROGATOR: Yes, alive, only anaesthetised. Why did you say—

PRISONER (*himself again*): Anaesthetised? Why?

INTERROGATOR: Part of the system. This is supposed to work.

[*The Prisoner is dragging from the coffin the inert form of the little old woman, in its provincial working class best clothes, and he props it, lolling ludicrously, on a chair. He slaps the hands and face and hurries to get the water carafe.*]

PRISONER: Her heart may give out if you leave her under too long.

INTERROGATOR: You can't do anything. Two hours, another two hours at least before she comes round.

PRISONER: It won't be my fault if—You must have known if I touched her I'd find out. Why did you make—let me touch her?

INTERROGATOR: Part of the system.

PRISONER: Shock tactics. I was meant to realise she was alive? Why? She's supposed to be someone I love—

INTERROGATOR: Supposed?

PRISONER: Someone I love. Well, then, what now?

INTERROGATOR: Well, the confession is ready for signature.

THE PRISONER

PRISONER: The confession. Oh, I begin to see. Or else?

INTERROGATOR: She goes to hospital. The Cancer Hospital.

PRISONER: She has cancer?

INTERROGATOR: No.

PRISONER: I don't understand.

INTERROGATOR: The Cancer Research Hospital. She will have cancer.

PRISONER: No! If it were a dog, it would make you sick. And you agree to this?

INTERROGATOR: She's in the hands of the police, I have no power there. It's only you who are my patient.

PRISONER: No signature. No confession.

INTERROGATOR: You are to have—she'll have—twenty-four hours.

PRISONER: No signature. I should be glad if she might be taken away, unless this gives you particular interest.

INTERROGATOR: I could have her left in your cell.

PRISONER: And in an hour or so she'd come round, and ask me what I condemned her to? She wouldn't even try to plead with me. (*Bitterly.*) You don't know us, my mother and I.

INTERROGATOR: Too proud to beg of me?

PRISONER: You say it's not in your province. I hope it's not in your province.

INTERROGATOR: No, it's not in my province. It's in yours. It's you who'll condemn her.

PRISONER: Yes.

INTERROGATOR: I could tell myself, as a doctor, other lives might be saved, other pain relieved by hers. Can you make yourself feel humane?

PRISONER: No!

INTERROGATOR: I told them it wouldn't work.

ACT ONE, SCENE FIVE

hated it, but at the worst I thought I might learn a little about you from it. I didn't think what I learned would shock me so.

PRISONER (*bitterly*): Oh, you have a heart.

INTERROGATOR: Sentiment is a weakness I have to guard against. But at least it's human.

PRISONER: You have an unnatural monster on your hands: I do not love my mother . . . I never have. If your orders allow it, have her taken away. I beg of you—taken away. (*He sits, his head turned from her.*)

INTERROGATOR: It was scarcely even a temptation! I was afraid it would lose me the foothold I'd gained with you. I didn't think it would be I that would be revolted. I was getting too close. I was slipping into the weakness of human pity.

PRISONER: Were you?

INTERROGATOR: Yours is a mind diseased. At all costs, you must not be damned. If she must, your mother can die of pain—to save your immortal soul. You're a hard man, Eminence, a hard man. (*He goes to the door, but pauses and turns back.*) No, I won't have her taken away yet. I'll keep her here to remind me, not you.

[*He pushes the chair with the corpse-like figure of the woman on it so that she and the Prisoner sit facing him, side by side.*]

I was beginning almost to dislike my work. I shan't dislike it now.

Curtain

ACT TWO

Scene I

Scene: The Cell.

The window is shuttered. There is a bed in the corner.

The Prisoner, dirty and unshaven, in shirt and trousers, is on his knees polishing the floor with a rag, with fanatical care, reciting rhythmically as he rubs.

PRISONER: Three nines are twenty-seven, four nines are thirty-six, five nines are forty-five, six nines are fifty-four, seven nines are sixty-three, eight nines are seventy-two, four eights are thirty-two, six elevens are sixty-six. (*He pauses in his polishing, beginning to think in spite of himself.*) Seven elevens are—seventy-seven. (*He pulls himself together and polishes again.*) Nines. Seven nines are sixty three, eight nines are seventy-two, nine nines are eighty-one, ten nines are ninety. Once ten is ten, two tens are twenty, three tens are thirty. Four tens are forty, five tens are fifty, six tens are sixty, seven tens are seventy—(*Louder*)—eight tens are eighty. •

[The door opens and the cell Warder comes in with a tray.]

(*Loudly.*) Nine tens are ninety. What happened to you?

WARDER: Eh?

PRISONER: What day is it? How long is it since you brought me food?

[He falls on the food almost before it is on the table.]

WARDER: You're fed according to regulations.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

PRISONER: Not for days—three days. Do you think I can't tell? That's why they've shuttered the window, isn't it? So that I can't tell, to frighten me—

WARDER: It's just the being left to sleep as much as you like. You got out of the habit, and now it muddles you up.

PRISONER: Are you trying to tell me it's only five or six hours since you fed me last? (*He is bolting the food.*)

WARDER: You know the times it's due.

PRISONER: You're lying. (*The Warden shrugs.*) What do you gain by lying to me?

WARDER: 'S right. What would I? You're fed according to regulations.

PRISONER: I'm to be left alone for weeks, months—how long is it? Left to rot in a mad timeless vacuum till I'm broken ready for him to work on again. And you're in the game, aren't you? It's thirty-six hours, isn't it, or forty-eight, since you fed me last?

WARDER: Can't get over what you're doing to this floor.

PRISONER: How long is it?

WARDER: Just a stone floor, and it's coming up like marble, like glass, the way you're doing it. I must say it's a nice change—what some of 'em will do to their floors would surprise you. Tell you what, I'll get you a nice tin o' polish, how would that be, and a proper cloth. Real show place, you're making this. You can get as much sleep as you like now, though, you know. I told you the switch is working in here now. What do you dream about, eh? Girls? Had a chap once in solitary a long time used to take a mop to bed with him and stroke its hair. But it got so he ate it in the end, and they took him away.

PRISONER: Am I not going to see him again? Are

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they just going to leave me here now? No trial, here for ever? Is that it?

WARDER: Now why should it be?

PRISONER: It's months since I've seen him.

WARDER: Mm. Like it's days since breakfast. (*He begins clearing the table.*)

PRISONER: It's terrifying the way I've got dependant on him. I didn't realize it—he could stop me going mad, don't you see? I'm no good to them mad, am I? Explain that to them, you get them to see that, and make him send for me again.

WARDER: Now then, don't you start fretting. You say some of that everlasting Bible of yours, or do your sums.

PRISONER: Don't go yet. What time will you be back? If I could make a sundial—if the window wasn't boarded. Wait. Leave me that jug. A water clock. Look, I'm going to make a bag with a corner of the blanket and time how long the water takes to pour through. I'll know next time you leave me alone for a couple of days like that, so don't you try it on again.

WARDER: Now, now, you know I can't do that, leaving crockery about in the cells. Come on, give it here.

[*The Prisoner clutches the jug to him.*]

PRISONER: I only want it to tell the time with.

WARDER: Come on, now.

PRISONER: No, I want it. (*He catches an echo of the childish indignity of the situation. With an effort, he puts the jug quietly on the tray.*) I warn you. I shall make a clock somehow. . . . Something running, something rolling, something round—a stud. (*Brushing past the Warder he hurries to his cassock which lies over a chair, and rips off a button.*) Good. Now a slope.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

[The Warder who has paused, watching him, lifts the tray from the table.]

It'll need a gentle but quite definite slope. The table.

[He tries to prop the ledge of the table on the back of the chair.]

WARDER: Cuckoo! That's what you want for a clock, a cuckoo! My Gran had one. I stuck his little door up so he couldn't get out, and you could hear him inside, whirring away, trying to fly out. I thought he was alive! Tt! Kids! Cuckoo! *(Laughing delightedly at his amusing youth—he lets himself out.)*

PRISONER: No good when one's asleep, of course, but I'll be able to keep a check on you in the daytime. . . .

[He turns and realizes he is alone, and coughs in an embarrassed way. Feeling his pulse with one hand, he sets the button rolling from the top of the table. It goes much too fast. He considers, and has another idea. He puts his folded blanket under one leg of the table. Now the button won't roll at all. He drags the table over to the wall and tilts two legs against it. The button still rolls too fast. He starts to adjust the slope and then suddenly overthrows the table violently and stands shuddering. After a moment he goes over to the bed and sits down.]

[After a moment he makes as though to kneel and then with a hopeless sigh gets up, takes his rag and starts his rhythmic polishing of the floor, stressing the rhythm of the words heavily.]

In principio erat verbum et verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat—

[He stops, shocked at his use of the words. He starts again, this time singing or humming.]

THE PRISONER

*Dies irae, dies illa
Solvat saeculum in favilla
Teste David cum——*

[*He stops again and after a moment goes on rubbing without rhythm in silence. He hears a noise, but thinks he must be wrong. The door opens and the Warder appears again with a tray.*]

(*Whispering hoarsely.*) A trick. It's a trick.

WARDER: Still at it? My! See your face in it soon.

PRISONER: What time is it supposed to be now?

WARDER: Hey! What've you been up to? Pick it up!

PRISONER (*shouting*): No! Not till you tell me what time it is! (*Gets a grip on himself and sets the table on its legs.*) Look, I've done it. How long is it since you came before?

[*The Warder puts down the tray. The Prisoner starts to eat automatically.*]

WARDER: Twelve o'clock dinner, eight o'clock supper, in the regulations. You work it out. I just do what I'm told.

PRISONER: Eight hours? You haven't been out of this cell eight minutes.

WARDER: Worked up a pretty good appetite, haven't you, in eight minutes?

PRISONER: Well, I was hungry, I hadn't eaten for three days.

WARDER: Eight minutes, you said.

PRISONER: You're tricking me, you're trying to fool me—— (*He clutches at the Warder*).

WARDER: Now, none o' that. You know better than that.

PRISONER: Tell me the truth, say it was three days before and only ten minutes now——say it——

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

[*He shakes the Warder who, without effort, imprisons his arms.*]

WARDER: Now, you don't want to get violent, you're not the violent sort. That's right. Easy now.

PRISONER: Are you doing this to me, or am I going out of my mind?

WARDER: Don't ask me.

PRISONER: You've seen prisoners run mad.

WARDER: 'S right.

PRISONER: Like me?

WARDER: It's interesting. Depends how much store a man sets by his wits—the more, the easier he loses them. A man that sits and watches his mind work—you can't leave him alone five minutes in the dark without him frightening himself to death.

PRISONER: The Interrogator—he's a doctor, he can't want my mind unhinged. Can't you get to see him? Ask him—no. Yes, say I asked him to see me. I won't confess, don't let him think—yes, even let him think it, I can take care of that. Ask him, beg him, to see me again.

WARDER: Just ring him up, I suppose, and ask you both to dinner at my club. . . ? (*He takes the tray.*)

PRISONER: It's what he wants, what he wanted—the voluntary patient, the man on the psychiatrist's couch who wants to talk.

WARDER: Mm? 'S right, they say he always gets what he wants. And go easy with the furniture. This cell isn't padded, you get rough and you're liable to smash things. 'Night. Turn the light out when you want. Always complain at first, and then when you say they can, they never want to. Get so you don't like the dark, don't you? Well—'night, 'night.

[*The Warder goes out—the Prisoner continues the conversation in imagination.*]

THE PRISONER

PRISONER: "Not like the dark?" "My good fellow do you really think I'm afraid of the——" "My good fellow——"

[He looks round the cell—as though he might forget what it looks like—and goes to the light switch. He switches out the light. In the darkness the springs of the iron bedstead can be heard creaking. There is silence.]

(Screaming.) Quiet! Quiet!

[The light is switched on and he is seen clinging to the switch, painting as though he has been running. He leans against the wall.]

Save us, O Lord, while we wake, and keep us while we sleep, that we may watch with Christ and sleep in peace.

Curtain

Scene 2

Scene: The Interrogation Room.

Time: Day.

Both Prisoner and Interrogator are asleep. The Prisoner wears shirt and trousers—no cassock. The door opens and the interrogation room Warder comes in. The Interrogator wakes at once, takes a quick look at his watch and at the Prisoner, and stays the Warder from waking him. He takes a note from the Warder and reads it.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

INTERROGATOR: No. Tell them no; they had their chance, we're playing it my way now. And ask my secretary to come down. We'll be keeping at it; some hours, anyway.

[The Warden salutes and goes out. The Interrogator looks down thoughtfully at the sleeping Prisoner and then walks away from him, thoughtfully. He takes a bowl from the extra desk with a sponge in it, which he holds to the back of the Prisoner's neck.]

PRISONER: No.

[The Interrogator pours a glass of water, which he gives him]

INTERROGATOR: We're making progress, you know.

PRISONER: Thank you. I'm sorry you should think so.

INTERROGATOR: Oh, not with the arms in the Cathedral crypt. We're getting to know each other better.

PRISONER: I've known no one else, since I was born, a hundred years ago.

INTERROGATOR: Tell me, what am I like?

PRISONER: Any scientist. A man with a toy too big to play with. Can't let it go, but frightened of it yourself sometimes.

INTERROGATOR: As a man——

PRISONER: One who might have been a friend.

INTERROGATOR: I believe you've been a lonely devil. You've had a hard life.

PRISONER: The aristocrat to the priest: a hard life. Plenty to eat, a pen or a breviary in soft hands, not a pick or the shudder of a pneumatic drill; air—or incense—in the lungs, not coaldust or sulphur fumes. You and I shouldn't insult each other without sympathy—even to gain that friendship, so late.

THE PRISONER

INTERROGATOR: Before dawn in the fish market, at ten years old——

PRISONER: But warm in school by nine o'clock, with the fat fruits of my scholarship.

INTERROGATOR: Charles—did your clothes smell of fish?

[*There is an endless pause.*]

PRISONER: Heavens, that it should rile me still! “Cod guts and mackerel blood!” “Look, there are squashed fish eyes sticking to his boots!”

INTERROGATOR: Dear little boys!

PRISONER: I used to go to the market with just my overall on over my skin, even when the snow was up to our ankles between the stalls. And I washed! Lord, how I washed! I used to save up and buy every new brand of soap I saw advertised. I burned the skin off my hands with disinfectants. And then: “Sir, must I sit next to him? He stinks of fish.”

INTERROGATOR: Our happy schooldays!

PRISONER: Torment. And always shame.

INTERROGATOR: Why?

[*The door opens briskly and the Secretary bustles importantly in.*]

God damn and blast you, you flaming little pest, what in hell's name do you mean by bursting in here at a moment like this. . . . Hold it. . . . Yes, yes, I did send for you. I beg your pardon, Stephen. You interrupted a train of thought. Please, later. I'll ring. Tell them I'll dictate the progress report later. I'm sorry.

[*The Secretary goes.*]

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

PRISONER: And it was only idle gossip he interrupted, poor chap—wasn't it?

INTERROGATOR: I should have thought so. What was I saying? Weren't we talking about our schooldays?

PRISONER: My schooldays.

INTERROGATOR: I was only waiting my chance to cut in.

PRISONER: Don't tell me anyone ever cried "stinking fish!" after you.

INTERROGATOR: No one called anything after me. I was alone. My school-room was a corner of the library, because my tutor was too lazy to move away from his favourite fire. Winter and summer, a roasting fire and the old genius dozing over his grubby notes. Hanetau, the historian.

PRISONER: Hanetau!

INTERROGATOR: Lucky, wasn't I? A man steeped in Europe's past. How I hated Europe's past, with all the future racing away from me! I got my grandfather to let the village schoolmaster come up and teach me mathematics—not that he knew much, poor scared little runt!—and the doctor had some physics and chemistry he hadn't quite forgotten.

PRISONER: Did you want to learn so much?

INTERROGATOR: I wanted to break out of the past, and twist the future all my way. I was a clever little devil, I could run rings round that huddle of puzzled old men; I thought I'd run rings round the world, if I took a couple of degrees. By the way, I noticed an odd thing on the files: you won a scholarship to the University at a fantastically early age, and yet you never took it up. Why? You must have had to work yourself sick and dizzy to get up to that standard so young.

PRISONER: Black coffee at night—an alarm clock under my pillow——

THE PRISONER

INTERROGATOR: You started early to do without sleep. You should have warned me. But after all that, why didn't you go through with the University?

PRISONER: I had a vocation to the Priesthood.

INTERROGATOR: You found that out suddenly—between sitting for the scholarship and winning it.

PRISONER: No, I had always known it. I had tried to evade it.

INTERROGATOR: Why?

PRISONER: That's an odd question for a layman, surely. I didn't think I was worthy.

INTERROGATOR: So you won the scholarship and then suddenly overnight you found yourself worthy of the Priesthood after all.

PRISONER: No, I found that for me—I had to be a priest.

INTERROGATOR: Why?

PRISONER: I had to. I had to. That and the next step, and the next, all my life, shirk nothing, duck nothing, overcome everything.

INTERROGATOR: Like going into the pulpit without being sick?

PRISONER: Without even feeling it.

INTERROGATOR: Have you ever?

PRISONER: Never.

INTERROGATOR: Ashamed?

PRISONER: To preach? Why should I be?

INTERROGATOR (*giving it up*): Why indeed? If I'd led your life, I'd preach myself. Well, I went to the University instead of you—and look where it's landed us both! Forgive me, they'll be clamouring like a pack of hounds for their confounded report. (*He goes to the house 'phone.*) Three one. . . . Stephen, if you'll be good enough. . . . Thank you, and bring your typewriter. (*He hangs up and goes to the window.*) A lovely day. Come and look.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

[*The Prisoner joins him at the window. The Interrogator opens it and the Prisoner breathes deeply.*]

Lot of shipping on the river. With these spring floods the boats seem to ride above the streets. I don't think you can see the roof of the Cathedral from here. . . .

PRISONER: You can see the roof of the Cancer Research Hospital, though.

INTERROGATOR: I was wrong about that, wasn't I? It was hard for you.

PRISONER: No, not as you mean it. Not hard to condemn her. You knew I must do it. Under the Occupation even people without religion or belief learned of duties above human relationships.

INTERROGATOR: Yet you found it hard in some way I don't understand.

PRISONER: Not hard to be "heartless". Terrible to be without heart.

INTERROGATOR: You wish you'd found the decision harder to make?

PRISONER: For me, the hard decision would have been to sign the confession and destroy myself and my cause. But the cause was God's, not mine. I'd no choice—except to torment myself with it. Is there news of her?

INTERROGATOR: She's alive—well. Well enough.

PRISONER: At the hospital? God forgive them, and me.

[*There is a knock at the door. They both look up, surprised. Then they laugh.*]

INTERROGATOR: Stephen, knocking at the door. I must have scared him out of seven years' growth last time. Come in!

THE PRISONER

[*The Secretary stands politely framed in the doorway.*]

Come in, Stephen, I'll dictate it now and get it over.

[*The Secretary glances enquiringly at the Prisoner as he opens his notebook.*]

That's all right. Sit down.

[*He indicates the Prisoner's chair. The Prisoner stares out of the window at first, then turns to listen.*]

"Interrogation progress report"—what is it—sixty-three or something?—and all the rest of it. Then: "No progress has been made with the formal confession drafted by the Police Department. The terms of that confession are no longer being considered even as a basis for questioning. It is undertaken that a full confession, both more appropriate and credible, will be forthcoming in the previously estimated time. The prisoner has been questioned"—however many times is it—"for a total of"—however many hours it is—"since the last report." And attach the latest medical report. Type it down here, would you, and I'll sign it right away.

[*The Secretary goes to the "quiet" typewriter at the extra desk.*]

Sorry about that. Where were we?

PRISONER: Up to schedule, apparently. Why am I to hear all this?

INTERROGATOR: Because I believe what I say. I've nothing to hide from you.

PRISONER: You must know that however deep you go you'll find no—no armaments stored in the crypt.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

INTERROGATOR: I know. I'm only spying out the nakedness of the land.

PRISONER: I ought to be afraid.

SECRETARY (*indicating typewriter*): Does this not bother you, sir?

PRISONER (*oblivious of it*): Where did you learn it all?

INTERROGATOR: Cigarette?

[*The Prisoner takes one, looking as he does so at the hand that offers it.*]

PRISONER: Those nervous fingers probing the tissues of the heart.

INTERROGATOR: Not yet the heart. When you touch the heart—

PRISONER: It stops beating?

INTERROGATOR: Perhaps, until you massage it back to life. (*He lights cigarettes for both.*) Where did I learn my trade? I specialised in forensic medicine as a doctor, and in criminal psychology as a lawyer—I've got a split personality, only both sides have the same hobby.

PRISONER: Are we interesting, the criminal classes? Are we numerous?

INTERROGATOR: The whole human race.

PRISONER: Yours must be a lucrative practice. All of us guilty of something, like the warder said—

[*The Secretary brings the Interrogator the report to sign.*]

INTERROGATOR: Oh, thanks. Much good may it do them. We know you're guilty—what does it matter to them what you are guilty of?

PRISONER: Quite. What? What did you make me say then?

INTERROGATOR: Sorry, just a moment. Stephen, get

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them delivered by messenger right away, would you? And don't forget the medical report.

[*The Secretary takes the papers and goes.*]

I beg your pardon? What were you saying?

PRISONER: I was admitting quite casually to a sense of guilt.

INTERROGATOR: My dear fellow, we were joking. You'll be getting persecution mania——

PRISONER: Well. If a man in gaol isn't entitled to feel persecuted I should like to know who is. Now what?

INTERROGATOR: Do sit down. These tiresome forms. . . . "Attitude of the prisoner to the working man," it says here. Your first curacy was in a working-class parish, wasn't it?

PRISONER: Saint Nicholas.

INTERROGATOR: Saint Nicholas? Oh, I know that district well. Rowdy political meetings in working men's clubs when I was a student. Very progressive and matey we all felt, going to them—a long way from old Hanetau by the library fire! So you were a curate at Saint Nicholas?

PRISONER: The church strategically dominating the Central Railway Viaduct in the Police Department's map.

INTERROGATOR: Noisy, wasn't it? I expect the trains punctuated your sermons as they used to do my speeches. D'you know, it always sounded to me as if I didn't mean what I said.

PRISONER: Didn't you?

INTERROGATOR: Oh, I had intellectual conviction, but—talking to those men—I never got the ring of it into my voice. I wanted to hold them, but I knew I didn't belong among them. No, the background for

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

me, the manipulation of truth, not the preaching of it.

PRISONER: The manipulation of truth!

INTERROGATOR: Well, you yourself felt sick, preaching to a houseful of empty stomachs: "Thou shalt not steal".

PRISONER: That's an easier text for the poor than for the rich—after all, they wouldn't be poor if they didn't practise it.

INTERROGATOR: And you presumably practised it yourself.

PRISONER: Why do you say that? What makes you say that?

INTERROGATOR: The habit of repartee, I think. Does it matter? Were you living a lie in that pulpit of yours? In all spiritual pride, my friend, you're trying to hoodwink me. When did you steal? Years before?

PRISONER (*laughing a little*): Not so very long before. I was very young in that pulpit.

INTERROGATOR: What was it? Chocolate at school. No, I've got it: soap!

PRISONER: Books. Books for those exams. Books, and paper, and pencils—

INTERROGATOR: You poor little devil.

PRISONER: No. I used to look down into those faces. It was in the bad days of unemployment. The faces of the women mostly—women who weren't stealing the things their men and their children needed.

INTERROGATOR: You'd needed the books.

PRISONER: Ambition, not need.

INTERROGATOR: Ambition's a hunger.

PRISONER: Besides—

INTERROGATOR: What besides?

PRISONER: I—used to take the best. The thick, shiny paper, and the pencils out of the threepenny tray.

THE PRISONER

INTERROGATOR: And be damned in splendid earnest! But surely you'd "confessed" all that off your conscience by then?

PRISONER: Oh, yes. Besides, I found there was no need to see the faces. You could look between them.

INTERROGATOR: Do you never look into the eyes of the people?

PRISONER: Now? Always. One must learn to do these things.

[*The 'phone on the extra desk rings.*]

INTERROGATOR: Blast! Excuse me. (*He goes to answer it.*) Hullo. . . . Yes, speaking. . . . Yes, General, I dictated a report this morning, it'll be on its way to you. . . . Still in the diagnosis stage. . . . You may remember that when you tried to rush it for the last international crisis, you very nearly looked the most conspicuous ass. . . . Certainly the prisoner's here, I'm in the middle of an interrogation—where do you expect him to be? No, I fancy he's asleep, he has a gift that way. . . . Not at all. Good day, General. . . .

[*He hangs up and goes over to the Prisoner who is asleep. He looks at his watch and sighs. He takes the sponge and squeezes water over his own wrists, then holds it to the back of the Prisoner's neck.*]

Talking in your sleep!

PRISONER: What did I say?

INTERROGATOR: Childhood—something about your mother.

PRISONER: What was it?

INTERROGATOR: Mm—hm. I didn't catch it. I'm half asleep myself. Come on, we'll have to keep each other up.

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

[*He takes the Prisoner's arm and starts to stroll with him, arm in arm, round the room.*]

INTERROGATOR: Tell me how you climbed from a curate in the slums to the dizzy heights in Church and State you occupy today.

PRISONER: Today?

[*They both laugh and the Interrogator presses the Prisoner's arm as they stroll.*]

INTERROGATOR: Well, not today, perhaps—but recently; and tomorrow, again. Why not?

Curtain

Scene 3

Scene: The Interrogation Room.

Time: Night.

The Prisoner, in shirt and trousers and looking dishevelled, is struggling hysterically with the Interrogation Room Warder. The Interrogator watches.

PRISONER: I'll kill him—let me get at him.

[*In obedience to the uplifted hand of the Interrogator, the Warder is careful only to restrain him. Eventually his struggles weaken and the Warder lowers him, exhausted, into the Interrogator's chair, where he lies shaking and gasping.*]

THE PRISONER

INTERROGATOR: Medical Officer, at once.

[*The Warder glances in doubt at the Prisoner.*]

No, that's all right. And remind him of the regulations about speaking before he comes in—with my compliments, of course, my compliments.

[*The Warder goes. The Interrogator goes to the house 'phone into which he speaks quietly.*]

Three one. . . . Stephen. . . . Well, blast it, go and wake him, and tell him forty-eight hours. I warned them to have everything standing by, and then I can only guarantee them twenty-four hours to play with. Is the relay of stenographers laid on. . . ? Right.

[*He hangs up and goes to the Prisoner. He feels his pulse.*]

Come now, pull yourself together. It's only that you've been talking for over fifteen hours. The prison doctor's coming.

PRISONER: I can't keep watch any more.

INTERROGATOR: No need to be on guard any more. We're beyond that, aren't we? We're so close, you and I, you might as well try to be on guard against yourself.

PRISONER: Feel friendship and talk, and something knows I mustn't. . . . Have I said anything?

INTERROGATOR: No. . . .

PRISONER: About the Church?

INTERROGATOR: We're only talking about you. forget the rest. Just about you—you and me. Now, here's the doctor, you've just been a little faint—

[*The Warder shows in the Doctor. The Interrogator, behind*

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

the Prisoner's back, lays a finger on his lips. The Doctor nods briskly and goes to the Prisoner, who submits limply. The Doctor feels his pulse, looks at his eyes.]

Just faintness, talking too long. The doctor will give you something. That's it.

[The Doctor takes something from the case the Warder gives him and fills a glass.]

PRISONER: Not faintness. I—lost control. Warder. I hope I didn't hurt you. Something I had to hold off. . . .

INTERROGATOR (*to Doctor*): The last kick—poor brute. I know the signs. (*To Prisoner.*) That's right. It's all right. Drink this.

[The Doctor holds the glass to him.]

PRISONER: No, nothing in this room.

INTERROGATOR: Oh, come on, now! It's all right. Look—(*He drinks from the glass and gives it to the Prisoner.*) The things I have to drink for you. Filthy, isn't it? That's right.

[The Interrogator jerks his head quickly to the Doctor who makes the gesture of one writing a report. The Interrogator nods impatiently and the Doctor goes. The Warder sits by the door. The Interrogator starts a gesture of dismissal and then turns it into one indicating absolute quiet.]

Better? You need someone to talk-to-yourself to, when yourself won't listen. Why do you hate yourself. I know you and I don't hate you.

PRISONER: You must.

THE PRISONER

INTERROGATOR: I am supposed to, but I can't. You don't love your fellow men, do you?

PRISONER: No.

INTERROGATOR: Is that it? Or something deeper? You've no delight in your God, have you? Nor ever had?

PRISONER: No.

INTERROGATOR: Is that why you hate yourself? Your heroism in the Resistance was only to convince yourself, to prove yourself to yourself. Why should you need to? What must you keep proving?

PRISONER: The flesh not weak——

INTERROGATOR: What are you ashamed of? Women?

PRISONER: A priest.

INTERROGATOR: Even so?

PRISONER: No.

INTERROGATOR: Well, before—before——

PRISONER: Thank God, no.

INTERROGATOR: Not round the corners of your mind. Not alive, pulsing in the dark, not veiled, drowned, buried, waiting?

PRISONER: No.

INTERROGATOR: You think your life was a façade. What were you hiding? Why were you ashamed?

PRISONER: Unclean flesh.

INTERROGATOR: Yes. Yes?

PRISONER: My body of her flesh and blood.

INTERROGATOR: Your mother.

PRISONER: Filth of her filth. I, me, at the root of it, her lust.

INTERROGATOR: Behind the Fish Market. A prostitute?

PRISONER: Not even for money. A whore. Not even for money, for lust.

INTERROGATOR: Yes.

PRISONER: Whelped in the kennel. Naked lust. Oh,

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

I put a scholar's gown on it, wrapped it in a cassock, pride to cover it, and then success to justify the pride, something, always, to prove—what wasn't there.

INTERROGATOR: Not there. No love?

PRISONER: Sentimental fools! There's no love in the kennel! Desire, seduction, and a quick satisfaction, and on to the next. There's no love in some of us! Don't you think I'd have found it if there were?

INTERROGATOR: Heredity. You were afraid——

PRISONER: Oh, that cant phrase. Heredity. What else is my flesh but her flesh, where else did I get this crawling body that I'm buried in? All right, environment! The environment of a bed in the other room, listening to new feet blundering up the staircase, the whispering and the smothered laughter, and the bedsprings screeching beyond the stupid flowered paper on the wall! Remembering the smell of the woman who bent over you to try and kiss you good night. Where, before I was born or after it, would I find a heart?

INTERROGATOR: Surely you proved to yourself——

PRISONER: Chastity, temperance, fortitude—but no love. I can serve men, or God, or my country, but I can't care. Open it up, tear it open, look for a heart—there's nothing there!

[He collapses, exhausted and fainting. The Interrogator stands looking down at him.]

INTERROGATOR (*standing for a moment, steeling himself for the final stage—he does not move or touch the Prisoner. At last he takes the jug and dashes water over him*): You fake, you empty husk of a man. Not so much alive in you as a maggot.

[The Prisoner rises, swaying.]

THE PRISONER

The National Monument! The hero of the Resistance who outwitted the Gestapo for his own vanity, the martyr for the Church who is only resisting for his own pride.

PRISONER: Yes.

INTERROGATOR: His Eminence the Cardinal, the Papal Chaplain, who flies to Rome on the high international business of the Church, the diplomat, the wit, the cultivated man of the world, is that you, Eminence? That's what you've shown the world, that, and the great preacher with the voice of fire and ice, who could fill your huge Cathedral to the doors with intellectuals and society women and the sweepings of the slums—Yes, you've lived a good life, haven't you? For the greater glory of you, for the making of a Prince of the Church, for the proving and perfecting of the miserable little bastard of a backstreet drab who smelt of fish.

PRISONER: Forgiveness.

INTERROGATOR: Did you preach forgiveness, up there in your fine pulpit, to those hungry faces with the eyes you didn't dare look down into, forgiveness for those that stole?

PRISONER: Of course—

INTERROGATOR: But with restitution. Didn't they have to give back what they'd stolen? Mustn't they make amends and return what they'd taken, poor devils, before they could be forgiven? But not you. You could sin and wallow in the profit of it, you could steal—you could steal the estimation of the world, and hug it to yourself to stuff the empty place where your heart ought to be. You could feed your hungry vanity with stolen honour and then confess your pride and be forgiven. You never had to give back what you stole.

PRISONER: Stolen honour—

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

INTERROGATOR: Yes, stolen honour! You know what you let men think of you and you knew the cold, proud fake you were, without the capacity for love of God or man! What right had you to honour? What right?

PRISONER: Restitution. How can you give back honour?

[*This is the crucial moment for the Interrogator. He pauses for a moment, registering now.*]

INTERROGATOR: Give it back. Oh—difficult. Deface the National Monument, pull it down? No, that'd be suicide, there'd be nothing left.

PRISONER: Nothing? Is there no more to me than that façade?

INTERROGATOR: Nothing. Pride. A prig who had to be respectable—a small man who had to be great and called it a vocation.

PRISONER: Oh, God. What to do?

INTERROGATOR (*with an effort*): If you have the courage, tear down the façade, throw them back their dream opinion of you, rid yourself of it, be yourself at last.

PRISONER: How?

INTERROGATOR: Tell them, as you've told me. But it'd take more than courage to do that.

PRISONER: It would take humility.

INTERROGATOR: A majestic splendour of humility.

PRISONER (*doubtfully*): Splendour?

INTERROGATOR (*quickly*): To end the splendour. Abasement.

PRISONER: Smash it, shatter it, grind it in the dust! Oh, but I've loathed it so!

INTERROGATOR: You'll do it?

[*The door opens quietly and the Secretary comes in, still*

THE PRISONER

disarrayed from a hasty call. The Interrogator grips something to control his emotion and signs to him to go. The Secretary, agitated but insistent, gives him a piece of paper, which the Interrogator, shaking with tension, reads. The Prisoner suddenly kneels.]

(*Whispering.*) Twenty-four hours. I warned them to have everything laid on.

[*The Secretary whispers in his ear.*]

They've got to be ready for the public hearing. Tell them that. It's in my grasp, and I shall be able to hold it for twenty-four hours.

[*He indicates the Prisoner, who kneels, his hands over his ears, trying to concentrate his swimming thoughts. The Secretary whispers again. The Prisoner notices him and rises.*]

PRISONER: Stephen.

[*The Interrogator takes the Secretary by the arm and urges him out of the room, closing the door softly. The Prisoner is trying to get his bearings.*]

That was Stephen. You have to be careful in here not to say——

INTERROGATOR (*pitching on the interrupted note*): But you could hardly do that to your reputation, could you—to yourself?

PRISONER: I mustn't sign the confession.

INTERROGATOR: No, not the confession.

PRISONER: Not harm the Church or the people——

INTERROGATOR: We've given that up, remember? It's only you we're talking about now, nothing to

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

do with politics, you and the honour of your soul. A different confession about nothing but you.

PRISONER: A true confession?

INTERROGATOR: Yes, a true confession, that you could sign.

PRISONER: That I must sign.

INTERROGATOR (*breathes a long sigh but still goes carefully*): What must you say?

PRISONER: All that I've told you. The mockery of a man.

INTERROGATOR: Will they ever believe it?

PRISONER: There's no restitution if I can't make them believe it.

[*The Interrogator signs behind the Prisoner's back to the Warden, who switches on the recording apparatus.*]

INTERROGATOR: What shall you say?

PRISONER: That I am the son of my mother, and my whole life a fantasy to hide me. Write that I lied my way through school and stole my way to a scholarship. Write that I became a priest for my own glory and that all my service was to my own spiritual pride. Write that I never had any love—love of the heart—for God. I never had a heart. The only prayer I ever prayed from—almost from—a heart was "Lord, I believe; help Thou my unbelief."

INTERROGATOR: And the people? The faces below the pulpit?

PRISONER: Write that I posed and postured for them. I ate when they were hungry. Tell them that when they called me in the night my first thought was anger. A woman dying in child-birth, uselessly, of a dead child, a man on the railway siding hanging mangled and screaming in the jaws of a crane, and my first thought when they woke me to go to them was anger,

THE PRISONER

hatred of their stupidity and their suffering. I prayed for forgiveness, but I knew I had no heart.

INTERROGATOR: And in the war——

PRISONER: Write that I betrayed them.

[The Interrogator is terrified of saying anything, but he needs more. He whispers.]

INTERROGATOR: That you betrayed them. How?

PRISONER: Write that, just that. Write that I betrayed them, and finish the mockery for ever.

[The Interrogator waits to see if any more will come, and then deliberately breaks the atmosphere. He stretches and yawns.]

INTERROGATOR: Oh well, it's late. Soon be dawn. *(He laughs.)* It won't do, you know. Put like that, they'll never believe it.

PRISONER: Why do you laugh? Why do you say that?

INTERROGATOR: Because you don't believe it, not one sanctimonious word of it.

PRISONER: I spoke in all sincerity.

INTERROGATOR: "In all humility!" I know. Not you! You know if I wrote that down it would read like the death-bed of a saint. Still at it, my dear humbug. If we put that out, and shot you at dawn, you'd be canonised within a year; well, twenty-five years, or however long it takes.

PRISONER: What can I do?

INTERROGATOR: Use your wits, man! There's only one line in all that weak rigmarole that would convey the truth.

PRISONER: What was that?

INTERROGATOR: That in the war you betrayed them.

PRISONER: Not true.

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

INTERROGATOR: Yes, that's why.

PRISONER: No, no, that's madness!

INTERROGATOR: It's a mad world. Tell them the truth, and it only gleams like another false facet of virtue in your shining humility. Do you really want to start again as low as the gutter you came from? Tell them you betrayed them in the war. That they can understand.

PRISONER: The men who worked under me—I betrayed them to the Gestapo. The links with the Allies, the chain that led out of the country. In the end I answered all they wanted to know. (*He looks at and feels his hands.*) Oh, God, am I doing right at last?

INTERROGATOR: Have you the courage to go through with this?

PRISONER: To sign this——

INTERROGATOR: Sign? They'll not believe it.

PRISONER: My signature?

INTERROGATOR: Faked, they'll say.

PRISONER: Recorded——

INTERROGATOR: You know what can be said yourself about recordings?

PRISONER: In court.

INTERROGATOR: In the public court? Before the judge and jury, the people, and foreign journalists?

PRISONER: Yes.

INTERROGATOR: Could you do that?

PRISONER: I must.

INTERROGATOR: It couldn't be done.

PRISONER: It must be done.

INTERROGATOR (*elaborately*): The Government can hardly be expected to put on so elaborate a show as a State trial just to restore the honour of your immortal soul.

THE PRISONER

PRISONER: Don't play with me, don't mock me. It must be done.

INTERROGATOR: You know, there is one way——

PRISONER: What?

INTERROGATOR: Throw in enough politics to leaven the loaf, and they'll eat it.

PRISONER: Politics? I mustn't confess, sign anything, I mustn't—I mustn't——

INTERROGATOR: The last shred of pride that spoils it all! You mustn't weaken, you mustn't fail, you, so certain of yourself when you arrived, with your wit and your sacred hands, and your insufferable conceit!

PRISONER (*begins to laugh*): That's it, isn't it? Let them see me in the weakness of the flesh and the meanness of the spirit, that will be degradation, that will be shame enough to burn the past and come through the flames, free.

INTERROGATOR: That is hysteria.

PRISONER: No. No, calm. Forgive me a moment.

INTERROGATOR: No hysteria, and no hypnosis. I can't hypnotise you into saying anything you think wrong, remember that. It must be your will, not mine. Do you believe that this is what you must go through with?

PRISONER: Only this way. Not drugged, nor hypnotised, nor hysterical. Sane and whole, and with the courage—with the grace of God—to make restitution in my own way. Deface the monument.

[*The Interrogator signs to the Warder, who brings the carafe and glass. The Interrogator pours water and drops into it the contents of a capsule.*]

INTERROGATOR: You must rest now. It's a long time since you slept properly. You'll sleep well, and when you wake you'll walk straight into the court and shed the burden of your life.

ACT TWO, SCENE THREE

[He gives the glass to the Prisoner, whose hand goes to his head in the effort to concentrate.]

PRISONER: You—you always taste it first.

[The Interrogator hesitates. The Warder makes a movement.]

INTERROGATOR: Warder. Tell my secretary to carry on with the programme. The time factor remains as I said. Everything is in order for an hour or two.

PRISONER: You must taste it.

INTERROGATOR: Of course. Here's to you, my friend.

[He toasts him and takes a long sip from the glass.]

[The Prisoner drinks after him, thirstily. The Warder takes his arm and raises him, and with a small formal bow to the Interrogator goes out on the Warder's arm.]

The Interrogator covers his face with his hands. After a moment he gets to his desk, lowers himself into his chair and with the abandonment of exhaustion, head on arms, falls asleep.]

Curtain

ACT THREE

Scene I

Scene: The Cell.

Time: Night.

The shutters have been removed from the window, the overhead practical light is not on, and moonlight streams in.

The Prisoner, fully dressed, lies motionless on his bed.

After a pause, the cell Warder appears, opening the door quietly.

WARDER: You awake? (*He switches the light on and goes over to the bed, sees the Prisoner's eyes are open and follows their direction.*) Yes. . . . Mm? Nothing up there that I can see. Let you have your sleep out, after the court. And you've slept, haven't you? Five good meals you've missed.

[*Warder goes out, leaving the door ajar, and comes back with a tray.*]

It's eight o'clock, if you're interested. No reason why you shouldn't know the time o' night now, is there?—what's left of it, eh? (*He laughs cheerfully.*) Pity to let it slip by, eh, and wake up and find it all gone. (*He arranges food on table.*)

PRISONER (*forcing himself to it*): What did the newspapers say?

WARDER: Whoo! Talk about headlines! "Appalling Confession", and your name and photograph, and hardly any room for anything else in the papers.

PRISONER: I must see them.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

WARDER: There! Day after the sentence, every criminal, nearly, I've ever known, first they sleep the round of the clock, like you done, then they wake up to their dinner and they ask me one question: "What do they say about me in the papers?" Murderers, specially; and specially the rough ones, the ones that did it messy: "What do they say about me in the papers?" Proud, you see, and wanting everyone to know.

PRISONER: Everyone to know. . . .

WARDER: Oh? . . . Takes all sorts to make a world. Cheer up. You want to eat you know. Oh, now you're not going to go on hunger strike, for heaven's sake? You politicals!

PRISONER: I am condemned to die, thank God.

WARDER: Yes, but you'll die the way it's laid down in the regulations; you just remember that! None of your hunger-striking, nor bits of jagged iron opening an artery and blood all over your beautiful cell floor. You wait for the proper time and place, my lad, and eat up now. . . . Hey! Dinner! Tell you what, I can't give you the papers to read, but there's nothing says I can't tell you bits out of them, is there?

PRISONER: Tell me——

WARDER: Dinner first.

PRISONER: I—I can't——

WARDER: You eat a bit, I read a bit. How's that?

[The Prisoner makes a pretence of intending to eat. Having once brought himself to the pitch of facing it, he is in an agony to know. With maddening deliberation, the Warder produces from an inner pocket of his uniform a newspaper folded into an almost impossibly small compass, which he opens with great care.]

PRISONER: Please, I must know what they've said——

THE PRISONER

[*With equal deliberation he produces a pair of spectacles from another pocket, and a handkerchief to polish them with from a third.*]

Now—now! And you get on with that good dinner.

[*He begins to read with the broken rhythm and false emphasis of the unaccustomed reader.*]

“ Trial Reveals Church’s True Role ”—“ Loathsome Confessions by Traitor Priest ”—and then there’s your picture. . . . Not very like, more proud-looking. An old one, I suppose.

PRISONER: Please——

WARDER: Yes. Well, it says: “ Speaking well and clearly, he assured the court he had been subjected to no drugs or torture, and made his confession of his own free will.”

PRISONER: Yes, yes, but what does it say I said?

WARDER: “ He admitted to personal crimes and vices, in which he had wallowed from childhood—detailed transcription page four——”

PRISONER: No, no, about the Church. Read on there.

WARDER: Oh, here’s a bit I wanted to ask you: “ It has shocked patriotic Catholics even more to learn that since the Liberation he has been receiving for his organisation large sums from abroad to foment sabotage and unrest; and he admitted ”—here’s the bit—“ that he had been personally guilty of esp—espyo——”

PRISONER: Espionage.

WARDER: Yes. Now, what’s that, eh?

PRISONER: Spying.

WARDER (*disappointed*): Oh, is that all. Here, you’re not playing fair, get on with it. . . . There’s another

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

headline, here—"Worst blow Churches have ever received." Good for you!

PRISONER: Have they printed a denial from the Bishops?

WARDER: Well, no one would hardly believe them, would they? I mean, you said yourself you weren't drugged nor hypnotised.

PRISONER: Anything from the Vatican—from the Pope?

WARDER: Yes, he said something about it was a sin to tamper with the minds of men; and the paper says he's a fine one to talk about that! . . . Morning papers, evening papers—never seen anything like it. Foreign papers, too—it has bits out of them, translated, tonight. The things you told 'em! You're a proper priest, all right, eh?

[*The Warder sees the untasted food.*]

Hey! Now that's too bad—I trusted you.

PRISONER: You! (*He gives a sobbing laugh.*) Yes, you did, too. I'm sorry. Yes, I must live till the judgment is executed. (*He tries to eat.*)

WARDER: Swallow all right?

PRISONER: I could drink, I think. (*He drinks.*)

WARDER: That's right. Had a boy in here once, couldn't swallow a thing. Killed three sailors with a hand-spike in a fight in the docks, but a nice quiet kid, not spiteful or out to make trouble for you. Just couldn't seem to swallow. Nervous stricture, the doctor said. Hanging, see? But I soon settled him. "They've changed your sentence, lad," I said, "they're bringing in an electric chair, like in America." Ate like a wolf after that: (*He moves downstage of pillar.*) only standing up, see? (*He sits on pillar seat.*) That's right, take your time.

THE PRISONER

[From off stage, the sound of the Prisoner's own voice is heard approaching.]

PRISONER'S VOICE (*recorded*): Yes, it's a free and spontaneous confession. I believe it's the only way. I have got to make the world believe I did these things.

[*The Warden looks round at the Prisoner who thinks that he alone hears the voice.*]

PRISONER (*whispering*): Madness. . . .

PRISONER'S VOICE: You must believe the worst that I can find to say.

PRISONER: No—no!

[*The door is opened and the Interrogation Room Warden enters carrying a portable radio set. He comes down the stairs leaving the door open.*]

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE: The Prisoner's voice, as you can hear from that recording, was clear and normal.

WARDER (*rising*): Thought I heard something funny.

[*The Interrogation Room Warden goes to bed, puts radio down and sits to opposite prompt of it.*]

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE: We will now play back some other passages from the official recordings of this trial, which has shaken the misplaced faith of millions in this country and abroad.

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: You have not been a good priest, you say?

WARDER: Here, shut the door. (*The Interrogation Room Warden goes up and shuts the door, then sits on the third step down. The cell Warden crosses to bed and sits beside the radio.*)

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

There's nothing about this in the regulations—it's never happened before. Listen!

PRISONER'S VOICE: No. A bad priest.

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Will you tell the court what you mean by that?

PRISONER'S VOICE: My whole life was a lie, a show. I was a fake from beginning to end. A fraud on the people.

WARDER: You. Like it?

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Are you just saying that out of saintly humility?

WARDER: Him.

PRISONER'S VOICE: No! No! I stole—I stole money they gave the Church for the poor——

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Did you use the information you learned in the confessional for blackmail?

PRISONER'S VOICE: Yes. Yes.

PRISONER: Oh, my people. . . . (*He rises, leans against wall down left, and then crosses below table to down right.*)

WARDER: That'll teach them to trust the priests, eh?

ANNOUNCER'S VOICE: There was an outcry in the public gallery at this point——

[*As the Prisoner crosses to right, he reaches as if about to be sick. The Interrogation Room Warder, seeing the obvious emotion of the Prisoner, indicates it to the Warder.*]

WARDER: Eh? . . . Oh. Get the doctor. He's in Number Four.

[*The Room Warder hurries out, leaving door open. In watching the Prisoner the Warder forgets about the radio.*]

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Do you confess that under the Occupation you betrayed the names of Resistance workers?

THE PRISONER

PRISONER'S VOICE: I confess that.

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Do you confess that you gave the Gestapo everything they wanted——

PRISONER'S VOICE: I confess that.

[*The Prisoner begins to chant during these lines, and continues while the voices on the radio go on, as emotionlessly as a priest in church.*]

PRISONER: *Confiteor Deo Omnipotenti, beatæ Mariæ semper vigini, beato Michaeli Archangelo, beato Joanni Baptistæ, sanctis Apostolis Petro et Paulo, omnibus sanctis, et vobis fratres quia peccavi nimis cogitatione, verbo, et opere——*

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Did you betray the underground links with the Allies in return for immunity for Church rights and property?

PRISONER'S VOICE: I did.

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Did you assist the enemy in laying traps for Allied parachutists bringing arms and equipment for the Resistance?

PRISONER'S VOICE: I did.

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Why do you confess this now?

PRISONER: *Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa——*

PRISONER'S VOICE: To make amends.

[*The Prisoner faints clean away.*]

WARDER: Hell!

[*He pulls the Prisoner on the floor to a half-sitting position against the column, so as to press his head down towards his knees. The voices on the radio continue.*]

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: And since the end of the war, have you received funds from abroad?

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

PRISONER'S VOICE: Yes. To pay for. . . . (*He hesitates.*)

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Sabotage? Bribery?

PRISONER'S VOICE: Yes.

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Rigging the stock markets?

PRISONER'S VOICE: Yes.

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Do you confess that you have attempted the corruption of the National Army?

PRISONER'S VOICE: Yes. I confess that.

[*The Prisoner is beginning to come round.*]

WARDER: That's right. Come on, now—(*He moves downstage around the prisoner and collects the blanket which he threw down at the foot of the stairs as he got up.*)

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Do you confess that you have paid Catholic officers and men in responsible positions to convey secret information to you for transmission abroad?

PRISONER'S VOICE: Yes I have done that.

[*The Prisoner is moaning and muttering incoherently. The Warder holds the two ends of the blanket firmly round the Prisoner, so that his arms are pinioned.*]

WARDER: Where's that bloody doctor—

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Do you admit that you have made such men impossible to trust? All men of your way of thought impossible to trust?

PRISONER'S VOICE { All men like me are impossible
PRISONER { to trust.

[*As soon as the Prisoner has the blanket wrapped round him, the Doctor enters, followed by the Room Warder, who leaves the door open and then stands between the stairs and the bed. The Doctor goes to the table, puts his bag down, places the tray on the chair and then prepares an injection.*]

THE PRISONER

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Do you tell the Court that with absolute conviction and of your own free will unconstrained?

PRISONER'S VOICE: Yes. I do.

WARDER: Crazy. Give him a shot, or something.

[The Doctor, having filled his syringe, crosses to the Prisoner, pulls his left trouser leg up to expose the calf, and then gives him a hypodermic injection.]

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Look round this court. Look at the judge who represents your country. Look at the jury who are here to see justice done. Look out there at the sea of faces in this great hall—look in those faces—tell them at last the truth about yourself: have you betrayed your people?

PRISONER'S VOICE: I have betrayed them.

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: The world is listening, outside. Tell the world. Treachery?

PRISONER'S VOICE: Treachery.

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: Corruption?

PRISONER'S VOICE: Corruption.

INTERROGATOR'S VOICE: A whole life of lies?

PRISONER'S VOICE: Yes, yes, yes!

[The Doctor returns to the table and as he puts away his hypodermic syringe he notices the radio as if conscious of it for the first time. He goes to switch it off, but turns the wrong knob which only increases the volume. As he is looking for the correct knob, the Interrogator enters. The Doctor switches off the radio. The Interrogator moves to left of the Prisoner who is quite motionless. When he speaks, his voice is toneless.]

PRISONER: Now that I'm mad I can kill you. There's no sin, because I'm not responsible, and I can kill you

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

because I know where the chink in your armour is. It's near your heart.

[*The lethargy of the drug holds his limbs immobile, but in his imagination he is untrammelled, and thinks that what he is doing, passionlessly, is what must be done.*]

It must be stamped out, that face, that voice, evil—it must be stifled, with my hands round your throat, pressing the bubbling pulse under my thumb. (*He struggles uselessly.*) You see? You can't even struggle. The voice of life goes out of you.

[*The Interrogator takes two steps downstage.*]

(*Gently.*) *Ego absolvo te de peccatis tuis, in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti—Amen.*

[*The Prisoner falls over in sleep with his head to centre.*]

INTERROGATOR: Get him up on the bed. (*He moves downstage of the table. To Doctor.*) Thanks. I'll have a word with you about the case later, before he comes round.

[*The Doctor exits up the stairs, and the Room Warder moves the radio on to table. With the Room Warder at his head, and the cell Warder at his feet, the Prisoner is placed on the bed, his head on the pillow. The Room Warder collects the blanket which he gives to the cell Warder, and is about to go up the stairs when the Interrogator stops him.*]

(*Indicating the radio.*) Get that out of here.

[*The Room Warder takes up the radio and exits, leaving the door open. The cell Warder covers the Prisoner with the blanket.*]

THE PRISONER

WARDER: Funny thing. It's always the quiet ones and you never learn. (*Starts to clear up the overturned furniture and food.*)

[*The Interrogator sits on the edge of the bed and looks into the unconscious face of the Prisoner.*]

INTERROGATOR: He was broken by a half truth—a distorted truth. You poor fool, you were too humble. You believed me when I told you your whole life was built on pride. A proud man would have been more sceptical. (*Turning to Warder.*) What did you make of him?

WARDER: Me? Guilty.

INTERROGATOR: You'd believe all that confession of his?

WARDER: Guilty. I knew it. You could see he knew it. He won't be stuck crazy, will he, sir? I don't want this, on and off—they'll have to keep him padded up, I don't want the responsibility.

INTERROGATOR: No, he won't stay mad, poor devil. Have you ever driven a brilliant mind to pray for madness?

WARDER: Me? No. That's psychology, I expect. Progress?

INTERROGATOR: Warder—I'm going to have a word with the doctor, in a minute—will you let him know if he seems to be in too much pain again?

WARDER: Pain? There's nothing wrong with him.

INTERROGATOR (*giving it up*): No. . . . (*To himself.*) Nothing that death won't cure.

WARDER: It was seeing you sent him round the bend. What did you want to come upsetting him for?

INTERROGATOR: Clinical interest—I thought. I wanted to see what I'd left of him.

WARDER: Morbid, if you ask me. Like a murderer

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

digging up his favourite corpse to see what it looks like dead and buried. Well?

INTERROGATOR (*revolted*): Well. It's still alive. When it comes to, it may be able to crawl away into the relief of drooling idiocy, but I doubt it. Well, it had to be done. The effect has already been overwhelming.

WARDER: Looks like it. Do you a bit of good, I suppose, sir.

INTERROGATOR (*fiercely*): Never mind that! It had to be done.

WARDER: Yes. . . . Oh, yes.

INTERROGATOR: The mind of man. Reasoning and creating, and beautiful. Do you know that that's what you mean by "God"?

WARDER: I shouldn't be surprised.

INTERROGATOR (*shouting*): Then if you smash it you must expect to feel guilty of blasphemy!

WARDER: Why not get the doc to give you a shot of that, sir? (*Indicating the Prisoner.*) Do you good. You want a nice long sleep.

INTERROGATOR: I've slept.

WARDER: So had he.

INTERROGATOR: Did you notice what he said? He was the only person who could kill me, because he knew the chink in my armour.

WARDER: Don't worry, we'll keep him locked up.

INTERROGATOR: You're too late. He's got out already.

Curtain

THE PRISONER

Scene 2

Scene: *The Cell.*

Time: *Day.*

The Prisoner, carefully dressed as in first Act, is kneeling in prayer, very still. The cell Warder comes in with a tray piled high with crockery and food. He looks about and dumps it on the floor and goes out again, leaving the door ajar. The Prisoner pays no attention. The Warder comes back with a white tablecloth, which, with an air of enormous importance, he spreads on the table. The Prisoner still pays no attention and the Warder whistles on his fingers. The Prisoner looks up, and the Warder displays his cloth.

WARDER: What do you think of that?

[The Prisoner rises and stands watching the Warder thoughtfully.]

Double damask. Pattern both sides—see? Clean as a marriage bed. Never been used. Well, used, but washed since last time, that's the point. Last time. . . . Well, you don't want to think o' that, no more than the bridegroom, do you? Meals and women, take 'em as they come, one after the other, enough and not too often, and you won't get indigestion—or anything else, you hope. Nice, isn't it?

PRISONER: Beautifully laundered.

WARDER: There now! And that's an expert, mark you; altar linen, eh? God, when I was a choirboy, use the corner of the hem to so much as wipe your nose and they'd murder you. *(He is laying the breakfast.)*

PRISONER: A very—elaborate breakfast.

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

WARDER: 'S right. Appetite?

[*The Prisoner turns away.*]

PRISONER: I'll try and do it justice.

WARDER: That's the spirit. You'd be surprised, the amount of waste at these breakfasts. Course, we finish it up, you know. "Make it kippers," my mate said. "We're going to eat it—might as well get what we fancy." "Kidneys," I said. "That'll be his taste."

PRISONER: I like them very much.

WARDER: What did I say! "He'll have what he fancies," I said, "poor devil. His last taste of life." (*He whips a cover off a dish, and stands by expectantly.*)

PRISONER: Kidneys.

WARDER: Can't abide 'em, so don't you bother about the left-overs. (*He continues to prepare the table.*)

PRISONER: You're a good soul.

WARDER: Ho! No, but a job's a job, you got to do it right. And you've got to go to bed with yourself, nights, with your mind easy.

PRISONER: What time is the execution?

WARDER: No orders.

PRISONER: How long, as a rule, after breakfast?

WARDER: Half an hour, maybe. Course, since the war, with there being so many and nothing done properly, you can't tell. Go on, sit down, get your belly full. I don't have nothing to do with executions. I did the training course, and passed out well, but—promotion doesn't go by rights, these days. Don't let your kidneys get cold.

PRISONER: Shall I be allowed a priest?

WARDER: That's a good one! "Shall I be allowed a priest!" Wait till I tell them that one! Good lad. You're a good lad, I always said so . . . I hate a man that can't take it with a grin. "Shall I be allowed

THE PRISONER

a priest?" Hocus pokus porcus pie, eh? We know, eh? You're a good sort, and I'll miss you—no trouble, you've been—well, hardly. Lord knows what I'll get in here next time. Eat up.

PRISONER: Would you be allowed to leave me for a little? There's no knife, with the food all cut up, and the crockery's too thick to give a cutting edge if one broke it. . . .

WARDER: Lord, yes, if you like. Squeamish, are you? Takes everyone different, but you don't want to waste those kidneys. Take your time.

[He is going to the door when it opens and the Interrogation Room Warder appears with a note—a pass—which the cell Warder reads.]

No, he can't! *(He reads again.)* Oh, well. *(To the Prisoner.)*

[The second Warder stands back with a penetrating sniff. The Prisoner reacts to the sound. The Interrogator appears in the doorway. The other Warder goes. The Interrogator gives the cell Warder an envelope.]

INTERROGATOR: Your instructions. Read them outside.

WARDER: He's having his breakfast, sir. He's got to have time for a good breakfast. That's civilisation, and always has been.

INTERROGATOR: Yes, yes . . . outside.

[The Warder shrugs and goes.]

Well. *(There is no reaction.)*

PRISONER: What more can you want of me, now?

INTERROGATOR: Nothing more.

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

PRISONER: No. There would hardly be anything else. Must we talk. I haven't seen you in the week since the trial, and now that I hear your voice I find it hard to forgive my enemies, and I haven't long.

INTERROGATOR: Well. I've got to know this. Have you made peace with your conscience?

PRISONER: Does it concern the Government?

INTERROGATOR: No.

PRISONER: To complete the record, scientifically, for the casebook?

INTERROGATOR: For my own personal satisfaction. It wouldn't interest you, but some—principles of mine are involved.

PRISONER: Well, then: yes.

INTERROGATOR: You've forgiven yourself.

PRISONER: Oh, no. But I believe I shall be forgiven. "He who will judge us is He who made us."

INTERROGATOR: So you've found here a peace you never really knew outside. Perhaps you should find it in your heart to thank me.

PRISONER: The doctor who diagnosed the weakness? Perhaps I should.

[He speaks absolutely without interest, but the Interrogator misinterprets him.]

Shall I be allowed to see a priest before I die?

INTERROGATOR: You won't need one.

PRISONER: I beg of you, let me see a priest.

INTERROGATOR: Still so much dignity.

PRISONER: I—had the habit of it. As humbly as you like; a priest, before I die.

INTERROGATOR: You're not to die.

[The Prisoner is unable to believe he has heard aright.]

No.

PRISONER: I was condemned. I am to be hanged.

THE PRISONER

You were in court, you heard the sentence.

INTERROGATOR: It's been commuted.

PRISONER: They couldn't commute it, after what I said.

INTERROGATOR: They have.

PRISONER: I said I'd plotted madness—to set up a Council of State with myself at the head, I said—how could they let me live?

INTERROGATOR: It's policy.

PRISONER (*frightened*): To let me live? No!

INTERROGATOR: Listen. I asked to take over the business of telling you from the Prison Governor, I said it was my work to observe rare phenomena, like the sight of a man being reprieved from a revolting death.

PRISONER: Oh! (*Relaxing with infinite relief. Almost laughing.*)! I should have known by now. One last experiment, give the specimen a whiff of oxygen, and watch it wriggle on the slide under the microscope.

INTERROGATOR: I was playing at no clinical experiments. I thought I could help you to the idea. You are not to die.

[*The Prisoner studies him and is convinced.*]

PRISONER: I must. The poor, muddled, fools whose beliefs I've shattered—they must at least see that I can die.

INTERROGATOR: The sentence has been commuted.

PRISONER: "Martyrdom." That's what you're afraid of. You needn't be. No one could make the world see me as a martyr now. Suicide. That's it, they think I'll take my own life, so that they can say that I committed the last cowardice of all. No . . . I shan't do that, you know.

INTERROGATOR: No. I didn't think you would.

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

PRISONER: No. (*He turns away and there is a short pause while he faces the realization.*) I—had counted on execution. For me, this is the heavier sentence.

INTERROGATOR: There's more to come.

PRISONER: What is it? Oh, man, you know me well enough by now to realize you've told me the worst of it. Well, what is it to be? Come on. What is it to be? Road gangs, oakum, or shall I drain you a foetid swamp? What'll you have?

INTERROGATOR: You're free to go. (*Pause*) The gates will be opened. You've only to walk through.

PRISONER: I was mad, at the trial, in a way. And then that insane fit of hysteria afterwards. Am I mad after all? Or asleep. . . ? They say you can't dream a taste. (*He takes something from the table and tries to eat it.*) Too dry, my mouth. They couldn't set me free.

INTERROGATOR: Can't you see? The harm's done, the object's achieved, but the effect mustn't be spoiled. Dead, you might be a martyr; imprisoned, you'd be an enigma; free, sane, whole, walking the world in the broad light of day, what harm can you do the Government?

PRISONER: They'd be mad to risk it—what I might say—

INTERROGATOR: That you were talked into it?

PRISONER: It's another of your tricks. It can't be true.

INTERROGATOR: Warder! (*The Interrogator goes to the door and raps on it, the Warder comes in. He grins cheerfully at the Prisoner.*)

WARDER: Think of that, eh?

INTERROGATOR: Give me the instructions.

WARDER: That's addressed to me—"Cell Warder number six".

INTERROGATOR: Idiot, the Governor and the gate

THE PRISONER

warder and half a dozen other people have copies. Well, give it to the prisoner.

[*The Warder gives the paper to the Prisoner who reads it while the Warder talks.*]

WARDER: Oh, want to see it in black and white, eh? Shook me, I don't mind telling you.

[*The lack of reaction from the Prisoner penetrates.*]

(*To Interrogator.*) Takes 'em different, you know, sir. Knew one once went out of his mind when the reprieve came. Straight jacket. You couldn't help laughing. "I'd sooner be hanged any day of the week," I said to my mate, "than look such a bloody damn fool as that, floundering about and squeaking like a bat, in a straight jacket." Couldn't help laughing. Sooner be hanged.

INTERROGATOR: Get out. Go on—outside.

WARDER: This here is my cell, sir. Number six.

INTERROGATOR: Get out.

WARDER: Amachers! (*He goes, closing the door.*)

PRISONER: How can they risk it? They won't for long.

INTERROGATOR: Don't fool yourself, there's no hope there. You're no danger to them. What could you say?

PRISONER: My mother——! That you used my mother.

INTERROGATOR: Her own doctor sent her to the Cancer Hospital some time before you were arrested. You—hadn't kept in very close touch, had you?

PRISONER: Is that true?

INTERROGATOR: Yes.

PRISONER: Has she the disease?

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

INTERROGATOR: They think not.

PRISONER: Thank God.

INTERROGATOR: For her sake, or yours.

PRISONER: Always the expert. For hers. I have more sympathy than I had with human weakness.

INTERROGATOR: But—you see? Nothing you say can harm the Government, it's even to their advantage to have you set free.

PRISONER: On what grounds?

INTERROGATOR: In recognition of your organising the resistance in the early years of the war. They will say that they believe you were only acting under your Church's orders, afterwards. They've drawn your sting. You can go.

PRISONER: It's true, then.

INTERROGATOR: It's policy. There's nothing you can do.

PRISONER: You devils. Out there, like Cain, branded; to live, to crawl on through life dragging out the scandal, trailing the offence. No!

INTERROGATOR: Listen——

PRISONER: Death's easily come by, you mean, outside. It'll hang on every bush, it could fall out of any window, it'll be laid for me on every table, with the knife beside the plate. Death—death—just for the taking up. Always there, and not for me. I had so eased my mind with the certainty of it, I—can't see beyond it!

INTERROGATOR: You'll not take your life.

PRISONER: My mother's an old woman. I could live twenty, thirty years. Yes, it's one thing I never thought of, it's more terrible than I could have thought of. Yes, I see.

[The Interrogator produces a revolver from an inner pocket.]

THE PRISONER

INTERROGATOR: You flew at me once before. I can pretend to call to the warder for help as I fire. Do you want to pray?

[*The Prisoner looks at him with eager gratitude.*]

PRISONER: You'd do it? (*After a moment's struggle with himself, with a cry of pain.*) Oh, to tempt me to cheat with death!

INTERROGATOR: Do you want to pray?

PRISONER: I—must not—ask you to do murder. You're not offering me martyrdom. You're offering me escape. I've accepted the heavier sentence.

[*The Interrogator slowly lowers the gun.*]

INTERROGATOR: I'd shoot a dog to put it out of such misery; and I couldn't kill you. You're entitled to your hell. What is it? Have I found a soul in you? What is it? When I saw you after the trial, trying to scream yourself mad, I was sick with loathing of what I'd done to you; I told myself it was reaction from the strain. But I was right; it shouldn't have been done. Not the lie itself—we needed the lie, it's done good—but the twisting and breaking of your spirit. We had no right—no cause however just can have the right to tamper with the mind of a man. Are you listening to me?

PRISONER: Yes. Yes, talk. I need the time.

INTERROGATOR: I should console you, surely? You've shown me I've a power I daren't use again. What is it—your courage now, or your weakness then? Perhaps it's both, perhaps it's man—that anything so frail can be so brave. . . . You did find out my weakness, didn't you?

PRISONER (*wearily*): Humanity?

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

INTERROGATOR: Is that all?

PRISONER: It's enough.

[The door opens and the cell Warden appears, the Secretary with a sheaf of papers, and the Doctor are at his elbow.]

WARDER: Sorry, sir; medical discharge certificate.

INTERROGATOR: Give it to me.

WARDER: It's the official one, sir. Copy to the Governor. The doctor, here——

INTERROGATOR: Give it to me.

[The Secretary gives him the papers.]

(To Doctor.) It's all right. I'll sign them.

[The Doctor nods and goes, leaving his stethoscope behind. The Interrogator jerks his head to the Secretary, to indicate to him to wait outside; and he and the Warden go out.]

There's something I can do, to lighten it for you.
(He clears a corner of the table, and begins to fill in the forms.)

PRISONER: How odd that he should think there could be anything about me you'd need to find out with a stethoscope.

INTERROGATOR: I hid that revolver. I hid what I was doing from my own secretary and the prison staff! Indulging in secret treachery.

PRISONER: It seemed like humanity at the time.

INTERROGATOR: It was treason. What have you done to me?

PRISONER: That, from you?

INTERROGATOR: I was out of my mind. How could I let myself be so shaken by pity—by sheer sentiment—that I risked throwing away the very effect that I'd

THE PRISONER.

worked for? God knows, I realized the dangers involved. I knew that for success I had to get so close to you that we would be like two sides of the same man talking to each other. But I let myself get trapped into a lunatic weakness for the other side, till it took over and made me abominate what I'd achieved.

PRISONER: If you had to do it again, you would. For you, your cause will always be right.

INTERROGATOR: Yes.

[*The Interrogator goes up the stairs to the door, knocks on it and calls.*]

Stephen!

[*He returns at once to the right of the chair. The door opens and the cell Warder lets in the Secretary who hurries to the foot of the stairs.*]

Stephen, I want you to arrange a meeting for me with the General at once. Say that I must see him within the next hour. And have all my keys and important papers where they can be got at easily, will you?—And Stephen—watch yourself. There's no need for you to be mixed up in this.

[*The Secretary, after a dazed moment, goes out.*]

I'm resigning my post at the Ministry of Justice. (*He crosses upstage of the chair and looks out of the downstage window.*) You can't be prepared to commit treason and trust yourself again. The time will come when they'll have to set people on my staff to watch *me*. Rustling through *my* papers. Tapping *my* telephone. And I shall have to face the fact that they

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

would be justified—that they'll be right. No. I won't wait for that.

PRISONER: What next—for you, then?

INTERROGATOR: An end to me, probably, quite soon. There won't be room for long for a man who's too—fastidious to trust.

PRISONER: That's your war. Every story is the story of one man's war. The setting, the battle-field is only incidental.

INTERROGATOR: You have your religion.

PRISONER: I was never a man to whom religion was a consolation. I want no consolation. (*He moves to the table and picks up the reprieve.*) I wanted the worst, and they've thought of it—they, or God—thank God. Well. I'm ready.

[*The Interrogator signs the certificate on the table.*]

INTERROGATOR: Your discharge certificate of physical and mental health. An appropriate use for my last official signature.

[*He hands the certificate to the Prisoner and steps towards the stairs. He stops when the Prisoner speaks.*]

PRISONER: Thank you. (*He pockets the certificate and the reprieve.*) Have you a plain piece of paper?

[*The Interrogator takes a piece of paper from his pocket.*]

(*Taking the paper.*) He thought I'd like the kidneys.

[*The Interrogator goes to the door and exits to find the cell Warder. The Prisoner takes the lid off the kidney plate, and tips the kidneys into the piece of paper. He just achieves this before the cell Warder enters, followed by the Interrogator. The Room Warder stays at the door.*]

THE PRISONER

WARDER: Ready? You've got a reception committee and a half out there—mobs of 'em! (*He hands the Prisoner his cross and ring.*)

[*The Prisoner kisses the cross and puts it on.*]

INTERROGATOR: A crowd?

WARDER: Never seen such a crowd. And dead still. Give you the creeps. (*He puts the feriola round the Prisoner's shoulders.*) Dead still, all looking this way—as if they were waiting, sir.

INTERROGATOR: Turn out the prison staff and get that square cleared at once. Do you understand? I don't want a living soul in that square in ten minutes' time.

WARDER: But—there's hundreds of them. You can't say they're doing any harm, just quite still—as if they were listening.

INTERROGATOR: Call out the police and have the place cleared.

PRISONER: No. (*He puts on the ring.*)

INTERROGATOR: You can't walk out of here in broad daylight into that. It's madness.

PRISONER: Don't clear the square. (*There is a pause, then he starts to walk downstage of the table.*) You can't empty the world for me forever. (*He turns upstage to the stairs.*) Those are my victims, and my judges, and my future. (*He continues up the stairs and disappears from sight.*)

INTERROGATOR (*calling up through the grille*): Open up.

WARDER: It's all open, right through.

[*There is a pause. The Warder goes to the table to clear it.*]

Ah, well, I don't suppose we shall have his room on our hands for long. . . . (*He picks up the kidney*

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

plate.) There, he liked his kidneys! I knew he would.
(*He turns to put the plate on the tray on the bed.*) We get to know about human nature in our profession, don't we?

INTERROGATOR: Yes. We do.

Curtain

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

by
MOLIÈRE

free version by
MILES MALLESON

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The School for Wives was presented at the Theatre Royal, Bristol on April 6th, 1954, by the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Old Vic Trust, Ltd., with the following cast:

CHRYSALDE	<i>Eric Porter</i>
ARNOLPHE	<i>Miles Malleson</i>
ALAIN	<i>John Warner</i>
GEORGETTE	<i>Pat Heywood</i>
AGNES	<i>Christine Finn</i>
HORACE	<i>Michael Meacham</i>
ORONTE	<i>Alan Dobie</i>
ENRIQUE	<i>Basil Henson</i>

The play produced by Denis Carey.

Settings designed by Patrick Robertson.

CHARACTERS

ARNOLPHE, <i>a rich man (of about fifty)</i>	
CHRYSALDE, <i>his friend</i>	
ORONTE, <i>another friend</i>	
ENRIQUE, <i>who has been in America</i>	
HORACE, <i>Oronte's son</i>	
ALAIN, <i>a countryman</i>	} <i>Servants of</i>
GEORGETTE, <i>a countrywoman</i>	
AGNES	

ACT ONE

A Street Scene in Paris

ACT TWO

Inside The House

ACT THREE

The Same

*The action takes place inside and outside a house owned by
Seigneur Arnolphe: in Paris about 1660.*

ACT ONE

Scene: A Street in Paris. 1660.

Two men, in middle-age, enter. Arnolphe and Chrysalde.

CHRYSALDE: Can I believe my ears?

You mean to marry her??

ARNOLPHE: Indeed I'm here in Paris for the wedding.

But a few days, and she will be my wife!

CHRYSALDE: Then let me seize this opportunity—perhaps the last—

to tell you what I think!

as a friend, my dear good Arnolphe,
as a friend.

For anyone, at any time, to take a wife
is something of a hazard.

But, for *you*—the risk is *terrible*!

ARNOLPHE: Doubtless you speak out of your own
experience!

You took the hazard; and you've
learned the risks!

Has your wife made you a laughing-
stock?

Have you the cuckold's horns?

CHRYSALDE: No. I don't think so!

In any case, I'm not aware of them!

ARNOLPHE: You will be! Make no doubt of that!

They'll sprout! They'll sprout!—

You have 'em on the brain!

CHRYSALDE: It's always possible I may be made a fool
of—

as you say—

And yet, to me, the biggest fool—

as I see life, my friend—

is he that lets himself be tortured;

tortures himself, and suffers agonies;

ACT ONE

when, in reality, the pain's quite bearable!

Why turn Misfortune into Calamity?

But I fear for you.

I give you solemn warning.

Marriage, for you, is a far greater menace,

than for any other man, throughout the whole of Paris.

ARNOLPHE: Ridiculous——

CHRYSALDE: But true.

And for this reason:

all your life, you have poured scorn upon your married friends.

When things went wrong with them, you've laughed; and mocked; and never spared their feelings.

With reason; or without.

ARNOLPHE: Always with reason.

Is there another city in the world where husbands suffer such indignities, and bear their miserable lot with such humility?

CHRYSALDE: Oh, you exaggerate!

ARNOLPHE: Indeed I don't!

You are a man with eyes!

Then look about you!

Look!

What do you see?

There! . . . There's a man making a fortune.—

And his wife spending it for him.—

But with other men.

There's another!

Smiling and smirking over all the presents

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

that his wife receives.
And believing her,
when she assures him they are hers by
right
because she's such a noble character.

CHRYSALDE: But really——

ARNOLPHE: Wait!
There's one who actually dares to doubt
her story
and makes his protest——
It does him little good.
Gets himself told that he's insensitive!
Shows a sad lack of trust!
In fact, married to such as he,
anything a woman does is fully justified!
He'd better have held his tongue.
And there's another!
Oh, a fine fellow!—the pick of all the
bunch!
Accepts the situation!
And when the lover calls,
loaded with gifts,
opens the door for him, takes his hat and
stick,
and bows him welcome to a happy
home!
Oh these Husbands!
And these Wives! These Women!
Up to every trick!
I know a wife, who takes her husband
into her confidence.
And whispers to him—
all about her luckless would-be lover.
Till the poor oaf pities the other man.
But when his back is turned—
there's no one to be pitied, but himself!

ACT ONE

I know another wife:—
to explain the sums of money that she
spends,
boasts that she wins “ at play ”.
And her fool husband,
gloating on her gains,
never realises the kind of play!
Look where you will, there’s matter for
a laugh.

CHRYSALDE: That’s what I mean.
And there your danger lies.
I make no boast of it—
merely I find no mirth in other people’s
pain.
I don’t exult.
So, should I become a laughing-stock—
the phrase is yours—
maybe they will not laugh.
Even, they might be sorry for me.
But not so with you!
They’re waiting for you, man!
Give them the slightest pretext—

ARNOLPHE: But I’ll not.
Don’t waste your sympathy on me!
There isn’t any need.
I’ve been too clever for ’em.
They’ll never get the chance to mock at
me.
I know the risks you speak of; very
well;
and knowing, laid my plans.
This girl, to be my wife, is innocent.

CHRYSALDE: So are they all, at some time in their
lives!

ARNOLPHE: Yes, but she’s more than that.

CHRYSALDE: How so?

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

ARNOLPHE: She's ignorant.

CHRYSALDE: Of what?

ARNOLPHE: Of everything. She's to be taught by me.

CHRYSALDE: Taught what?

ARNOLPHE: The things I'd have her know.

CHRYSALDE: Are you to be a husband, or a school-master?

ARNOLPHE: Something of both!

And my household is to be a school for wives!—

You have a charming and a clever wife.

CHRYSALDE: I'm glad you think so!

ARNOLPHE: A clever wife's a very bad investment! You think you're safe, but never can be sure.

Indeed a wife who reads and writes knows more than's good for her!

She can read love-letters—
and write 'em, too!

I shall be well content
if mine can sew and spin,
look to my table,
and can say her prayers.

CHRYSALDE: My God, dear friend, it all sounds very dull!

A wife who's stupid!

ARNOLPHE: I prefer stupidity that's all my own
to Wit and Beauty that I share with
others.

CHRYSALDE: Ridiculous!

ARNOLPHE: But true!—

I've seen it all too often!

If a clever woman makes up her mind—
Well, that's the end of it . . . or the
beginning!

ACT ONE

They have no Principles.
Except the one that suits them at the
time.

And that they use to put us in the
wrong.

Give me a fool!

CHRYSALDE: I'll say no more.

ARNOLPHE: But you can listen!

I know what I'm about.

I'm rich.

She'll be dependent on me. Absolutely.
And she's very sweet; and loyal;
and looks up to me.

I fell in love with her when she was just
a child,

and quite adorable!

She's an orphan—

or, I presume she is.

Would you believe it:

her parents left her in some woman's
care,

and went abroad;

arranging to send money—

but which never came!

And when I met them first,

the woman, having not a penny of her
own,

was in despair.

And, quite naturally, was overjoyed
when I suggested I should take the
child,

and send her to a Convent.

Which I did.

Giving my instructions to the Nuns,
as to her education—

CHRYSALDE: —or her lack of it!

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

ARNOLPHE: The Nuns have sent her back to me,
exactly as I would;
A virgin page—for me to write upon.
A stripling vine—for me to shape its
growth.

CHRYSALDE: She's to be scribbled on,
and tied against a wall—
d'you think she'll like it?

ARNOLPHE: My dear good fellow, but you miss the
point!
When she has learned what I shall have
to teach,
she'll like what I like;
enjoy what I enjoy.
There'll be no room for differences;
for quarrels and disputes;
for all the things that spoil the name of
marriage.

Now, d'you see my drift?
A man who wants a perfect wife,
must make her for himself!
He'll not obtain one any other way.

CHRYSALDE: And when, my dear fellow, can I meet
the girl?

This Perfect Nothingness!
This lovely empty bowl—
in which you mean to pour your very
self,
creating a personality to be the twin of
yours.

ARNOLPHE: Tomorrow.
You'll sup with us tomorrow!

CHRYSALDE: That's very kind of you.
Indeed, I thank you.
Tomorrow—at your house.

ARNOLPHE: Not at my house.

ACT ONE

Not at the one you know.

CHRYSALDE: What's this?

ARNOLPHE: My house in Paris is always very full.
People coming and going; to be
entertained;
where she might learn much she is not
to learn.

I keep her to myself. Close. In another
house.

CHRYSALDE: Alone?

ARNOLPHE: With two servants.
Both as simple as she is herself.
This is the place.

*[He points to the front door of a house outside of which
they are.]*

CHRYSALDE: This? And what's her name?

ARNOLPHE: Agnes! Her name is Agnes; and she
lives here.

And that reminds me!

Here I am not the "Arnolphe" that
you know.

My name is here "La Souche".

CHRYSALDE: You've changed your name? Whatever
for?

ARNOLPHE: For reasons of my own: "La Souche"
—you'll not forget?

CHRYSALDE: "La Souche"—I shall remember.

ARNOLPHE: Here, then, tomorrow!

CHRYSALDE: I can hardly wait.

ARNOLPHE: And you're the only one of all my
friends

I'd trust in such a way.

CHRYSALDE: My good—now, what's the name?

ARNOLPHE: La Souche.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

CHRYSALDE: My good La Souche, I prize the compliment.

ARNOLPHE: It's from my heart.

CHRYSALDE: So has its place in mine.

ARNOLPHE: Praise God we met.

CHRYSALDE: I say Amen to that.

(*Then, as he turns and goes*) The Pompous Ass!

ARNOLPHE (*As he turns to the front door*): The Silly Idiot!

[*And with the knob of his stick he knocks on the front door of the house.*]

(*Shouting as he knocks*) Hullo! Hullo!! Hullo!!!

[*The Lights fade.*]

Music, which continues, until the Lights come up again, inside the house, in a room just the other side of the front door.

Two servants are in the room. Alain, a man, who is busy at the fireplace, and

Georgette, a woman, who is busy at a birdcage.

At once we hear Arnolphe's knocking and hear his voice.]

ARNOLPHE (*off*): Hullo! . . . Hullo!! . . . Hullo!!!

[*The servants continue what they are doing. A battery of knocks follows.*]

ALAIN (*to Georgette*): Can't you hear? There's someone knocking—
open the door.

ACT ONE

GEORGETTE: I thought you must be deaf. Open it yourself.

ALAIN: It's not my place.

GEORGETTE: Nor mine.

ARNOLPHE (*calling*): Alain! Georgette!

ALAIN: The Master!

GEORGETTE: Quick, man—let him in!

ALAIN (*turning back to his fireplace*): I'm busy with my fire!

GEORGETTE (*back to her birdcage*): I have to mind my sparrow.

ARNOLPHE (*off*): I'm losing patience! Open! Open, I say!!

ALAIN (*getting busier than ever*): No getting it to light!

GEORGETTE (*making bird noises into the cage*): My sweet! My pretty sweet!

ARNOLPHE (*off*): Can't you hear me?
One of you, or both, will pay for this!

[*Both servants stop what they are doing to listen.*]

(*off*) The one of you who doesn't open
this door for me,
Goes without food—and for three days!

[*They both scuttle to the door—and collide.*]

GEORGETTE: Where are you coming to?

ALAIN: Opening the door.

GEORGETTE: It's not your place. You mind your fire.

ALAIN: The cat'll get your sparrow.

GEORGETTE: We haven't got a cat.

[*Another volley of knocks They arrive together at the door, and throw it open.*]

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- ARNOLPHE (*entering*): Here's a fine welcome! After
a week away!
Which of you's to blame?
- ALAIN: Not me.
- GEORGETTE: Nor me.
- ARNOLPHE: Which of you opened it?
- ALAIN: Me.
- GEORGETTE: No. Me.
- ALAIN: We opened it together.
- ARNOLPHE: Enough of this. . . . Well! And how
is she?
- GEORGETTE: Blooming.
- ARNOLPHE: And has she missed me?
- ALAIN: No.
- ARNOLPHE: What's that? Surely you mean Yes.
- ALAIN: Yes, I mean No.
- ARNOLPHE: Eh?
- GEORGETTE: Master, she's had no time.
- ARNOLPHE: No time?
- GEORGETTE: To miss you.
- ARNOLPHE: What's she been doing?
- GEORGETTE: Every moment of the day, Good
Master,
since you went away, she's been ex-
pecting you.
At every sound and footstep in the
street,
rushing across her room, she'd throw
her window wide
Her eyes examined every passer-by.
- NOLPHE: Good, very good!
- ALAIN: And not a Donkey, Mule or Ass went
past,
she thought it must be you.
- ARNOLPHE: She's up there now?
- ALAIN: She must have heard you knock.

ACT ONE

GEORGETTE: And she'll be coming down.

ARNOLPHE: Ah!—Here she is.

[*Agnes appears. Very pretty; very demure; just growing from a girl into womanhood.*]

And with her sewing, too. That's as I'd have her.

And are you well, my dear?

AGNES: Yes, sir. Very well.

ARNOLPHE: And happy?

AGNES: Yes. Very happy.

ARNOLPHE: Then I'm happy too—You have no complaints?

AGNES: No, sir.—Except my bed.

ARNOLPHE: Your bed? What's wrong with it?

AGNES: You see, I get no rest.

ARNOLPHE: No rest? For Heaven's sake, dear child, what d'you mean?

AGNES: I hardly like to say.

ARNOLPHE (*to Georgette*): What can she mean?

GEORGETTE: Well, good Master—you can be assured there's no one with her, to disturb her rest!

AGNES: If there were only one!

ARNOLPHE: Only one!

GEORGETTE: What are you talking of?

AGNES: Fleas.

GEORGETTE: Fleas!!

ARNOLPHE (*laughing*): Oh! How you frightened me!

For one awful moment, I was afraid—

AGNES: Afraid! Afraid of what?

Why should you be afraid?

ARNOLPHE: Oh, no matter—and no need to ask. I love your innocence.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

Forget the fleas!
Remember very soon I shall be there to
catch 'em!

AGNES: I shall be glad of that.

ARNOLPHE: I make no doubt you will.

AGNES: They'll take you all your time.

ARNOLPHE: My pretty sweet—perhaps not all of it.
What have we here? (*Indicating her
sewing.*)

AGNES: A new night cap, sir, for you.

ARNOLPHE: I shall look well in it!

Now, back to your room!
Before I go this evening I shall have
much to tell you
of the wedding; and how you're to
behave.

[*She makes a little curtsey to him.*]

Oh, you look lovely.

[*She turns and goes. . . . He watches her go. . . .
Then turns to the servants. They busy themselves at some
household tasks.*]

Oh, ladies! Dear sweet ladies
who know so much of Life!
With all your learning, all your
cleverness,
your wit, your wiles, your genius for
intrigue,
your beauty, your attractiveness—
all that's as nothing to me!—nothing!—
against the simple modesty of this dear
girl
I mean to make my Wife—
to be my Other Self! . . .

ACT ONE

[*The Lights fade . . . Music which continues, until the Lights come up again. Out in the Street again on the other side of the front door; and Arnolphe is coming out of it. . . . As he does so a Young Gentleman enters from the opposite side of the stage, and observes him. They meet, as Arnolphe walks from his front door.*]

- HORACE: Surely, it's Seigneur Arnolphe!
- ARNOLPHE: That is, or was, my name.
- HORACE (*a low bow*): Good Seigneur Arnolphe!
- ARNOLPHE (*a slight bow*): Young sir!
Although I must confess I don't know
who you are.
- HORACE: Oh yes, you do.
You knew my father well.
- ARNOLPHE: Your father.
- HORACE: And my name is Horace.
- ARNOLPHE: It isn't!
- HORACE: It is.
- ARNOLPHE: My old friend's son!
- HORACE: He often speaks of you.
- ARNOLPHE: He's often in my thoughts.
Well, well and well!
Last time I saw you, you were half the
size.
I make no doubt you've heard as much
before!
- HORACE: It's the way that every elder starts a
conversation!
- ARNOLPHE: Oh, but I'm glad to see you.
How long have you been in Paris?
- HORACE: Nine days.
And the first hour of the first day
I visited your house.
But they knew nothing of you.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

ARNOLPHE: I've been away on business, in the country.

Now tell me of your father. Is he well?

HORACE: Yes. Very.

ARNOLPHE: As young as ever?

HORACE: Younger.

ARNOLPHE: He makes a mock of Time. Defying age.

HORACE: I have a letter for you from him.

ARNOLPHE: Give it to me.

[*He takes the letter. While he is reading it Horace continues.*]

HORACE: I had a letter from him yesterday;
Saying he hoped to join me.

ARNOLPHE: That's good news.

HORACE: He mentioned, too, a mutual friend of yours.

ARNOLPHE: A mutual friend?

HORACE: Who's made a fortune in America.

ARNOLPHE: America! Where's that?

HORACE: It's where he's made a fortune.

ARNOLPHE: Does your father mention his name?

HORACE (*consulting the letter*): Enrique.

ARNOLPHE: Enrique? I don't remember!

[*Having read the letter; folding it; and putting it away.*]

He asks me here to treat you as a son.
I'd have done that, without the asking.
Is there anything, in any way,
that I can do for you?

HORACE: I'm short of money!

ARNOLPHE: How much do you want?

HORACE: A hundred pistoles.

ACT ONE

ARNOLPHE (*handing him a purse*): Here's two hundred.

HORACE: Oh, sir! To be repaid you, when my father comes——

ARNOLPHE: Of course, of course.
I'm very grateful that you took me at my word.
And this is your first visit?

HORACE: Yes.

ARNOLPHE: Well, what do you think of us?
And how does Paris strike you?

HORACE: It's very full of people!
Some of the buildings are magnificent.
And, I should imagine, that a man—
with money in his pocket
could lead a perfect life.

ARNOLPHE: That's very true.
For here, a man may satisfy his every
appetite.

For food; for Art; for learning; and
for Love.

You'll find our women most accessible,
blonde and brunette alike.

And the husbands too!

Just as accommodating!

For they'll not interfere.

Things happen here in Paris every day
fit for a story-book.

Nine days you've been here!

Nothing started yet!

You disappoint me.

You're a young man to catch a woman's
eye.

HORACE: Well—to tell the truth—
you rather drag it from me—
something has started.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

ARNOLPHE: Oh! It *has*!

HORACE: I think I must be the luckiest man on earth.

ARNOLPHE: Hey, hey, what's this??

HORACE: I've lost my heart!

ARNOLPHE: You call that lucky!

HORACE: Yes.

For I have another in exchange.
And she has mine.

ARNOLPHE: Good; very good.

HORACE: Her heart in me, fills me with ecstasy,
and then I have to hold her very close,
to hear my own heart beat.

ARNOLPHE: You're doing very well!
You'll be another history for my Case-
book!

HORACE: Please; if I tell you, you'll keep it to
yourself?

ARNOLPHE: Of course, of course.

HORACE: Strangely, the whole thing came about
almost by chance.

Quite by chance, I saw her.

I couldn't believe my eyes.

Such dazzling loveliness.

I acknowledged her beauty—as any-
body would—

and she responded!

ARNOLPHE: What did you expect??

HORACE: Oh, but so simply; and so naturally—
as one would wish a woman to,
and they so seldom do—

And then,

before she took my heart, she took my
breath away.

Asked me to visit her!

Which I have done!

Beyond all reason, the affair progresses.

ACT ONE

ARNOLPHE: Oh, this is splendid!
More! You must tell me more!
Who is she? What's her name? Where
does she live?

HORACE: Her name is Agnes; and she lives here.

ARNOLPHE: (*with a cry*): Merciful God!!

HORACE: Good sir, you're ill!

ARNOLPHE: A twinge!
A touch of giddiness.
I'll just sit here.

[*There is a bench in the street.*]

It'll pass. It's nothing serious.
At least I hope it's not.
Tell me more.

HORACE: As it turned out, my little Beautiful—
if you could see her, oh, she's exquisite.

ARNOLPHE: Oh!!

HORACE: Sir!

ARNOLPHE: Another twinge!

HORACE: Well, this Simplicity and Naturalness I
told you of—
Indeed this *is* a story for your case-
book—

is simply Ignorance.

There's some old man—

can you imagine such stupidity—
who shields her from the world.

God! He must be a fool!

ARNOLPHE: Oh!!

HORACE: Dear sir—

ARNOLPHE: I have a cramp.

Go on, go on, go on.

HORACE: Somehow this Ignorance gives her
added charm.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- It seems a pity that she has to learn!
- ARNOLPHE: Aah!
- HORACE: Sir, you're in pain——
- ARNOLPHE: A touch of gout!—
But tell me: this old fool? You've
seen him?
- HORACE: Indeed I've not. Nor am I likely to.
His name's La Souche—not that it
matters.
I've made up my mind.
Here is this lovely jewel of a girl;
I'll not leave her to Methuselah—
I'll have her for myself
and the two hundred pistoles that you
let me have
will make that possible.
- ARNOLPHE (*giving a howl*): Ow!
- HORACE: Sir! What's the matter?
- ARNOLPHE: The wind! I have the wind.
- HORACE: I hardly like to leave you here alone.
- ARNOLPHE: I'd rather you didn't wait!
I shall stay here awhile;
and then go home.
- HORACE: You'll keep it to yourself?
- ARNOLPHE: The wind?
- HORACE: What I have told you.
- ARNOLPHE: Indeed I will.
- HORACE: Not even tell my father.
He might disapprove.
- ARNOLPHE: You can trust me—
as far as I'd trust you.
- HORACE: Next time we meet,
and make no doubt of it,
I shall have more to tell.

[*He turns to go.*]

ACT ONE

ARNOLPHE: Aah!

HORACE (*turning back*): You spoke?

ARNOLPHE: No, only belched.

HORACE: If there's a wiser man in all of Paris than Seigneur Arnolphe, I'd like to meet him.

(*Going*) Oh! That fool La Souche!!

[*And laughing, he disappears.*]

ARNOLPHE: Thank God he's gone!

I couldn't have contained myself a moment longer.

And thank God he chattered—

We're all the same, we Frenchmen;

a promising intrigue, we have to boast about it.

Which is as well for husbands!

I think the God of Virtue made us so. . . .

Oh, why did I let him go before he told me more?

I may be glad he's gone,

but I've yet to know

how *far* he may have gone!

Now, let me think.

What did he say?

That she'd invited him;

he'd been received.

Why, then the servants must have let him in!

The rascal pair!

The treacherous couple!!

My God, I'll deal with them!

[*He leaps up from the seat, shouting.*]

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

Alain! . . . Georgette! . . .

[*He goes to the door of his house and, throwing it open, disappears through it, still shouting.*]

Georgette!! . . . Alain!!

[*The Lights fade. Music which continues, until the Lights come up. Inside the room. Arnolphe has just burst in, shouting.*]

ARNOLPHE: Georgette . . . Georgette . . . Alain. . . .

[*He yells at the top of his voice.*]

Where are you both?

Alain!! Alain!!! Where are you?

ALAIN (*putting his head round a corner*): Master, did you call?

ARNOLPHE: What d'you think I'm doing? Talking to myself?

Where's the other one?

Georgette!!!!

GEORGETTE (*putting her head round another corner*): Did I hear your voice?

ARNOLPHE: I shouldn't be surprised!
And you'll hear more of it.
Come here; the pair of you.
Here. In front of me!

GEORGETTE (*to Alain; as they approach*): What's the matter with him?

ALAIN: He's swallowed a tiger!

ARNOLPHE: That's enough! no muttering!
While I'm talking you can hold your tongues—
you'll have enough to answer for,
after I've done with you.

ACT ONE

ALAIN: Master, what is it?
GEORGETTE: What can *we* have done?
ARNOLPHE: What is it?
What have you done?
Why, I . . . I . . . I——
Oh, I'm so distracted, I can hardly
speak!
Which of you disobeyed me,
While I've been away?
Which of you? Eh? Or both?
Have you agreed together in deceit?
GEORGETTE: *Deceit?* Not me!
ALAIN: Nor me!
ARNOLPHE: A man's been here!

[*The two give a quick glance at each other.*]

Ah! I saw! I saw!
You looked at one another!
Guilty!
The pair of you!
Oh, you damned rascal!!!
Oh, you wicked slut!!!!
I'll skin you both alive!
Which of you let him in??
Which was it? You?? or you???

[*They remain silent. . . . He goes up to Georgette.*]

You, Georgette? Was it you??
I'll get it out of you!
What! Have you lost your voice??

[*He loses all control.*]

Say something, woman!

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

Say something!
or I'll wring your neck!
GEORGETTE (*utterly terrified; and collapsing into a seat*):
I think I'm going to faint!

[*Arnolphe turns in his mad fury upon Alain.*]

ARNOLPHE: Well! You?

ALAIN (*collapsing on to a seat too*): I've come
over queer!

ARNOLPHE (*suddenly clutching at his throat and col-
lapsing on to a seat*): And I can't get my
breath.

[*For a moment they are all three collapsed.
Then Arnolphe leaps up, forgetting the servants.*]

I knew him in his cradle!
Then, as a schoolboy!!
Now, a man——
who's stolen from me everything I
have!
Has he? . . . or hasn't he?
I shall go mad unless I know what
happened.
Go and tell Agnes to come down to me.
No! Don't!
You'd give her warning—and I'll have
none o' that!
I'll go myself.
And take her by surprise.
The truth!
I'll have the truth.
Oh, how I dread to hear it!

[*Calling upstairs as he goes.*]

ACT ONE

Agnes, are you there??

[*And he disappears.*]

GEORGETTE: Well!! What a to-do!!

ALAIN: It's that young feller!
He's the trouble—and I said he would
be!

GEORGETTE: But what's the fuss about??
Why does he want to keep the girl
shut up?
This house is like a cage!
That's what it is,
a kind of human cage,
as if she was some kind of animal.
And yet, she's not for show!
Why does he get the Jumps-and-Jitters
if anyone comes near?

ALAIN: Because he's jealous.

GEORGETTE: What's he jealous *for*?

ALAIN: Because he's jealous—that's the way he
is!

GEORGETTE: But why??

ALAIN: It's Jealousy, good woman, gives the
Jumps-and-Jitters.
Stops you enjoyin' life!

GEORGETTE: It don't make sense to me!

ALAIN: Put it like this:
if you was hungry, with a plate o' soup;
and someone comes along, as hungry as
you,
and puts his spoon in——
wouldn't you be cross?

GEORGETTE: Of course I should.

ALAIN: Well, there you are!
A wife's a plate o' soup.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

And who wants another feller
dippin' 'is fingers in?

GEORGETTE: Some men don't seem to mind.

ALAIN: It isn't everyone's as greedy as a pig
wantin' 'is dish entirely to 'imself,
allowin' nobody even a sniff of it.

GEORGETTE: He's coming back.

ARNOLPHE (*re-appearing*): Make yourselves scarce!
Clear out!!

[*The servants go.*

*Arnolphe watches them go; then looks upstairs; and
waits impatiently.*]

A Greek Philosopher
(I forget his name)
once gave a Roman Emperor
(Augustus Caesar I believe it was)
some very sound advice!
Whenever anything occurred to put him
in a rage,
just to repeat the Alphabet——
to give him time to cool,
and not do anything he might be sorry
for!

That's what I've done now——
I've said the Alphabet five times!
I'm not quite cool!
But I was cool enough to tell Agnes
to come down here and have a talk with
me.

A most unusual talk!
It won't be easy—learning the truth
from her;
without her learning what I'm trying to
learn!

ACT ONE

Oh! Here she is!
God grant my worst suspicions may be
laid to rest!
For if they're not——
Then, that's the end of me——
I shall be laid to rest!

[*Agnes appears.*]

Ah, there you are, my dear.
Sit down . . . and I'll sit here.

[*A pause.*]

What a fine day it is!
AGNES: Yes. Very fine.
ARNOLPHE: Yes. . . . Any news?
AGNES: News?
ARNOLPHE: Anything happened while I've been
away?
AGNES: What should have happened?
ARNOLPHE: Er . . . yes . . . what indeed?
AGNES: My kitten died.
ARNOLPHE: Oh dear, that's very sad.
But cats are mortal, like the rest of us.
AGNES: Yes, but it was a kitten, not a cat.
ARNOLPHE: You must have another.
AGNES: No. Not yet. I'd like a dog.
ARNOLPHE: Then you shall have a dog.
AGNES: A little dog.
ARNOLPHE: A little dog.

[*A pause.*]

Arnolphe in his embarrassment wipes his brow.]

How hot it is.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- AGNES: Yes. Very hot.
 ARNOLPHE: Hasn't it rained at all?
 AGNES: On and off.
 ARNOLPHE: You've not been out?
 AGNES: Oh *no*.
 ARNOLPHE: You've stayed indoors?
 AGNES: Of course. You told me to.
 ARNOLPHE: You've not been dull?
 AGNES (*with enthusiasm*): Oh *no!* I've not been dull.
 ARNOLPHE (*in dismay*): You haven't?
 AGNES: No.
 ARNOLPHE (*with a groan*): I'm glad to hear it. What *have* you found to do?
 AGNES: Six night shirts.

[*Arnolphe tries a new tack.*]

- ARNOLPHE: Agnes, my child—the world is very strange.
 AGNES: Oh yes, it is.
 ARNOLPHE (*suspicious*): You think so——
 AGNES: If you say it is.
 ARNOLPHE: Oh yes—of course . . .
 People talk scandal.
 AGNES: Scandal? . . . What's that?
 ARNOLPHE: What people talk.
 AGNES: I like to hear them.
 ARNOLPHE: I hope you don't like scandal?
 AGNES: I don't know what it is.
 ARNOLPHE: I'll tell you.
 It's very simple.
 For instance,
 a neighbour told me that, while I was
 away,
 a young man came to see you;
 here; in this house.

ACT ONE

And you received him.
That's scandal!
You see what stupid make-believe it is!

[*She is looking at him, wide-eyed, but doesn't say anything. Under her gaze he adds:*]

- (*with an uneasy little laugh*) I laid a wager
with him
that it wasn't true.
- AGNES: Oh, heavens, don't do that!
You'd lose your money!!
- ARNOLPHE: You mean there was a man, here, in the
house?
- AGNES (*with a delighted giggle*): He was scarcely
ever out of it!
- ARNOLPHE (*leaping to his feet*): God give me
patience!
- AGNES: You're not angry?
- ARNOLPHE: No. No. Not angry—not yet! Taken
aback.
(*to himself*)
Oh, surely, such frankness must mean
innocence.
- AGNES: I didn't hear.
- ARNOLPHE: You weren't intended to . . .
If I remember right . . .
I forbade you, definitely, to see anyone.
- AGNES: You don't know why he came——
- ARNOLPHE: No—but I can guess.
- AGNES: Oh, no, you *never* could.
- ARNOLPHE: Tell me what happened.
- AGNES: From the beginning?
- ARNOLPHE: Yes, from the beginning.
- AGNES: Well—I was out on my balcony——
- ARNOLPHE: What were you doing there?

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

AGNES: Sewing . . . and a young man came by.

ARNOLPHE: Below you in the street?

AGNES: Oh, such a handsome fine young man
he was!

ARNOLPHE: What then?—

AGNES: I dropt my sewing,
and jumped up to have a better look.

[*Arnolphe groans.*]

And when he saw I'd noticed him
he raised his hat; and bowed.
Not wishing to be less polite, I did the
same—

at least, I raised my skirt, and curtseyed.

ARNOLPHE: Oh, you did!

AGNES: Of course.

The Nuns taught me always to be
polite.

And then he bowed again,
again I curtseyed—

(*with a little squeal of delight*)

And a third time he bowed,
so graceful, and so low—
his hat was in the mud.

ARNOLPHE: The young coxcomb!

AGNES: Is that what he was? Coxcombs are
very nice!

ARNOLPHE: And after the bowing?—

AGNES: Then he went away.

ARNOLPHE: Away?

AGNES: Only to come back; and wave; and
kiss his hand.

ARNOLPHE: Oh!!!

AGNES: No need to worry; I was not outdone.
I did the same. And more—
and if the Evening hadn't come,

ACT ONE

and Darkness hidden him,
we'd have been at it still.

ARNOLPHE: At what??

AGNES: Throwing kisses.

ARNOLPHE: And that was all?

AGNES: That was all for then!

ARNOLPHE: What next??

AGNES: Next day?

ARNOLPHE: Yes, the next day?

AGNES: Even more wonderful!

[*She stops—smiling blissfully at the recollection.*]

ARNOLPHE: Go on, go on!

AGNES: You *are* impatient! Do you like my
story?

ARNOLPHE: Yes, but get on with it.

AGNES: Well!—I was standing by that door——
(*she indicates the front door*)
and it was open——

I wasn't in the street; indeed I wasn't—
not with either foot!

But as I stood there, just inside the
room,

a strange old woman came along the
road,

and when she reached me, stopped;
and spoke to me.

ARNOLPHE: What did she say?

AGNES: “The good God bless you, dear,” she
said,

“Long may your beauty last.”

(*She adds, with rapturous smile*)

She called me beautiful!

ARNOLPHE: And so you are—to me;
that's all that matters.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- AGNES: Oh no, I was to him—he told me so.
- ARNOLPHE: You shouldn't have listened.
- AGNES: Not listen! When he said such lovely things!
Nor to you either?
- ARNOLPHE: Of course, listen to me!
- AGNES: But if I'm beautiful to you,
why not to him? . . .
Won't you explain?
- ARNOLPHE: No. Not now. . . . On with your story.
- AGNES: Where was I? . . .
Oh yes, of course—
I haven't finished what the woman said.
“Your beauty wasn't given you,” she said,
“to make ill use of it.”
And then she told me I'd been very cruel;
and I'd wounded one who'd never done me harm.
- ARNOLPHE: Oh, what wickedness!
- AGNES: But what had I done?
I asked her what I'd done.
I'd done great harm, she said, to that young man.
- ARNOLPHE: Ah!
- AGNES: Yes—*him!*
“That innocent, well-intentioned gentleman,” she said,
“I'd smiled at from my balcony.”
Oh, I was near distraught!
Had I dropt something on him, without knowing it!
And what do you think she said—
it was my eyes!!

ACT ONE

A glance from them had dealt the
fatal blow!

—that's what she said.

My eyes had, deep within them,
a fearful power to pierce another's
heart——

and the young man was dying!

ARNOLPHE: Dying!!

AGNES: Yes. Dying. Think of that!
I said I couldn't bear it if he died.
She said I needn't worry!
His life was in my hands——
You can imagine what I said.

ARNOLPHE: No, I can't.

AGNES: Well—you know I can't endure to see
things suffer.

No matter what!

When I think of my poor kitten, I still
cry.

I can't even bear to see a chicken killed.

And this young man——

this beautiful young man——

I asked what I could do——

and it was all so simple.

All that he wanted was to come and see
me,

to hold my hand; and look into my
eyes——

for only they could heal the wound
they'd dealt.

Oh, I was so relieved!

I said he was to come as quickly as he
could!

And I'd do everything I could to make
him well.

ARNOLPHE: What did you do?

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

AGNES: Why, everything he asked.

ARNOLPHE: What did he ask?

[*She gives a little trill of a laugh.*]

AGNES: Oh, the strangest things! You'd never
guess——

you'd never *think* of them.

You'd laugh!

ARNOLPHE: I doubt it!!!

Oh, no Modesty! No decent holding
back!

AGNES: What's modesty? And why should I
hold back?

ARNOLPHE: Oh, God forgive me—I've brought this
on myself!

AGNES: What's the matter, sir?

You seem put out!

Have I done wrong, behaving as I did?

ARNOLPHE: *Yes!!*

AGNES: Yes??

ARNOLPHE: *No.*

AGNES: No???

ARNOLPHE: I don't know what to say!

I don't know yet what happened. Tell
me.

AGNES: I'm trying to.

ARNOLPHE: You were alone with him?

AGNES: Yes. Yes. I was

ARNOLPHE: What did he do?

AGNES: The moment that he saw me,
he seemed so strong and well——
and fit for anything.

ARNOLPHE: I'm asking what he did?

AGNES: I'll tell you in a moment.

But if you knew the presents that he
brought;

ACT ONE

and all the money that he gave Alain—
and Georgette, too,
you'd be as fond of him as we are.

ARNOLPHE: My feelings for him now are strong
enough!

AGNES: Are they? I'm *so* glad!!

ARNOLPHE: Go on!!

AGNES: First, he swore he loved me.
Loved me! He'd only seen me once!
But he swore to me
no other girl in all the world
had ever been so loved, as he loved me.

ARNOLPHE: Ridiculous!

AGNES: I didn't think so!
For when he said it,
I felt the strangest things.
A kind of tingling——
starting in my toes—up to my finger
tips——
all thro' and thro'.
I think I've never felt such happiness.

ARNOLPHE: Oh, this is Misery!
When every revelation gives her plea-
sure, and me pain!
There's nothing for it, I must probe
some more.

(He makes an enormous effort)

My dear sweet child . . .
besides this talk, this silly, idle talk,
did he *do* anything? . . . what are you
smiling at?

AGNES: The things he did!

ARNOLPHE: *(In desperation):*

Now for it!

Now!

Did he make love to you?

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- AGNES (*puzzled by the expression*):
 "Make love"?
- ARNOLPHE: Did he caress and kiss you?
- AGNES (*with enthusiasm*):
 Oh yes, he did.
 He took my hand, and kissed it.
 Then, all up my arm——
 and kissed behind my neck——
 I thought I should have died!
 And *he* enjoyed it too.
 I thought he'd never stop.
 All up and down he went.
 Time after time!
- ARNOLPHE (*in a strangled voice*): What more?

[*She looks at him: then drops her eyes.*]

- AGNES (*in a whisper*): No!
- ARNOLPHE: Heaven be merciful! You must tell the truth.
- AGNES: I can't.
- ARNOLPHE: Why not?
- AGNES: You might be vexed with me.
- ARNOLPHE (*a cry, to himself*): Oh, no!
- AGNES: Oh *yes!* I think you would.
- ARNOLPHE: Let me know the worst.
- AGNES: Promise you won't be cross.

[*He doesn't answer . . . she goes on.*]

- I gave him . . . or at least he took——
 No. You'd be angry.
- ARNOLPHE: I can't suffer more!
- AGNES: I couldn't help it.
 I didn't want to.
 I felt it would be wrong, unfair to you.

ACT ONE

- There was just nothing I could do
but let him have his way!
- ARNOLPHE (*only just able to speak*):
Listen, my child.
Tell me—in your own words—what
happened?
- AGNES: What was it that he took?
The ribbon from my hair.
The one you gave me.
Please, don't be cross——
- ARNOLPHE: He did nothing more?
- AGNES: Was there more to do?
I'd have done *anything*!——
He pinned it on his coat,
told me he'd wear it always——
and was gone!
- ARNOLPHE: What an escape!!
All this, my dearest child, comes from
your innocence.
I'll say no more about it!
We can forget it.
- AGNES: Forget!
- ARNOLPHE (*laughing, with the weight off his mind; he
he is very light-hearted*):
This naughty fellow sought to turn your
head,
to flatter and deceive—and laugh at you.
- AGNES: Oh, no! it wasn't that.
He told me so, at least a score of times.
- ARNOLPHE: And you believed him!
What a touching faith!
It's worthy of an angel.
But the world we live in isn't Heaven!
(*And then he becomes pompous*)
Now, pay attention, please.
To listen to a Jackanapes like him——

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- to accept his presents——
let him kiss you——
and, worst of all——
to like it!——
This tingling in the toes, you speak of—
Is a Sin!!
- AGNES: A Sin??
- ARNOLPHE: A Mortal Sin!
- AGNES: How can it be?
- ARNOLPHE: Good men have known it since the
world began.
- AGNES: But the Nuns told me Sin was ugly.
This was beautiful.
- ARNOLPHE (*strongly*):
An Offence to Heaven.
Death to the body.
Damnation to the soul.
- AGNES: You frighten me!
I'll never kiss again! Not anyone.
Not him. Not you.
- ARNOLPHE: Oh Lord, I've overdone it!
(*He switches from Old Morality to Sweet Reasonableness*)
My child, you're growing up.
You're old enough to know . . . the
facts of life;
—or some of them——
It's true, that kissing and caressing and
the rest of it,
can be a source of pleasure——
some people find it so——
indeed I do myself.
But such things must be done re-
spectably.
- AGNES: What's that?
- ARNOLPHE: In other words,

ACT ONE

when you are married, there's no harm
in it.

AGNES: Let me be married soon.

ARNOLPHE: That's why I'm here.

AGNES: When shall we be married?

ARNOLPHE: Tomorrow!

AGNES: Tomorrow!

Oh, I'm so happy!

Oh, you're so good to me!

I'd like to kiss you. May I?

ARNOLPHE (*delighted*): But of course!

AGNES: It's not a Sin.

ARNOLPHE: No.

AGNES: I'm not married yet.

ARNOLPHE: Marriage is near enough to make a kiss
quite safe.

[*She gives him a great big kiss.*]

AGNES: Oh, I'm so grateful!

I think the facts of life are wonderful!

[*And she leans her face against his body, adding:*]

He'll be grateful, too.

ARNOLPHE: Eh? . . . What was that? *What* did
you say?

AGNES: He'll be grateful too.

ARNOLPHE: He? Who?

AGNES: Him. The Coxcomb!

ARNOLPHE: What's *he* got to do with it.

You're going to marry me!

AGNES: (*a sudden wail*):

You! Oh *no!* Not you!

ARNOLPHE: But this *is* wickedness!

This time there's no excuse!

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- You must be taught a lesson!
Listen, my lady!—
You've seen the last of him!
- AGNES: Oh no, I haven't!
He's coming here today!
- ARNOLPHE: Is he? I'm glad to hear it!
When he comes,
you'll open the door to him—
- AGNES: Yes!
- ARNOLPHE: —and slam it in his face!
- AGNES: He'd only stay and knock.
- ARNOLPHE: Then up to your room—out on your
balcony—
and throw stones at him!
You'll find a pile of loose bricks
under the window-sill.
- AGNES: Oh no, I couldn't. I shouldn't have the
heart.
Besides, I *want* to see him.
- ARNOLPHE (*raging at her*): Up to your room!
- AGNES: I won't throw stones.
- ARNOLPHE: You'll do just what you're told.
I'm master here.
If you learn nothing else, in this first
lesson,
at least, you can learn that.

[*She begins to cry.*]

And don't start crying.

[*She cries more bitterly.*]

Quiet, d'ye hear me? Quiet!

[*She cries louder.*]

ACT ONE

I won't have you miserable,
if I have to thrash you for it!

[She sets up a bowling . . . and disappears upstairs in a regular crescendo of howls. . . .]

He sinks into a seat, covering his ears with his hands.

The two servants put their heads into the room, to see what's happening.]

Curtain

ACT TWO

Scene: Inside the house.

Arnolphe is there; with Agnes, who is sewing. And the two servants, Alain and Georgette.

ARNOLPHE (*who is very, very pleased with himself, and everything else*):
Well, I must say!—
You've followed my instructions, all of
you,
with great success.
The enemy's defeated.
A very bright young spark has been
extinguished!
Between the four of us—
we've put him out!!
Oh, the young devil!
That's what they are—he and his kind!
Devils! Disguised as fops!
I know 'em well!
With handsome faces, under handsome
hats;
and well-built bodies, under well-cut
clothes.
But in their coloured shoes—the cloven
hoof!
And while I was away—
one of 'em came knocking at your
door—
even had hold of you!
My blood runs cold!
But you escaped
with flying colours!
I saw you throw that brick at him!
Well thrown!

ACT TWO

You hit him on the shoulder!
 And bruised more than his shoulder—
 I'm quite sure of *that*!
 I've never seen a man look so surprised!
 One glance up at you!—
 And then he stooped to pick up what
 you'd thrown
 and thrown at *him*!
 He held it in his hand—
 and stood there, gazing at it!
 I laughed out loud.
 I laughed so much I couldn't see the
 end!
 I thought he'd hear me, so I came
 away.

Well done, well done, my dear!

(He turns to the servants)

And now, I want a word with her
 alone—

So off you go!

ALAIN: You can trust us, Master.

Your word is law.

We're only simple folk—we was
 deceived.

GEORGETTE: That's what we was—deceived.

ALAIN: And we was more than that. Cheated,
 we was.

GEORGETTE: That's what we was! Oh, we was
 cheated.

ALAIN: He gave us both a Crown.

ARNOLPHE: Oh, did he?

GEORGETTE: Mine was a bad 'un!

ARNOLPHE: Well, be off with you.

(To Georgette)

Go and prepare the supper I arranged.

GEORGETTE: Aye, that I will.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

ARNOLPHE: My best friend's coming.
And so serve it well.

GEORGETTE: It shall be served as if you were a King.

ARNOLPHE: And so I am!
This household is my Kingdom.

GEORGETTE (*going*): God save us all!

ARNOLPHE (*to Alain*):
You, go fetch my Notary.
He has his office down in the Square.

ALAIN: I know the place.

ARNOLPHE: I want him here as quick as he can come.

ALAIN (*going*): I'll have him here quicker than
that!

[*Arnolphe and Agnes are left alone.*

A slight pause.

Agnes, her eyes on her work, continues very busily to sew.]

ARNOLPHE: Now, my dear! . . .
No need to go on sewing.
Put it aside, and pay attention.

[*She stops sewing; but keeps her eyes downcast.*]

Well, let's see your face!

[*She raises her head.*]

That's right!
You can hear better, when you look at
me!
And I can see you're listening!
Now——

[*She starts to sew again.*]

Oh, put the damned stuff away!

[*He takes it from her.*]

ACT TWO

Now——

Where was I? What was I going to say?

Oh yes!

We're to be married.

I wonder if you realise how fortunate you are!

AGNES: Yes, I think I do.

ARNOLPHE: "Thinking's" not enough.

What were you when we met?

When first you saw me?

AGNES: I was six!

ARNOLPHE: A child!

AGNES: Yes; but I remember.

ARNOLPHE: A little village child——
living in poverty.

AGNES: I remember that, too.

ARNOLPHE: What are you now?

Or rather,

what will you be tomorrow?

AGNES: Shall I be any different?

ARNOLPHE: Of course!

You'll be my wife.

A rich man's wife!

From Poverty to Wealth,

from Want to Plenty——

from Over-work to Leisure,

All that you owe to me!

AGNES: Oh yes, I know.

ARNOLPHE: Well—don't forget it.

That's all I want to say.

Oh no—there's one thing more!

Some men there are, who marry
country wives

for something of a change——
after a mis-spent youth!

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

Promiscuous rioting!

Not so with me.

Oh, it *could* have been! Make no mistake
in *that*!

Oh, there were many women, ready to
oblige.

AGNES: What do you mean—"oblige"?

ARNOLPHE: Um?—We'll leave that till tomorrow.
Enough to say: that in affairs of Love,
I've been both cautious, and economi-
cal.

And kept myself for *you*.

And that's another thing, you'll please
remember.

AGNES: Oh yes, I will—if you remind me.

ARNOLPHE: Remind you!!

AGNES: I'll do my best!

But I'm not clever,
as you keep on telling me,
and remembering things is very diffi-
cult.

I find the things that stay there in my
head,

are those that come there of their own
accord!

ARNOLPHE: What kind of things?

AGNES: Well, there's still my kitten—
and the Coxcomb!

ARNOLPHE: You still think of him?

AGNES (*with a sudden grin*):

I'd like to throw another stone at him.

ARNOLPHE: He's out of sight.

Put him right out of mind.

AGNES: That's another thing:

it's just as hard to put things out,
as keep 'em in!

ACT TWO

Nothing goes in or out—
unless I want it to!!

ARNOLPHE: You have much to learn.
I wonder if you realise
the *seriousness* of marriage?

AGNESS: No. I don't think I do.

ARNOLPHE: I'll tell you.

A man who marries,
accepts responsibility; shoulders a duty.
So does the woman.

It's a Partnership.

Two Halves—that are not equal.

Two Duties—not the same.

One to command; the other to obey.

One leads; the other follows.

You find that everywhere.

It's not confined to marriage.

A soldier of the line obeys his officer,

A servant his master,

and a child its parent.

Even to have harmony in music,

there must be one to sing the second
part!

And to be Soldier, Servant, Child, or
Second Fiddle

and be it well,

to be a wife,

the very source of perfect harmony,

by never saying, doing, thinking any-
thing

against her husband's wishes—out of
tune—

that's an achievement.

Something to be proud of!

And to be proud of one's humility—

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

why, that's a virtue every Christian
knows.

It's simple. Isn't it?

AGNES: Yes. Very simple.

ARNOLPHE: Easy to say! Less easy to perform!
Too often women fail!

AGNES: Fail?

ARNOLPHE: They disobey!!!—
which spells Catastrophe!
That's not unusual either!
A soldier disobeys—the battle's lost!
A city's secret life is like a battle-field—
casualties everywhere.
Paris is strewn with broken marriages.
You understand?

AGNES: I think so.

ARNOLPHE: You must do your best.
Most women fail thro' lack of under-
standing.

Oh there *are* some women,
who, knowing what they do,
flout all the decencies.

And there are men, young and hot-
blooded,
who encourage them.

Together, they'll descend to anything!
Such you'll avoid, as you would the
plague.

You'll be my other half.

When *you* do wrong, *I'll* be the one to
suffer.

And I'm sensitive.

Easily hurt.

And when I'm hurt, I'm angry.

And when I'm angry——

You'll be the one to suffer!

ACT TWO

And, behind my anger
is the Wrath of God!
My dear, you're beautiful!

[*She breaks into a seraphic smile, which he notices.*]

And like to hear me say so.
Be good, and faithful—and your purity
will shine out of your face.
Your beauty will endure.
But, stain my honour——
and your soul turns black.
That, too, will be reflected in your face!
All those that see you will avert their
eyes.

And more than that——
you'll be the Devil's prey.
And when you die, go straight to Hell
and boil in oil through all eternity.
. . . Did the Nuns teach you to read?

AGNES: From holy books.

ARNOLPHE: Then try your hand at this——
a kind of holy book——
the author's anonymous——

AGNES: —a funny name——

ARNOLPHE: When we're married you must learn the
words,
and say them to me daily,
when you say your prayers.
But now, read them out loud.

AGNES (*reading, carefully*):

"The Secrets"—I like them——

ARNOLPHE: You must have none from me.

AGNES: None?

ARNOLPHE: Certainly not!

AGNES: Oh!

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

ARNOLPHE: Read on.

AGNES: "Of a Happy Marriage,
or, Some Rules for Wives.
Rule One . . .
She who shares a bed in wedlock
must always bear in mind
he who lies beside her
is her Only man. . . ."
Well!!!—I should think so!
I've never seen a bed
that's big enough for three!

ARNOLPHE: Rule Two!!—

AGNES: "A wife must dress
only for her husband.
Her appearance matters nothing—
save to him."
Oh, but you said if I was naughty
I'd turn black,
and all who saw me
would avert their eyes.

ARNOLPHE: So they would;
it wouldn't matter, except to me; and
you—
Rule Three.

AGNES: "A wife must never use
Paints, Powders or Creams.
A Desire to be especially beautiful
is seldom, if ever, inspired by a hus-
band."

ARNOLPHE: Do women paint their faces??
You have no need for *that*!

AGNES: No—but I'd like to try.

ARNOLPHE: Rule Four.

AGNES: "Never accept a present from a man.
Nothing is given for nothing."

ARNOLPHE: Note that.

ACT TWO

- For you took presents from him.
 AGNES: But I gave nothing back.
 ARNOLPHE: You let him kiss you.
 AGNES: That was his nicest present.
 ARNOLPHE: (*pointing to the paper*): Rule Five. . . .
 AGNES: "Concerning Men Visitors"——
 (*She perks up*) Oh! Yes!
 "A wife shall welcome to her home,
 only those men
 who come to see her husband.
 Those wishing to see her,
 shall not come in."
 (*At which she shakes her head, and gives a deep sigh*)
 ARNOLPHE: Well? What's the matter?
 AGNES (*from her depths*): Marriage is serious!
 ARNOLPHE (*very pleased*): Well said. Well said.
 Rule Six. . . .
 AGNES: "A wife shall have no parties,
 solely of women.
 For women, on their own,
 plot to deceive their husbands."
 (*With eager hopefulness*)
 Oh, how can they do that?
 ARNOLPHE: Pray God you never know——
 Rule Seven. This is for Sunday.
 Take special note of this.
 What follows now, is all important to
 you.

[*What actually follows is a sudden tremendous knocking on the front door.*]

- AGNES: What's that?
 ARNOLPHE: Who can that be?
 AGNES: Shall I open the door?

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- ARNOLPHE: Look from the window.
AGNES (*running to it*): My Coxcomb!
ARNOLPHE: *Your* Coxcomb??
AGNES: My target!—
ARNOLPHE: Target?
AGNES: The one I throw the stones at!
(*She rushes towards the door*)
ARNOLPHE: Away from that door!
Up to your room.

[*She rushes upstairs. He yells.*]

- Alain! Alain!
GEORGETTE (*appearing*): He's gone for the Notary.
ARNOLPHE: He's here.
GEORGETTE: Who's here?
ARNOLPHE: The Enemy.
GEORGETTE: He's not!
ARNOLPHE: He is.
GEORGETTE: What shall I do?
ARNOLPHE: Nothing.
(*More knocking*)
I'm going thro' the kitchen
into the street,
to head him off.
Don't let him in.

[*He rushes out. Another hurricane of knocking on the door. The Lights fade. Music, which continues until the Lights come up again. In the street. Horace is knocking very vigorously on the door. Arnolphe enters from the opposite side.*]

- ARNOLPHE: Horace!
HORACE (*swinging round*): Seigneur Arnolphe!!
ARNOLPHE (*advancing towards him*):
Can I believe my eyes?

ACT TWO

You here again!
Dear boy, I'm pleased to see you!—
What are you doing here??

HORACE: What are *you* doing here??

ARNOLPHE: Me? Here?

Oh, I have a Notary down in the
Square.

I've been to see him.

On my way here, passing this street,
I recognised your back.

HORACE: My back?

ARNOLPHE: Yes, I was glad to see it.
I always shall be.

HORACE: And are you well?

ARNOLPHE: Yes. Very well.

HORACE: You're quite recovered?

ARNOLPHE: Recovered??

HORACE: Last time I saw you
you were very poorly.

ARNOLPHE: Poorly?

HORACE: I left you here, in pain,
there, on the seat.

ARNOLPHE: Oh Ah, so you did!
I had the cramps.

HORACE: The wind, I think, the wind.

ARNOLPHE: A touch of both.

HORACE: But it has passed?

ARNOLPHE: Never in better health.

HORACE: Nor spirits, so it seems.

ARNOLPHE: Yes. All goes very well.
And with you too, I hope!
Tell me about yourself.

HORACE: I'd rather not.

ARNOLPHE: What's this?

HORACE: Last time I saw you I fear I talked too
much.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- ARNOLPHE: Not a bit of it.
You didn't talk enough.
Last time I saw you,
I let you go
before you'd told me all there was to
tell.
Very unfriendly of me!
And not the way to treat your father's
son.
And now you say something's gone
wrong——
- HORACE: Did I?
- ARNOLPHE: Did you what?
- HORACE: Say something had gone wrong——
- ARNOLPHE: Yes.
- HORACE: I never said a word!
- ARNOLPHE: But hasn't it?——
- HORACE: How did you know?
- ARNOLPHE: I saw it in your eye.
- HORACE: My God, what understanding!
- ARNOLPHE: Tell me everything!
I may be able to help.
- HORACE: I'm very touched!
- ARNOLPHE: Don't mention it!
- HORACE: You're very right! Things *have* gone
wrong.
The fool's come back.
- ARNOLPHE: What fool?
- HORACE: Her guardian.
- ARNOLPHE: Oh *him*!
- HORACE (*with great vehemence*): THE DEVIL
TAKE HIM!
- ARNOLPHE: Careful! Careful!
Don't invoke the devil.
When once *he* gets a finger in the pie,

ACT TWO

you never know what he'll be up to next.

HORACE: That's very true!

ARNOLPHE: Women are bad enough without the devil.

HORACE: That's true again. Oh, you're very wise!

ARNOLPHE: You think so?

HORACE: I do indeed.

ARNOLPHE: Then, tell me about La Souche.

HORACE: Oh, I can scarcely speak of him! And not run mad.

Misguided, besotted, lecherous, half-mad,

An upright corpse!!

With only one thing in him that's alive.

His insane jealousy!

ARNOLPHE: A charming portrait!

HORACE: He's *there!*!

ARNOLPHE: *Where??*

HORACE: Behind that door!

Let's break the damned thing down!

And take him by the throat,

and shake him, like a rat!

ARNOLPHE: Oh no. I wouldn't do *that* if I were you!

HORACE: Why not?

ARNOLPHE: We'll find some other way to deal with him.

We'll get the better of him! You and I, together.

HORACE: Oh, Seigneur Arnolphe!

To think that two such men, as you and he,

should stand on either side of that same door.

It's very strange!

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- ARNOLPHE: It's stranger than you think!
 HORACE: The old fool knows.
 ARNOLPHE: Knows what?
 HORACE: I've been to see her.
 ARNOLPHE: Don't tell me that!!
 HORACE: I do.
 ARNOLPHE: I can't believe it!
 How did he find out?
 HORACE: I can't imagine.
 ARNOLPHE: Did the girl tell him?
 HORACE: She's not as naïve as that.
 ARNOLPHE: He might have wormed it out of her.
 HORACE: Most unlikely.
 Can you imagine yourself—if you were
 he——
 worming it out of *me*?
 ARNOLPHE: You'd keep it to yourself?
 HORACE: Of course I should.
 ARNOLPHE: Like any Frenchman!!
 How do you know he knows?
 HORACE: Oh, there's no doubt.
 The last few days, how I've been wel-
 comed here!
 And now! At my last visit,
 I walked up to the door and knocked
 upon it——
 so! (*He does*)

[*Immediately Georgette's voice streams out at him from the other side of it.*]

- G.'s VOICE: Go away, you scoundrel, go away!
 HORACE: There——! You hear? *His* voice!
 ARNOLPHE: *His!* Whose?
 HORACE: Her guardian's. La Souche.
 ARNOLPHE: It sounded like a woman's.

ACT TWO

- HORACE: So does his!
A silly piping squeak of impotence.
- ARNOLPHE (*indignant, in spite of himself*):
Look here, young man——
- HORACE (*going straight on*):
The door was slammed, right in my
face,
and insults shouted thro' it!
- ARNOLPHE (*with hardly-concealed glee*):
What kind of insults?
- HORACE: I can't remember.
- ARNOLPHE: Try.
- HORACE: It's of no consequence.
And as I stood there, dumbfounded,
utterly,
I heard a voice—above me.
- ARNOLPHE: Hers?
- HORACE: Up on her balcony.
- ARNOLPHE: And shouting insults too?
- HORACE: Yes. Yes, she was.
- ARNOLPHE (*almost choking with delight*): Poor lad!
- HORACE: Worse was to come!
What happened then, you'll never,
never guess,
not in a hundred years,
it's past belief!
What do you think?
- ARNOLPHE (*being mischievous*): She threw a stone at
you.
- HORACE: Good God! You've second sight!
- ARNOLPHE: It's what I should expect!——
Her outraged innocence.
- HORACE: There's *been* no outrage—yet!
- ARNOLPHE: This stone she threw at you——
was it a big one?
- HORACE: Very.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

ARNOLPHE: And hit you?

HORACE: Yes.

ARNOLPHE: And hurt?

HORACE: Considerably.

ARNOLPHE: That's good; that's bad, I mean!

HORACE: The next time I see her,
she shall pay for it—with all she has.

ARNOLPHE: Horace! You must be brave!
You must prepare yourself!
Next time will never come.
From what you've told me, you've no
chance at all.

HORACE: There is a gleam of hope!

ARNOLPHE (*suspicious*): What *gleam*?

HORACE: I haven't finished yet!

ARNOLPHE (*shaken*): Not finished?

HORACE: No. There's more to come!

Well!—Can't you guess?

ARNOLPHE (*frightened*): God help me! No, I can't!

HORACE: I'm not surprised.

What followed then, would baffle even
you!

You know the stone she threw——

it hit me on the shoulder;

fell at my feet; I stooped to pick it up;

I held it in my hand——

ARNOLPHE (*impatently*): I know, I know!

HORACE (*surprised*): You *know*??

ARNOLPHE (*passing it off*): Well, you're telling me!

HORACE (*repeating*): I held it in my hand. . . .
Then!—Can you imagine?

ARNOLPHE (*on tenterhooks*): No, I can't. Go on.

HORACE: On the bottom side, where it was flat,
tied neatly on with string—a letter!

ARNOLPHE (*a cry*): Ah!

HORACE: Dear sir, what is it?

ACT TWO

ARNOLPHE: I've got the cramps again!

HORACE: How very strange!

There must be something, here, about
the place,

that doesn't suit you.

Have you the wind as well?

ARNOLPHE: I may have any moment.

What of the letter?

HORACE: I have it here.

ARNOLPHE: Then read it to me! Read it!

HORACE (*as he unfolds it*):

Completely ignorant!

She may have been—indeed, I think she
was——

but, oh, how swiftly Love can teach!

And, in a moment, how we can be
changed!

In one revealing flash,

abysmal ignorance knows all there is to
know!

ARNOLPHE: Read me the letter!

HORACE: Yes, indeed I will.

(*He looks at it.*)

A childish scrawling hand—and she
writes this:

(*he makes as if to read, but goes on talk-
ing*)

Oh, but the Little God works miracles!

Under his touch

the miser spends his money;

a coward may be brave;

a man without manners becomes
courteous;

a mental clodhopper becomes a wit!

The blind can see.

The lame can walk.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- The foolish understand!
 ARNOLPHE: Yes, yes, yes—the letter!
 HORACE: Yes. The letter. . . . She writes:
 (*but again he breaks off*)
 Oh, I can see her now——
 ARNOLPHE: Where???
- HORACE: As she was then—up on her balcony.
 Her arm raised high;
 her little hand clutching the great big
 stone
 and she leaned over to me——
 and she shouted——
 “I’ve thought of all you had to say,”
 she screamed,
 “considered every word—AND
 HERE’S MY ANSWER!”
 And she flung it at me!
 Doesn’t that show resource!
 A very pretty cunning!
 Aren’t I a lucky fellow??
 Don’t you admire her for it
 and doesn’t it make that guardian of
 hers
 look ludicrous?
- ARNOLPHE (*to himself*): Nothing to what he feels!!!
 HORACE: He shuts the girl up like a prisoner!
 And tells his servants not to let me in!
 It’s true his coming back has compli-
 cated things,
 for the time being.
 I wouldn’t have it otherwise.
 It’s brought the girl to life.
 And there he is! Behind this very
 door——
 as close to me, as I am, now, to you!
 D’you think he’s listening?

ACT TWO

ARNOLPHE: I shouldn't be surprised.

HORACE: It's funny, isn't it? (*He laughs*)

ARNOLPHE: Yes. Very very funny.

[*Arnolphe tries to laugh too; but it ends in a kind of hiccough.*]

HORACE: The wind??

ARNOLPHE: *The letter!*

HORACE: Yes. The letter!

It's very touching, and ingenuous!

It's brave; and it's bewildered.

A little cry of pleasure, and of pain——

Cupid's first dart draws blood!

ARNOLPHE: Give it to *me*? I'll read it for myself!

HORACE: *I'll read it! She begins:*

(*reading*)

"My own dear Coxcomb"——

Now, that's beyond me!

Why should she call me that?

ARNOLPHE: I can't imagine!

HORACE: She goes on:

(*he continues reading*)

"I want to write to you and tell you all my thoughts; but I don't know how to say them. I mistrust even my own words."

It's pathetic! Listen to this:

"I know now that I have been brought up

to know nothing."

And she goes on:

"I am afraid I might write something I should not."

Then she writes:

"I am sad, and very angry, at the things I am made to do against you.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

And my heart aches that I do not see
you any more.

Oh, how I wish that I was yours."

That's what she says! She wishes she
was mine!

"I hope it is not wicked to say that.

Everybody, I mean my Guardian and
the Nuns,

tell me young men are deceivers; and
you

should never listen to them; and all
they

want to do is to betray you.

I don't know what that means. And
anyhow

I don't believe it."

Bless her! She doesn't believe it!

I love this bit:

"Your words went thro' and thro' me,
and I hear them still.

So how can they be false? Please tell
me if they are!

Never could I wish any harm to you.

I think it would be very wrong of you to
wish me harm."

Was anything so simply logical?

And she ends up:

"Come again soon. I'll throw another
stone at you; your loving loving
Agnes."

This in my hand, am I to give up hope!!

Not on your life!

But I must ask your help!

ARNOLPHE: Eh?

HORACE: Sir, will you condescend to play a part
in this?

ACT TWO

- ARNOLPHE: I mean to whether I'm asked or not!
First tell me this:
What d'you mean to do?
- HORACE: Let's put our heads together!
I half expected she'd come out on her
balcony,
and throw another stone!
Why do you think she doesn't?
- ARNOLPHE: Perhaps because of *me*?
- HORACE: What difference should *you* make?
- ARNOLPHE: Young women don't, as a rule,
stand on their balconies,
and throw stones at men.
- HORACE: That's very true!
I'll throw a stone at her!
- ARNOLPHE: What for?
- HORACE: Answer her letter! Tell her I love her.
- ARNOLPHE: No. I shouldn't do that.
- HORACE: Why not?
- ARNOLPHE: It might attract attention——
- HORACE: How?
- ARNOLPHE: The noise—La Souche might hear!
Remember he's very close!
- HORACE: That's true again!
- ARNOLPHE: One thing is certain!
Whatever course you take,
La Souche must never know.
This wants thinking over.
Suppose we sleep on it.
- HORACE: Sleep on it!
- ARNOLPHE: Tomorrow morning I shall see more
clearly.
I shall have made a plan.
Be patient till tomorrow.
- HORACE: Tomorrow! That seems years away.
- ARNOLPHE: But a few hours!

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- Better wait, than make some silly move,
that might be fatal.
- HORACE: I suppose that's true.
- ARNOLPHE: Of course it is!
If you want my help,
wait till the morning.
- HORACE: I'm in your hands!
- ARNOLPHE: Yes, dear boy, you are!
- HORACE: Where shall we meet?
- ARNOLPHE: Come to my house.
- HORACE: Your house?
- ARNOLPHE: If I'm not there—I'll leave a
message for you.
(He begins to urge Horace off the stage)
Don't stay here now.
Most ill-advised.
He may be watching.
- HORACE: You think so??
- ARNOLPHE: I shouldn't be surprised!
I have a feeling that he's got his eye on
you!
- HORACE: Tomorrow at your house.
How can I ever thank you?
- ARNOLPHE: Don't try!
I'll give you something to be thankful
for.
- HORACE: I take my leave. . . .

[He goes.

*When Horace has gone Arnolphe's pent-up feelings find
expression.]*

- ARNOLPHE: Oh, anguish, anguish, anguish!
Oh that letter!!!
It'll be the death of me!!
Oh, the little Vixen!!!!

ACT TWO

I can see her now——
 sitting there, listening to me——
 her childlike, smiling eyes!
 And all the time——
 the knowledge of what she'd done to
 me
 was at the back of them.
 Oh Women!!
 Young or old; clever or silly;
 at heart, they're all the same.
 They're never innocent.
 Either wanting intrigues; or having
 intrigues——
 or getting out of 'em!!
 Unfathomable depths of Infamy!!
 And this one's worse than most!
 She makes a mock of all I've done for
 her——
 I'll leave her to her fate!
 He'll take her; have her; and have
 done with her!
 I'll be revenged——
 she'll bring it on herself!
 What can I ask for more??

[He laughs, but his laugh turns to a groan.]

That way I'd lose her!——
 And I can't do that!
 I can't. I can't. I can't.
 I chose her for myself.
 So carefully! So many years ago!
 She'd no relations; not a single friend,
 she'd *nothing!*
 So she'd be wholly mine!
 I petted and played with her,

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

watched her grow up——
a child—a girl—a woman!
How I've looked forward——
Like any lovely fruit, I've watched her
 ripen:
and now another plucks her from my
 tree.

The more I think of it, the more I burn
 with rage.

Rage, I could bear—it passes!
But the more I'm consumed with Anger,
the more I'm consumed with Love.
Somehow, she's never seemed more
 beautiful.

I'm going mad!!!
She's up there now. Beyond her bal-
 cony.

I could call out to her!
What could I call??
I'm mad already! Stark, staring mad!
A fool, a shameless fool!
I could beat out my brains!

[He starts to beat his head with his hands, but stops——]

My horns! My cuckold's horns.

[He feels his head.]

No. They're not there.
Not yet. I'm sure they're not.
Oh, Merciful Heaven! Grant they
 never will be!
Or if they are,
give me the strength to bear them, like
 my fellow men!

ACT TWO

No! I'll not ask for that!
That's surrender!—and I'll not give
in!
What am I thinking of!
I hold all the cards!
The girl belongs to me——
I'm her appointed Guardian——
and, obviously, a better match for her,
than this young Ne'er-do-well!
For her own sake,
she has to marry me!
I have to keep my head!
That's all I have to do.
Instruct my servants further,
double-bolt my doors—that's all!——
and that I'll do.

*[He goes to his house; and at the door turns and looks in
the direction Horace has gone.]*

Young man, I'm sorry for you!
Tomorrow morning it'll be too late!

Curtain

ACT THREE

Scene: In the house.

Arnolphe is haranguing the two servants.

ARNOLPHE: Let me see! . . . Where was I? . . .

Oh yes—

Oh no!

First, tell me this:

since her kitten died,

there's been no cat or dog about the
house?

ALAIN: No.

GEORGETTE: No, there hasn't.

ARNOLPHE: Very strange! . . . Just now, up in her
room,

while I was talking to her,

I heard a noise.

It might have been a dog under the bed.

I looked, but there was nothing.

I don't know what it was.

Oh well, no matter!

Where did I say I was? . . . Oh yes:
get this into your skulls, thick as they
are.

A threat to my honour is a threat to
you!

If he outwits you and gets in again,

I've done with you!

Into the street you go, the pair of you—
and starve!—I'll see to that!

ALAIN (*in plaintive protest*):

Master, you can trust us.

GEORGETTE: We've *told* you so.

ALAIN: We keeps on tellin' yer!

ARNOLPHE (*ignoring them*):

You'd be a laughing stock!

ACT THREE

There's not a servant up and down the street,
or round the Square,
who wouldn't cock a snook at you——
the Nincompoops who couldn't guard
a home.

ALAIN (*indignant to Georgette*):

Did you hear that?

GEORGETTE: He called us Nincompoops.

ALAIN: I tell you, Master—if he came here
now——

ARNOLPHE: Well, what if he did——
and made a pretty speech.

ALAIN: A pretty speech! to me!——
just waste of breath!

ARNOLPHE: Ah, but suppose he came to you and
said:

(*He mimics and exaggerates Horace's voice
and manner*)

“I'm in great trouble! I beseech your
help!

As you hope for mercy at the Last,
grant me one tiny boon.”

ALAIN (*looking at him in great disgust*):

Oh, you're an idiot.

ARNOLPHE: What's that???

ALAIN (*blandly*): That's what I'd say to *him*!

ARNOLPHE: Oh yes—good, good, good!

(*He turns to Georgette*)

Now, he might say to *you*:—

“Georgette, my dear one! Oh, my
Beautiful.”

(*Georgette giggles*)

“You always were a favourite of mine!

So good. So *sympathetic*?

Such a heart of gold.”

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- GEORGETTE (*ferociously*): Oh, shut your mouth!!!
- ARNOLPHE: *What* did you say???
- GEORGETTE: You're *him*!
- ARNOLPHE: Oh yes. So I am!
But then he'd try again, even more pitiable.
"Oh, if you don't have mercy on me, I shall die!"
- GEORGETTE: Good riddance!
- ALAIN: I know of two, at least,
who'd be glad to see you go!!
- ARNOLPHE: Um? Yes! That sounds convincing.
But he'd not stop at that.
He'd try another tack!
"I know the world," he'd say——
"I'm not a man who wants something for nothing.
No one will suffer for what I want to do!
Why shouldn't *you* benefit?
Here's money for you! Gold!
Here, take it. Take it."
(*They both do.*)
- ALAIN (*suddenly giving Arnolphe a violent push*):
Now, get out of it!
- ARNOLPHE (*taken by surprise*): Hey!
- GEORGETTE (*also pushing him violently*): Be off!!
- ALAIN (*another push*): Away with you!!
- GEORGETTE (*another*): Make yourself scarce.
- ARNOLPHE: Hey! That's enough!
- ALAIN (*pleasantly*): That sort o' thing?
- GEORGETTE: Something like that??
- ARNOLPHE: (*recovering himself*):
Not bad. Not bad——
Except the money!
- ALAIN: Money?

ACT THREE

- GEORGETTE: What money??
 ARNOLPHE: I gave you some.
 ALAIN: Did you?
 ARNOLPHE: You put it in your pocket.
 ALAIN: Did I?
 ARNOLPHE: You shouldn't have taken it.
 ALAIN (*in mock amazement*): Shouldn't have taken it!
 GEORGETTE: Would you believe it!
 ALAIN: Let's do it all again.
 GEORGETTE: Pushing and all!
 ARNOLPHE: No need, no need!
 ALAIN: Try the bit again—offering money.
 GEORGETTE: We might forget—and take it, by mistake.
 ALAIN: Force o' habit.
 ARNOLPHE (*giving up*):
 Keep what I've given you!
 Less reason to take his!
 Well, he's a cleverer fellow than I think if he gets in now.
 In any case, we've seen the last of him, at least until tomorrow.
 GEORGETTE (*pointing to the window*): Master!
 ARNOLPHE: What is it?
 GEORGETTE: Look.

[*Arnolphe goes to the window.*]

- ARNOLPHE: Oh, God-in-Heaven, there he is again!
 ALAIN: And coming here!
 GEORGETTE: No. No, he's not.
 ALAIN: What's he up to?
 GEORGETTE: What's he doing at the balcony?
 ALAIN: He's going to climb it!
 GEORGETTE: He is!

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

ALAIN: He is! . . . He *is!* . . . He isn't!!

GEORGETTE: What's he think he's doin'?

ALAIN: Measuring.

GEORGETTE: That's what he's doing—taking measurements.

ARNOLPHE: This is insufferable!

Go out and stop him!

Ask him what he wants!

No, don't!—He wouldn't tell you;
and I've got to know!

I'll go myself—

out thro' the back; and take him from
behind.

(As he crosses the room)

Thank God he knows my Notary's in
the Square.

He always thinks that's where I'm
coming from.

(At the door)

Is he still there?

GEORGETTE: He's pickin' up a stone!

ARNOLPHE: Aah!!

(And he bolts)

[The stage becomes dark. Music, which continues until the Lights go up. Outside the house. Horace is at the balcony obviously making sure of its height. Arnolphe runs on to him.]

ARNOLPHE: Horace! You here again!

HORACE: You, too, Seigneur Arnolphe!

What are *you* doing here?

ARNOLPHE: Some very awkward business—with
my Notary—

keeps me on tenterhooks; running
to and fro.

ACT THREE

HORACE: Oh, such adventures since I saw you last!

I've been up in her room!!!

ARNOLPHE (*letting out an involuntary cry*): Aah!

HORACE: Don't say you're ill again??

ARNOLPHE: No—only excited by what you're telling me!

HORACE: I'll tell you everything!

ARNOLPHE: For God's sake, do!!

HORACE: Well, when I left you, I couldn't rest. To sleep upon it seemed impossible. In fact, my legs refused to bear me back to my lodgings. Instead, they brought me here! To have another look—just one more look——

at the dear window,
behind which she lives.

And there she was!
Out on her balcony——
and overjoyed to see me.

ARNOLPHE (*gives a groan which he tries to suppress—the result is an unexpected noise*)

HORACE: I knew you'd laugh!——
She managed to come down!

ARNOLPHE: Come down!

HORACE: Down the back stair-way; into the garden;
opened the gate for me——
she had the key.
Oh, she's a cunning one.

ARNOLPHE: She is, she is!

HORACE: Together we crept up again—into her room.

No sooner were we there,
than we heard footsteps!

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- Her guardian! On the stairs!
I was prepared to kill him!
- ARNOLPHE: Eh?
- HORACE: It wouldn't have been wise.
No point in doing that!
- ARNOLPHE: No point at all—Oh *no!* A great
mistake!
- HORACE: But Agnes, acting in a flash,
bundled me into her wardrobe!
He stayed there half an hour
talking such utter drivel——
what I could hear of it.
There I was—shut up——
it was as dark as night and hot as hell,
I couldn't see a thing,
and then—I got the cramps!
I bumped my head; knocked down a
dress;
and got myself entangled in a shift!
The *row* I made!
I can't imagine how he didn't hear——
God, he must be decrepit!
Deaf as a post.
- ARNOLPHE (*not hearing*): Eh?
- HORACE: I said, deaf as a post.
- ARNOLPHE: Oh yes——
- HORACE: And tonight!!!——
- ARNOLPHE: Tonight???
- HORACE: I visit her again.
She begged me to!
Never have I known,
such simple, natural, unconventional,
uninhibited
yet strangely innocent expression
of all she feels and wants.
Oh, I'm her slave!

ACT THREE

Obeying her every whim!
I don't know how to wait till darkness
falls——

Then, I shall bring a ladder——

ARNOLPHE: A ladder!

HORACE: I've taken the measurements.

Under his very nose!

And there he sits, snug in his little
fortress,

thinking himself secure.

But tonight——

ARNOLPHE: Yes??

HORACE: YES!!!

[*Chrysalde comes hurrying on.*]

CHRYSALDE: Ah, my dear friend! I'm pleased to find
you.

I feared I might be late.

ARNOLPHE: Late? Late for what?

CHRYSALDE: Dinner!

ARNOLPHE: Dinner—who wants dinner?

CHRYSALDE: I do. You invited me!

ARNOLPHE: Oh! . . . er! . . . This is Horace!

Son of my oldest friend.

HORACE: And a good friend to me—dear Seig-
neur Arnolphe.

CHRYSALDE: You mustn't call him that!

HORACE: Not call him by his name?

CHRYSALDE: It's not his name. He's changed it!

ARNOLPHE: No, no! Indeed I haven't.

CHRYSALDE: You told me so yourself
only this morning.

“Here I'm not known as Arnolphe”
—that's what you said——

“My name is now——” . . . Ah, it's
on my tongue . . .

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- “is now——” No, I’ve forgotten it!
- ARNOLPHE (*to himself*): Thank God for that!
- CHRYSALDE: Don’t tell me! I’ll have it in a moment!
It was a silly name.
La . . . La . . .
- ARNOLPHE (*breaking in*): Oh la la!
(*Then he hisses, under his breath*)
Hold your tongue!
- CHRYSALDE: I beg your pardon!
- HORACE: I must be off.
(*To Chrysalde*) Sir, I take my leave!
(*To Arnolphe*) Wish me luck tonight.

[*And he goes.*]

- CHRYSALDE (*a sudden shout of remembering*):
La Souche! La Souche!!
- ARNOLPHE: Ugh!
- HORACE (*returning*): Who called La Souche?
- ARNOLPHE: Nobody called! I sneezed! (*He sneezes*)
La . . . Soooooche!
I think my cold is worse!
- HORACE: Oh, I’m sorry.
(*To Chrysalde*) We must take care of him.
I’m anxious for him—he has so many
ailments.
Well, goodbye again!

[*And again he goes.*]

- CHRYSALDE: Why this mystery?
- ARNOLPHE (*tetchily*): There *is* no mystery.
- CHRYSALDE (*good humoured*):
I should have thought there was!
But let it go! What about dinner?
- ARNOLPHE: I’m not hungry!

ACT THREE

- CHRYSSALDE: But I am!! Do we have dinner here?
I gather your intended doesn't dine out!
- ARNOLPHE: She won't get any dinner.
- CHRYSSALDE: Not hungry either?
- ARNOLPHE: Whether she is or not, she'll go without!
- CHRYSSALDE: You sound a happy household! Any-
thing wrong?
- ARNOLPHE: Everything!
- CHRYSSALDE: Oh my poor friend—tell me the trouble!
- ARNOLPHE (*a soulful and comprehensive protest*)
Oh, I'm the sport of Fate!
That's what I am—a plaything of the
gods!
And after all the forethought that I have
taken
to arrange the future exactly as I want—
It isn't fair!
I ask no special treatment from Above.
A little recognition, some slight reward,
for all I've done—
and all I haven't done—
But no! The gods are jealous, that's
what it is!
They'll have no planning in the Uni-
verse
except their Own.
- CHRYSSALDE: Yes; but—apart from the Universe—
what's wrong?
- ARNOLPHE: I'll tell you. Listen—that young
jackanapes—
- CHRYSSALDE: Horace? The Charming Horace??
- ARNOLPHE: —the devil take his charm—
while I was away, broke into my house.
- CHRYSSALDE: And met the girl?
And she thinks well of him?
- ARNOLPHE: A thousand times too well!

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- CHRYSALDE: Well—what d'you expect?
The first young gentleman she's ever
seen!
And most presentable!
Were he a Monster, she'd have been
intrigued!
- ARNOLPHE: He is a Monster—of Deceit!
And so is she!
The way they plot and plan——
- CHRYSALDE (*laughing at him*):
You've spent your life in making plans
to outwit your fellows.
It has one disadvantage—others do the
same!
- ARNOLPHE: But she's my wife!
- CHRYSALDE: Is she?
- ARNOLPHE: Well, very nearly is——
- CHRYSALDE: And you're jealous!
- ARNOLPHE: Wouldn't you be?
- CHRYSALDE: Yes. I expect I should!
But knowing myself, as well as knowing
you,
I doubt if I should feel the same
despair——
nor even, for that matter, lose my
appetite!
- ARNOLPHE: I hate your flippancy!
- CHRYSALDE: An attempt to laugh you out of your
misery!
But, in all seriousness,
it's not the gods
or fate
or some External Thing
that tortures you.
It's something in yourself——

ACT THREE

It's this barbaric passion of possessiveness.

You can't keep even your dearest things completely to yourself.

ARNOLPHE: There is a limit.

CHRYSALDE: Of course there is. It's where you set your limits.

Yours are quite impossibly confined. They should be stretched with generosity.

A civilised desire that the one you love should have the most from life.

ARNOLPHE: Revolting nonsense!

An intellectual excuse for immorality!

CHRYSALDE (*beated himself*)

Let me tell you, sir,

I think your attitude just as nonsensical and as revolting—as you think mine.

And to what depths of folly does this dread of cuckoldry reduce you!

A man may be a thief; a bully; or a cheat;

if his wife's faithful to him,

he's a decent chap!

Why judge a man by how his wife behaves?

Take my advice——

ARNOLPHE: Advice from you! Rank poison!

CHRYSALDE: Take it as medicine then!

A little at a time.

Nasty—but to be swallowed.

Here's a dose:

look to your own behaviour!

Not too much to hers;

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

or you may drive her to the thing you
fear.

ARNOLPHE: I never heard such idiocy.
I'll tell you this:
unless I keep an eye on her;
both eyes—wide open—
the worst will happen—I shall be
betrayed.

CHRYSALDE: What then?

ARNOLPHE: Eh? What was that? *What* did I hear??

CHRYSALDE: It's an accident can happen to us all!
To bear it bravely, and with self-
respect—

ARNOLPHE: Self-respect!
You sicken me.
To compromise with Evil; and call it
self-respect!

CHRYSALDE: The thing's as Evil as you think it is.
No more, no less.
Regard it as overwhelming—you'll be
overwhelmed.
Believe it bearable—you'll find you'll
bear it.

ARNOLPHE: And go about the place,
boasting my wife has lovers—and I like
it!

CHRYSALDE: If you boast about it, everybody knows.
But so they do if you run mad,
and call destruction down on all con-
cerned,
yourself included!
You're just as ridiculous raging as
boasting.
There's a middle way.
Keep quiet about it!
Steel yourself to silence.

ACT THREE

Avert your eyes!
And it *can* happen—when you turn to
look,
there's nothing there!

ARNOLPHE: That's very possible!
No lover and no wife—they've gone
away together.

Any more physic?
I'll pour it in the street.

CHRYSALDE: I'll give you one more dose.
I'd rather be married to a wife,
who might, on occasion, have a faith-
less lapse,

than to a nagging one.
Or to a wife, always making demands,
who eats a man alive,
complaining all the time
she doesn't like the taste!

Or to the worst of all——
some Paragon of Virtue,
who believes her Faithfulness
to be her only obligation in the married
state.

And has only one interest in her
husband——
that he should have no interest in
another woman!

Then, she springs to life,
and pours abuse upon him.

Here's a last pill!

If a woman isn't always all that she
should be

it gives the man a certain latitude.

So swallow that!

Talking of swallowing—I'm hungry!

I must go and eat!

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

[*And without waiting, he strides off.*]

ARNOLPHE: Here! Hi! Come back!

[*But Chrysalde has gone.*]

Of all the idiots!
(*Then he turns towards the house and calls*)
Alain! . . . Alain!! . . . Georgette!

[*Alain appears.*]

Oh, there you are!
Come out here; I want to talk to you.
Is Georgette there?
ALAIN: She's coming.
ARNOLPHE (*turning again from the house*):
Oh, I'm so angry!
GEORGETTE (*appearing; to Alain*):
What's the matter now?
ALAIN (*to Arnolphe*): With us?
ARNOLPHE: No. Not with you.
An interfering fool, who says a lot of
things
I don't know how to answer—till he's
gone!
Oh, what's he matter?
I can deal with him another time.
Now to deal with Horace!
And I will!
(*To the servants*)
I found out what he was up to;
you were right—measuring.
He's going to bring a ladder!
GEORGETTE: A ladder? Whatever for?
ARNOLPHE: What d'you think?

ACT THREE

GEORGETTE: To climb.

ARNOLPHE: My God, you're bright!

ALAIN: You mean he's going to climb a ladder on to the balcony? . . . Into her room?

ARNOLPHE: I don't suppose he'd stop out on the balcony!

GEORGETTE: Oh, the wickedness!

ALAIN: What are you going to do?

ARNOLPHE: I'm going to let him.

GEORGETTE: } Let him?—

ALAIN: } You're going to let him?—

ARNOLPHE: Hold your tongues.

He's coming here tonight!

Inside the house, we three will be on guard—

watching!

As soon as he appears,

the two of you—armed with sticks—
out thro' the kitchen; into the street;
behind him!

It'll be dark.

He'll place his ladder.

As soon as he sets one foot upon the
bottom rung
you attack.

And beat him.

Beat him black and blue.

Belabour him.

Don't spare that back of his!

We'll teach him such a lesson!

Black-and-blue, and bleeding, he can
creep home,

and that's the last we'll have of him—
hanging about the place!

Into the house!

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

We have to find the sticks.
They must be stout and strong, and
very nobbly!
I could be glad of this!
I feel myself, tonight, the champion of
my sex.
If every lover were received like this,
that wretched animal—a man with
horns——
would soon become extinct!
In with you. In.
It's getting dark.
We shan't have long to wait.

[They go in. The Lights fade. . . . Music, which continues until the Lights come up. Inside the room. . . . Now it is lit by candles. And Arnolphe with his two servants is at the window peering out into the night.]

ARNOLPHE: He should be coming any moment now!
It's very dark!
We shall see him when he comes,
round the corner,
under the lamplight, there, across the
road.
. . . What was that? . . . Something
moved!
Isn't that a shadow? On the wall?
It moved again——
It's *him!* . . . He's coming! . . . Here
he is!
And with his ladder!
Have you got your sticks?
He's stopping . . . and looks round,
Now looks to her balcony.
Oh, you villain!

ACT THREE

He thinks he's unobserved!
Here he comes, nearer. . . .
Careful! Keep from the window!
Don't let him see you!
Are you ready?
Don't go yet!
Wait till I give the word . . . get
ready . . .
ready. . . .
Now!
Out! Thro' the kitchen.

[*The servants with an ugly-looking stick each run to the door. There he stops them for a last quick instruction.*]

ARNOLPHE: As he mounts the ladder—strike!
And strike hard.
Don't spare your blows.
There's nothing sham about this fight,
so strike to hurt.

[*They go.*]

(*alone*) Oh, this is wonderful!
I wouldn't miss this moment for the
world!
(*cautiously to the window again*)
What's he doing now?
How stealthily he moves!
Again, he stops! . . . again, looks
up! . . .
now sets the ladder! . . .
Where are those servants??
In a moment, he'll be up it.
Ah! There they are!
I can see 'em, in the lamplight!
They mustn't stop there, or he'll see
them too!!

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

Ah, there they go—into the shadows!
I can see 'em moving.
They must be near him——
Yes, they're close behind him! Almost
touching!
Now he starts to climb!
Now! . . . Now!!!

[And he himself gives a great swinging blow with an imaginary stick—which is followed by a great cry.]

He's getting what he asked for!
(But he shrinks away from the window)
My God, Alain can hit!
And Georgette, too!
I've never seen a carpet beaten with half
such energy. . . .
*(He stands and listens . . . but there is no
sound)*
What's happened?
(He returns to the window)
What *could* have happened??
I can't see anyone . . . and not a
sound.
He must have got away; and they'll be
coming back.
*(He moves about for a few moments, in a
state of great agitation)*
Why don't they come!!
They may have overdone it!
That last blow of Alain's would have
felled an ox.
I can't stand much of this!!!

*[The servants re-enter, Alain first . . . Georgette behind.
They look at him. There is a silence. Then:]*

ACT THREE

. . . Well?
 ALAIN: Master! . . . He's dead!
 ARNOLPHE: . . . Merciful Heaven! . . .
 (*Then suddenly he shouts*)
 Madman! . . . You madman!
 ALAIN (*shouting back in his fear*):
 Don't shout at me!
 Nor blame us either!
 We did what we was told.

[*Arnolphe stands gaping at him for a few moments in silent horror.*]

ARNOLPHE (*in a small, dry voice*): . . . What happened?
 ALAIN (*quietly*):
 As he began to climb,
 I aimed a blow.
 But as I aimed he stooped.
 It must have hit his head.
 He gave a cry; one cry;
 let go his hold—and fell.
 Fell at my feet;
 and didn't move . . . 'e never moved!
 I turned him over, like a sack o' coals!
 There never was a doornail, half as dead
 . . . 'e never moved!
 ARNOLPHE: He never moved!
 He lies there now.
 ALAIN: Oh no, 'e don't!
 ARNOLPHE: Well, where's he gone to??
 ALAIN: Into the garden!
 ARNOLPHE: Into the garden???
 ALAIN: Yes. I dragged him there!
 Round to the back.
 No point in leaving him,

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

for every stranger, passing by, to see!
Master—this is Murder.

[*Upon which Georgette sets up a great wailing hullabaloo.*]

- GEORGETTE: Oh! Oh!! Oh!!!
I'm frightened! I'm afraid!
What are we going to do?
What'll they do to us?
We'll be arrested; put in prison;
executed!!!
- ARNOLPHE: Oh, for God's sake, woman, stop it,
stop that noise.
You'll be all right. No harm'll come to
you.
Or him; or me.
- ALAIN: No harm!! How d'you make that out?
- ARNOLPHE: The blow was struck in self-defence.
- ALAIN: Well!! of all the—Self-Defence!!!
- ARNOLPHE: Defending my honour!
And the girl's!
And he was breaking in.
- ALAIN: Yes; that's true enough.
- ARNOLPHE: The Law has little sympathy for thieves;
and young seducers——
- GEORGETTE: Oh—are you sure of that?
- ARNOLPHE: Well, if it has——
there's certainly a way of getting round
it.
Let me think!
First, leave the ladder there—for
evidence.
Next—the body——
- ALAIN: In the potting shed.
He'll stay there till you want him.
- ARNOLPHE: I'll to the Notary.

ACT THREE

If he's in bed, I'll rouse him.
He'll tell us what to do.
It may be that La Souche must disappear;
and the four of us leave Paris for a while;
and live in my country house.
There I am "Arnolphe".
and "La Souche" is nobody.
He doesn't exist!
How can a man without existence
commit a crime?
Pack all your things to travel, and wait
here.

(At the door, he has another thought)

Did you see Agnes?

GEORGETTE: No!

ALAIN: Not a sign of her!

ARNOLPHE: That's something to be thankful for!—
Pack her things, too.

[He goes. Light fades. Music which continues until the Lights come up again.]

In the street.

It is rather dark; there is some moonlight; and on the side of the stage furthest from the house some kind of street lamp throws an arc of golden light around itself.

Arnolphe comes out of his front door, and crosses the stage not without apprehension.

And when he is in the patch of golden light, he hears his own name called.]

A VOICE: Seigneur Arnolphe!

ARNOLPHE *(stopping dead; very scared)*:

Who's that?? . . . who called???

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

THE VOICE (*again*): Seigneur Arnolphe!
ARNOLPHE (*In a trembling voice*): Who is it?
HORACE (*appearing*): Me!

[*Arnolphe lets out a strangled cry.*]

You didn't expect to see *me* here again!
And I must say: I'm not surprised.

Oh, Seigneur Arnolphe——
since I saw you last,
I've had such strokes of luck!

ARNOLPHE: Of *what*?

HORACE: Of luck! Of great good fortune!

ARNOLPHE: I think I'm going mad.

HORACE: Off to your Notary again??

ARNOLPHE: Same old business.

At it day and night.

HORACE: But that's where I was going!

ARNOLPHE: *You?* To my Notary!

HORACE: Yes.

ARNOLPHE: Whatever for?

Has something happened to you?

HORACE: It has! Indeed it has.

ARNOLPHE: I should keep quiet about it, if I were
you.

HORACE: Keep quiet? No. Never.

He'll see the inside of a prison,
or something worse.

ARNOLPHE: You mean La Souche?

HORACE: La Souche is done for; finished;
we've heard the last of him.

ARNOLPHE: I think you may be right!

HORACE: We can forget him. He no longer
counts. . .

Things have gone further!

ARNOLPHE: What's that? Further?

ACT THREE

- HORACE: Adventure upon Adventure.
Listen to this:—
I came here with a ladder—as I said—
no sooner had I set one foot upon a
rung,
than I was set upon.
It must have been La Souche.
- ARNOLPHE: Oh no!
- HORACE: How did he know?
- ARNOLPHE: Know what?
- HORACE: That I was coming.
- ARNOLPHE: Don't ask me!
And you were set upon! I can't
believe it.
- HORACE: They might have killed me,
very nearly did.
A blow right on the head.
It knocked me out!
And the next thing I knew,
I slowly realised I was on the ground
and someone bending over me.
La Souche!—or one of his household,
there were two of them—
I'd been unconscious, and my eyes were
closed,
and so I kept 'em closed—
I heard him telling someone I was
dead—
Lord, he was frightened.
Then, if you please, he took me by the
feet,
and dragged me, for what seemed a
hundred miles,
over some cobble stones,
and thro' a cabbage patch,
and dumped me in a shed.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

And shut the door!
I still felt pretty dizzy.
And not knowing where they were,
I thought I'd better stop there for a
while.

Then, in the dark,
I heard a quiet fumbling at the door,
and it was opened.
Someone came in.
And knelt beside me,
and began to cry!
Tears fell on my face;
well, by that time, I thought that I'd
been
dead for long enough——
and opened my eyes.
A face—so close to mine——
in the half-darkness——
looking down at me.
It was hers.

ARNOLPHE: Hers??? You mean Agnes?

HORACE: Yes. Agnes.
She'd watched the whole thing from her
balcony.

And when they'd gone, came down.

Now d'you realise my luck?

She's come to me!

She's mine!

She's with me now!

ARNOLPHE: Aah!

HORACE: Dear Seigneur Arnolphe, ought you to
be out?

ARNOLPHE: Out?

HORACE: This chill night air is shocking for a
cold.

ACT THREE

- ARNOLPHE: She's with you now?
What have you done with her?
Where is she?
- HORACE: Under that archway.
Waiting for me.
(*Pointing off*)
You can see her from here.
I was taking her with me to your
Notary.
I thought perhaps he'd know your
whereabouts.
I *had* to find you——
even at this hour.
There's no one else!
Sir, I have to ask you one last favour.
You see;
as it's turned out, this is no episode.
Her tears upon my face!
The things she said to me!
First, her distress; and then, her
happiness!
I know she loves me.
Even more deeply
I know that I love her.
Those few moments in a potting shed—
But she is all my world,
and I am hers——
I mean to marry her.
- ARNOLPHE: Marry!
- HORACE: That, with your Notary's help,
I can do tomorrow.
But there's tonight.
- ARNOLPHE: What of tonight?
- HORACE: Perhaps you'll think I'm foolish;
but even before I'm married,
she seems to be my wife.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

And there's her reputation to be thought of.

She can't come home with me; because, in my lodgings, I'm alone—— with only one room.

Dear sir, would you, just for tonight, I hardly like to say it——

Would you take care of her?

ARNOLPHE: Me—take care of her?

HORACE: I know it's a lot to ask.

ARNOLPHE: Yes; but I will, my boy; of course I will.

Bring her to me at once.

HORACE: I will. I will. At once,

Oh, I'm so grateful!

Oh, when you see her, you'll fall in love with her.

ARNOLPHE: Wait! Wait a moment! Wait!

What am I thinking of?

When she sees me—it's always possible she may not want to come.

HORACE: She doesn't want to leave me anyhow.

ARNOLPHE: Is that so? In that case, we must be careful.

We have to consider *her!*

Let me advise!——

Forgive me, but I'm older——

Now, let me think:

I'll stand aside.

You tell her who I am.

Old Seigneur Arnolphe, tell her——

your father's oldest friend——

and yours.

And tell her this:

I'll guard her, as if she were my own.

HORACE: How can I thank you!

ACT THREE

ARNOLPHE: I'm pleased to do it.
 Very pleased——
 you'll never know how pleased!——
 Now——
 go and send her to me!
 I'll wait here!

[*He makes a gesture throwing his cloak up round his face so as to hide it—but he just overdoes it—so that Horace notices.*]

HORACE: Why are you doing that?

ARNOLPHE: Doing what?

HORACE: Putting your cloak about your face?

ARNOLPHE: Eh? . . . I'm feeling cold!

The night air, you know!

You were quite right, my boy—it's very dangerous!

A touch of pleurisy!

(*He clutches at his chest*)

HORACE: Oh sir!

ARNOLPHE: No matter! Never mind! I'll risk my life for you——

only for Heaven's sake, dear fellow,
 and for mine——

cut this thing short!

As quick as you can, say your Goodnight
 to her,

allay her fears;

tell her you'll fetch her early in the
 morning.

Remember, every added moment
 brings me nearer Death——

I fear pneumonia!

[*He has a terrible fit of coughing.*]

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

HORACE: Oh, indeed, I'll hurry—
you must get home to bed.

ARNOLPHE: Yes. Yes. I must.
At once.
So go and send her to me.

[*Horace runs off. Arnolphe, his cloak well across his face, moves into the darkest shadow he can find. . . . Horace re-enters with Agnes. But she is unwilling.*]

HORACE: My darling love,
he'll guard you with his life—
he's told me so,
my father's oldest friend.
No one could be more suitable in all
the world.

AGNES: I want to stay with you!

HORACE: I want you to:
but, dearest, you can't.
For one night—that's all—
and for my sake, as well as yours.

AGNES: I'm not happy any more
unless you're with me.

HORACE: It's the same with me.

AGNES: Then why not stay together!!
It's a silly world!

HORACE: You know I love you.

AGNES: Not as I love you.
For if you did,
you'd never let me go!
(*She catches sight of the dark figure of
Arnolphe*)

Who's that?

HORACE: That's him!

[*Agnes takes a step towards him: and drops a curtsy.*]

ACT THREE

Arnolphe, still in deep shadow, bows. But Agnes turns back to Horace.]

AGNES: Don't go!

[Behind her back, Arnolphe is now making violent signs to Horace, that he should go.]

HORACE: I must.

AGNES: Then come back soon.

HORACE: Tomorrow morning, before the sun is up,
I'll come to his house, to fetch you;
and we'll never part again.

AGNES: I'm frightened! Don't leave me here,
alone!

HORACE: Darling—you're not alone!
Look! There's my friend!
And yours.
Tomorrow morning. Early.
Till then—Goodnight.

[He kisses her; and goes. . . . She stands, looking after him. . . . Stealthily, like an animal after its prey, Arnolphe creeps towards her. Seeming to sense his approach, she turns to him. Swiftly, all in one movement, he seizes her by the hand, and hurries her towards the house.]

AGNES *(utterly taken by surprise)*:
Oh! . . . Oh! . . . No . . . No . . . No!

[But she hardly has time to raise her voice before they disappear into the house. The Lights fade. Music, which continues, until the Lights come up. Inside the house. . . . It is daylight. Piled about the room are baggages and boxes and bundles—the paraphernalia of travel. Arnolphe is

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

there; and the two servants; and Agnes sits perched on a large travelling trunk, disconsolate.]

ARNOLPHE: Is all the packing done?
All of it?
(*At the various piles*)
—Mine; and yours;
and yours; and hers.
All ready, eh?
Ready to be off into the country
at any moment.
Good.
You needn't hang about!
I can make sure she doesn't run away.
Go to your rooms.
I'll call you when I want you——
in a moment.

[The servants go . . . and he turns to Agnes. He has regained his composure; but is in a cold rage.]

Well!—Miss Simplicity!
Miss Innocence!!
Miss *Cunning*!!!
Where did you learn it, eh?
You're wicked from your birth——
——the lot of you——
that's what it is!
Thank God, I know it;
and can be cunning, too!
I can match yours; and add some of my
own.
And I already have!
Don't look to your lover to come and
rescue you.
He knows me by another name,

ACT THREE

- and in another house!
- AGNES: Why do you scold me so?
I've done nothing wrong!
- ARNOLPHE: Wrong! Done nothing wrong?
To run off with a lover! Nothing
wrong!!!
- AGNES: But to be married!
That's why I went to him!
Marriage takes away the sin——
you told me so yourself!
- ARNOLPHE: Oh, you're a half-wit!
You can marry only one husband——
and you're to marry me.
- AGNES: I'd much rather not!
- ARNOLPHE: And why?
- AGNES: Well—for one thing——
you make it sound so awful!
He makes it sound a joy.
Besides, I love him!
- ARNOLPHE: You dare sit there,
and tell me that you love him?
- AGNES: But it's true!
The Nuns taught me always to tell the
truth.
- ARNOLPHE: Oh drat the Nuns!
Oh what a reward for doing all in my
power——
everything I could——
to make you love me!
- AGNES: What did you say!—"to make me love
you"?
- ARNOLPHE: Yes——
- AGNES: You've tried?
- ARNOLPHE: Of course I have!
- AGNES: Well! . . . Who would have thought
it!

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- You're not as good at it as Horace is!
- ARNOLPHE: Oh, how you answer back!
Any sophisticated Miss in High Society
could learn from you.
Very well!
Since you're so clever, and know every-
thing,
answer me this:
Considering everything I've done for
you,
had you educated,
fed you; and clothed you;—and now,
given you a house and servants of your
own——
- AGNES: I don't call those servants;
they're more like prison guards.
And had me educated!
Taught!
What did you have me taught?
Nothing!—so I'm ashamed!
He taught me all I know
and all I want to know.
It's him I should be grateful to; not
you!
- ARNOLPHE: Oh, I could give you such a sounding
smack!
- AGNES: All right; go on; and do it!
It wouldn't make me love you any more.
- ARNOLPHE (*in a passion*):
My fingers itch to beat you!
And everything you say, and do, and
are——
(*then his voice breaks*)
makes you more lovely!
And I love you more!
And more, and more, and more!!

ACT THREE

Oh, Women may be wicked——
 but Men are fools!
 Weak fools!
 And I'm a man!
 I love you more than he——
 —I've known you so much longer!——
 What did he do, to gain your love?
 I'll do the same!
 He gave you presents!
 Well—what of that?
 I'll give you better ones!
 What d'you want? Just tell me!
 Fine clothes? And friends? And all the
 life of Paris?
 Yours—for the asking!
 Don't look at me, like that;
 without a smile!
 What did he do to please you?
 kissed your neck and arms——
 and so will I!!
(He seizes her hand; she withdraws)
 You seize your hand away!
 What *do* you want?
 For I'm your slave!
 See! I'm on my knees!
 Just say the word!
 I'll beat my brains out!
 Or I'll kill myself!

AGNES: Oh, please do stop!
 Why should you kill yourself?
 It's all so *silly*!
 If you're my slave——

ARNOLPHE: I am. I am. I am.
(He grovels before her)

AGNES: Then take me back to Horace——
 and let me marry him.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

[*For a moment Arnolphe stays quite still where he is on the floor; then struggles to his feet. He is quite livid with rage.*]

ARNOLPHE: This is insufferable! (*He calls*) Alain!!
You've had your chance! (*He calls again*) Alain!!!
I'll never offer you another thing.

[*Alain appears.*]

Bring round the carriage—to the back;
and put the luggage in.
Then come and let me know the
minute that you're ready.

[*Alain hurries out thro' the kitchen. Georgette has appeared.*]

During the journey you're to guard the
girl!
Don't let her out of sight—
We start at once.

[*There is a sudden loud knocking on the door.*]

Now, who—in God's name—is that??
GEORGETTE: I expect its *him!*
ALAIN: It isn't.
GEORGETTE: Three of 'em!
ARNOLPHE: *Three!* D'you know 'em?
ALAIN: Not from Adam!

[*More knocking*]

Don't open . . . I'll go myself and
see!

ACT THREE

[He runs out thro' the kitchen. More knocking. . . . Agnes begins to cry. Georgette goes to comfort her, and the girl, clinging to her, sobs in her arms. . . . More knocking. The stage becomes dark. Music, which continues, until the Lights come up. In the street. Three men, Chrysalde, Oronte and Enrique are standing at the front door. . . . Arnolphe appears stealthily, from the opposite side of the stage, watching and listening but keeping out of sight.]

CHRYSALDE: My good Enrique!

Are you quite sure this is the house?

ENRIQUE: Well . . . from the address and the description, yes.

CHRYSALDE: I think you must be wrong.

I know the man who owns it.

ORONTE: Who?

CHRYSALDE: Arnolphe.

ORONTE: • Arnolphe! Seigneur Arnolphe??

Oh no—you're wrong yourself;

I know him well.

One of my oldest friends.

Last time I was in Paris,

I had dinner with him——

at his house——

it wasn't here.

CHRYSALDE: He has other houses.

One here in Paris—where you had dinner;

another, in the country;

but this is where you'll find him——

under another name.

ORONTE: Another name?

What do you mean?

What for??

CHRYSALDE: He's very close about it.

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

Something to do with a young girl
he means to marry.

ORONTE:

Marry!
Arnolphe?

A young girl—you can't be serious!

CHRYSALDE: Indeed I am.

ORONTE: But he's as old as I am!
Even older!

Another name!

He must be crazy!

What's he call himself?

CHRYSALDE: He told me . . . but I can't remember.

ORONTE: Then, who lives here?

CHRYSALDE: The girl.

That's why he bought the house.

And today, I think it is, he plans to
marry.

ORONTE:

Well, well, well.

We've come in time to pull his leg,
and give him a wedding-feast.

Let's knock again.

(He does . . . then turns to Enrique)

Enrique, dear fellow, you've been
misinformed.

These aren't the two we're after.

CHRYSALDE: Strange no one answers!

He keeps two servants; and the girl
herself.

ENRIQUE: Here's some kind of garden, at the back;
and another door.

CHRYSALDE: Let's try that. There must be someone
in!

[The three disappear.

*Arnolphe ventures out towards the middle of the stage—
when Horace comes quickly from the other direction.]*

ACT THREE

HORACE: Seigneur Arnolphe!

ARNOLPHE: Horace!

HORACE: Disaster!! Utter disaster!!!

ARNOLPHE: What's the matter now???

HORACE: Last night, I returned to my lodgings,
walking on air——
to find my father waiting,
with a man Enrique——
a childhood friend; and fabulously
rich——

he has a daughter!——

I'm to marry her!

My father's adamant.

I wasn't even able to come to your
house this morning.

This man Enrique—rolling in money
and thinking he owns the world,
insisted on coming in this direction,
to find some house or other;
and I had to come with them.

But, as we passed your Notary,
I slipt inside, to try and get a message to
you.

Oh, Seigneur Arnolphe!

You'll intercede for me?

You won't see Agnes snatched away
from me——

under your very nose?

ARNOLPHE: You can rely on me.

HORACE: I knew I could! I knew!

[*Chrysalde and Oronte, and later Enrique reappear.*]

CHRYSLALDE: Why, there he is!

ORONTE (*going quickly to Arnolphe; and greeting
him effusively*):

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

- My dear old friend!
- ARNOLPHE: Oronte! Dear fellow! But I'm glad to see you!
- ORONTE: And what a day to choose to run across you so!
Your wedding-day!
You to be married—at your age!
I'm proud of you!
- ARNOLPHE: How did you know?
Oh, Chrysalde has told you.
Yes. I and my future wife start for the country in a moment's time.
Another minute, and you'd have missed us.
- HORACE: Seigneur Arnolphe!
You to be married!
But you never mentioned it!
- ARNOLPHE: No. You had other things to think about!
(Turning to Oronte)
Talking of getting married,
I hear you plan a marriage for your son.
- ORONTE: And the young dog objects.
- ARNOLPHE: Oh, but that's very wrong!
- HORACE *(utterly taken aback)*: Wrong??
- ARNOLPHE: There's nothing I feel more passionately about than filial duty!
- HORACE: But, Seigneur Arnolphe!—
- ARNOLPHE: A son must obey his father!
And in everything!
This Modern Cult of Disobedience must be stamped out.
- CHRYSALDE: Oh come, my dear fellow!
Force a young man to marry,
and against his will?
- ARNOLPHE: You take the rebel's part!

ACT THREE

I might have known it.
Irresponsible!
This refusal of the young
to recognise Authority
threatens Society.
Horace! Obey your father!
It's your Duty!
(*To Oronte*)
And you, old friend,
insist on his Obedience.
It's your Duty, too!
And doing your duty, both of you!
you'll find happiness——

[*Georgette appears in a great state of excitement from the house.*]

GEORGETTE (*loudly*)
Master, what shall I do?
The girl's run mad.
I can't keep hold of her.
She wants to get away!

ARNOLPHE (*taken aback; but recovering himself*):
See how it is with me!
So eager is the girl I'm going to marry,
there's no restraining her!
You heard?
“She wants to get away,”
into my coach,
into the country,
into my arms——

[*Agnes suddenly comes rushing from the house; and straight into the arms of Horace.*]

AGNES: Horace, my love!

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

HORACE *(receiving her):*
 My darling, darling girl!

ORONTE: In Heaven's Name—what's this?

ARNOLPHE: Keep calm! Don't lose your head!
 I'll deal with this!
(To the two young people, locked in each other's arms)
 That's right, my dear—say your good-
 byes to him.
 And you, young fellow—take a last
 farewell.

[Alain has appeared; and is making signs to Arnolphe, who doesn't see him.]

ORONTE *(to Alain):*
 What is it!
 What d'you want??

ALAIN: A word with my master.

ORONTE: Your master?

ALAIN: Monsieur La Souche.

HORACE *(extricating himself from Agnes):*
 La Souche?
 Did I hear La Souche?
(To Alain)
 Is this man called La Souche?

ALAIN: Well, it's 'is name.

CHRYSALDE: Yes! *That's* the name! La Souche!

ENRIQUE *(emerging unexpectedly from the background):*
 Then you're the man I want!

ORONTE: Enrique, dear fellow, can you unravel
 me this mystery?

ENRIQUE: Indeed I can.
 And there's no mystery!
 Some fifteen years ago,
 I had to go on business to America.

ACT THREE

My wife came with me.
 But for our baby girl,
 she feared the long, uncertain, perilous
 weeks at sea.
 Believing we should be away only a
 year or less,
 we found a woman we could trust
 and left our child with her.
 But in America,
 my wife died of a fever,
 and the business failed
 and I was alone; with nothing!
 But as with awful suddenness
 the Fates had taken all that I had,
 with equal wantonness
 they gave me back more than I needed.
 By a first stroke of luck
 I found myself with money in my purse:
 with which——
 caring little whether I won or lost——
 I speculated.
 And won; and won; and won.
 And so I hastened home
 sought out the woman,
 and learned from her
 she'd given my daughter to a man La
 Souche.

HORACE

(*to Arnolphe*):
 Oh what hypocrisy!
 What cunning! What deceit!
 You nauseating villain!

ENRIQUE

(*to Arnolphe*):
 Sir, let me shake your hand!
 I've much to thank you for!!
 The woman told me how you'd cared
 for her,

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES

and everything she has, she owes to you.
Now, bring her to me.
Oh, my eyes ache
to see the only living thing
that is some part of *me!*

[*Then Agnes walks to him; and stands in front of him; and looks him up and down.*]

AGNES: I've often heard the story,
how my parents went to America——
and disappeared!

ENRIQUE: You!
Can you be the baby that I left asleep!
Indeed you are!
Your mother's very image!

AGNES: You say she's dead.

ENRIQUE: She lives in my heart——
and *here*. . . .

[*He takes a locket and holds it out to Agnes, who looks at it.*]

AGNES (*in wonder*):
I'm looking at myself!! . . .
You were a legend to me——
my mother and my father——
I never believed in you!
But this is my mother's picture——
(*she raises her eyes from the locket to Enrique*)
and you're my father!

ENRIQUE (*taking her in his arms*):
My dear! My child!

HORACE: But if she's your daughter!!!——

ENRIQUE: Yes, my boy, take her!
I'm just in time to give her to you;

ACT THREE

and with the greater part of all my
fortune——

which is immense!!

ORONTE: I still don't understand!——

(*To Horace*)

Do you *know* the girl??

HORACE: This man, *La Souche*'ll tell you!

CHRYSALDE: No. I'll not have that!

La Souche is dead!

And my old friend *Arnolphe*
knows nothing of it!——

(*To Horace*)

You have the girl; at least be generous

(*To Arnolphe*)

Oh! you're a lucky man!

ARNOLPHE: Eh? What's that? Me? Lucky!

CHRYSALDE: There's one thing spoils your life;
and only one——

This haunting, obsessing fear of being
deceived;

of being made a fool of;

of wearing your cuckold's horns.

And there's only one way to deal with
that——

to eliminate the risk——

not to get married!!

My dear old friend,
accept my congratulations!

HORACE: And mine!

ORONTE: And mine!

ENRIQUE: And mine!

[*And as they gather round him, shaking his hands; and
banging him on the back; and as Horace and Agnes
embrace——*]

The Curtain comes down

MEET A BODY

by

FRANK LAUNDER *and*
SIDNEY GILLIAT

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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 original version of *Meet A Body*, under the title of *The Body Was Well Nourished*, was presented at the Lyric Theatre, London, on August 14th, 1940; its run was cut short by the "blitz." The revised version, *Meet A Body*, was staged as an "improbable adventure," by Laurence Olivier Productions Ltd., at the Duke of York's Theatre, London, on July 21st, 1954. The cast was as follows:

REGINALD WILLOUGHBY-PRATT	<i>William Kendall</i>
ALAN	<i>Patrick Cargill</i>
WILLIAM	<i>Brian Reece</i>
ANN	<i>Joy Shelton</i>
MR. HAWKINS	<i>Duncan Lewis</i>
SERGEANT	<i>Noel Coleman</i>
WINIFRED	<i>Christine Pollon</i>
LANDLORD	<i>Julien Mitchell</i>
MR. BOUGHTFLOWER	<i>Cyril Chamberlain</i>
LILY	<i>Barbara Leigh</i>
SIR GREGORY UPSHOTT	<i>Lloyd Pearson</i>
JOAN WOOD	<i>Dorothy Gordon</i>

Directed by Henry Kendall
Sets designed by Hal Henshaw

CHARACTERS

(in order of their appearance)

REGINALD WILLOUGHBY-PRATT

ALAN MONTAGUE

WILLIAM

ANN

MR. HAWKINS

SERGEANT

MRS. BOSTOCK'S VOICE

LANDLORD

LILY

MR. BOUGHTFLOWER

SIR GREGORY UPSHOTT

JOAN WOOD

RADIO ANNOUNCER'S VOICE

SCENES

PROLOGUE

Scene: A spotlight is thrown on a cameo of a B.B.C. Announcer.

ACT ONE

Scene: The curtain rises on the lounge of a newly built little house in St. John's Wood. It is an early evening in May.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1. *Scene: The lounge of the house next door, immediately after the end of Act One.*

SCENE 2. *Scene: The Lounge, Appleby. The same as Act One.*

ACT THREE

Scene: The Bar Parlour of the Green Man, Newcliffe.

Time: The same night, 10.20 p.m.

PROLOGUE

A spotlight is thrown on a cameo of a B.B.C. announcer, Reginald Willoughby-Pratt. His one distinctive feature is a moustache which, in the modern fashion, inclines towards the fully-fledged, but stops halfway before it can interfere seriously with his vocation.

REGINALD: . . . and depended, he said, on the decision of the new French Government, if—and when—it was formed.

At a luncheon in the City today, Sir Gregory Upshott, the recently appointed Special Envoy to the Middle East, told the guests of his high hopes for his forthcoming mission. The Government had appealed to him to come out of retirement and put to use once again his lifelong experience of peoples, personalities and conditions in the Middle East.

[Reginald turns away from the microphone to indulge in a slight fit of coughing.]

(Leaning into microphone.) I beg your pardon. *(Resuming reading from script.)* His object was to persuade the countries in that vital strategic area that it was either a question of hanging together or hanging separately. Certain minority elements there had threatened to take steps, however extreme, that might be necessary to defeat the object of his mission. Sir Gregory said that he remained quite unintimate, and. . . .

[Reginald breaks off, studies his script for a moment and leans to the microphone.]

I'll read that again. Sir Gregory said that he remained quite *unintimidated*, and concluded by remarking that

PROLOGUE

it was a platitude, but a true one, to say that in the common interest we must all unite. The moment of impact might not be far ahead, and if he could help to achieve a completely new outlook, then his task would be done, and he would be able to disappear, this time finally, from the public scene. (*Intimately, to microphone.*) A recording of Sir Gregory's speech will be broadcast in the Home Service at 10.45 this evening.

At question time in the house today the Prime Minister denied that the cuts in the Army, Navy and Air Force estimates had anything to do with the Government's entry into the film business.

[*He continues reading as the lights black out and the Curtain falls.*]

ACT ONE

The curtain rises on the lounge of a newly built little house in St. John's Wood. A house of modern design—as the Estate Agent terms it, “A veritable suntrap”.

The furniture too, is modern and almost painfully brand new. A sharp eye might perhaps detect a certain tentativeness in the arrangement of the pieces—an impression reinforced by the presence of (for instance) numerous piles of books tied up with string on the floor and an odd packing case or so in the corner.

But, apart from this, there is evidence of a disturbance of a rather different character; one edge of a rug is turned back, a chair is lying over-turned, and a cushion has fallen from the sofa on to the floor. The curtains on the windows are closed.

It is 6.30 in the evening in May.

After a moment, Montague, a dark, compact little man (of whom it is possibly sufficient to say that he has the look of a rather intense shop steward), enters from door right. His cuffs are turned back and he is wiping his hands on a towel. He is breathing fast and altogether his manner certainly suggests that he has just suffered a considerable shock to his nervous system and is anxious to clear out as soon as possible. In the distance, a church clock strikes the half hour.

Hurriedly, he picks up the cushion; sets the chair back on its legs. He kicks the rug with his foot to straighten it, puts on his jacket, and opens the curtains. Then he catches sight of a stain on the carpet: muttering, he bends down and rubs the stain vigorously with his towel. He steps back to study his work, then grabs his hat, hurrying to the front door. He opens it, then sees he has left the towel in view,

ACT ONE

and hurries back and puts it in his pocket. As he takes a final look round the room, his eyes rest on a bottle of whisky on the small table. He hesitates, then crosses—picks up the bottle, pours out a drink, and swallows it down with a gulp.

As he does so, the front door is pushed slowly open and the head of a young man, William, appears round it. He is carrying a long wooden case which he puts down left of door.

WILLIAM: Anybody at home?

[*Montague gasps and swivels round.*]

(*Sighting him.*) Ah, good evening.

MONTAGUE: What . . . what is it?

WILLIAM (*moving left to Montague*): I have an appointment with Mrs. Bostock.

MONTAGUE: Mrs. . . . Bostock?

WILLIAM: That's it. "Windy Ridge", Hilcot Road, St. John's Wood—correct I think?

MONTAGUE: What? (*Then his face clears as if this has given him the answer to the problem.*) Yes. Of course. That's right. Windy Ridge.

WILLIAM: Splendid.

[*He promptly closes the front door.*]

MONTAGUE (*quickly*): She's out.

WILLIAM: What?

MONTAGUE: Mrs. Bostock's out.

[*He moves towards kitchen.*]

WILLIAM: But she asked me to call at 6.30.

MONTAGUE: She must have overlooked it—that's it—

MEET A BODY

she'll have forgotten. (*Gaining confidence.*) She went out at about six, said she was going to the pictures.
WILLIAM: Ah, well! One can't compete with Gregory Peck.

[*He opens the case and takes out the rubber tube.*]

MONTAGUE (*suddenly apprehensive*): Did you ring the bell?

WILLIAM (*shakes his head smilingly*): I'm sorry if I came in unheralded, so to speak, but the door was open, and in my job a foot in the door is worth two on the step. You see I represent the Little Wizard of the Carpet.

MONTAGUE: The what?

WILLIAM: I telephoned Mrs. Bostock and arranged the demonstration. My card.

[*He hands Montague his business card. Montague looks at it, reacting with some relief.*]

MONTAGUE: Oh, I see. You're a vacuum cleaner.

WILLIAM: Well not incarnate, sir. Just the human agency. (*He takes the card back.*) Pardon me—it's the only one I've got.

MONTAGUE: I'll tell Mrs. Bostock you called.

[*He moves towards the front door.*]

Sorry you've wasted a visit—how about the same time tomorrow?

WILLIAM: Please don't bother to apologise, Mr. Bostock.

MONTAGUE: Eh?

WILLIAM: It is Mr. Bostock, I take it?

MONTAGUE: Yes, yes. Of course.

WILLIAM (*shutting the front door*): Good. Good. Then

ACT ONE

I couldn't have hoped for a happier accident. (*He takes the handle out of the case.*)

MONTAGUE (*hastily*): I'm sorry but I'm afraid I'm very busy just now.

WILLIAM: This is the very machine for the busy man. The whole thing assembles in twenty-five seconds. . . . (*The motor jams in the case, he pulls again.*) . . . if I can get it out.

MONTAGUE: I haven't the time to wait while. . . .

WILLIAM: May I just explain? The ordinary cleaner sweeps as it cleans, the superior cleaner beats as it sweeps as it cleans . . . but the Electro-Broom, the Little Wizard of the Carpet, *disinfects* as it beats as it sweeps as it cleans—thanks to our own inbuilt germicidal insecticide. Have you any idea what that carpet hides, sir? Millions of tiny germs. I won't go into what they're doing but if they're allowed to increase in numbers, what do you think will happen?

MONTAGUE: I've no idea, but. . . .

WILLIAM: Now, we have some rather cunning gadgets here, sir. (*He takes each one out of the box in turn.*) This is for getting into small places and cleaning gentlemen's hats . . . this is for slightly bigger places and—(*running the attachment over Montague's suit*)—cleaning gentlemen's suits . . . this is for larger places and carpets, and so on . . . and this—(*He breaks off, looking puzzled.*) Excuse me, sir. (*He picks up the pamphlet and consults it.*) Oh yes—(*he laughs*)—how silly of me!

MONTAGUE (*forcing a ghastly smile*): I'm sure Mrs. Bostock will be very interested—tomorrow.

WILLIAM: While I'm assembling it you might care to glance at this folder giving five unreasonable answers—I mean unanswerable reasons why you should choose our machine in preference to any other.

MONTAGUE: I've said I'm not interested.

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: But surely, sir, when it comes to a question of how your money's spent you must be interested, if only morbidly.

MONTAGUE: I tell you I'm not interested in spending it on a vacuum cleaner.

[*He crosses nervously to the window.*]

WILLIAM: I beg your pardon, sir, but I think you said you were willing to let Mrs. Bostock see it tomorrow.

MONTAGUE: It doesn't matter what I said.

WILLIAM: I'm only too afraid you're right. Once she sets eyes on it—you are—forgive the expression—a dead duck.

MONTAGUE: Will you pack that thing up and go!

WILLIAM: At times like this I ask myself what would be the point of having learnt how to overcome sales resistance if there were no sales resistance to overcome. . . . Expecting somebody?

[*He has noticed that Montague is looking out of the window.*]

MONTAGUE: No.

[*He looks at William in despair and gives the whole thing up.*]

How long will you be?

WILLIAM: The Electro-Broom is noted for its extreme ease and rapidity of assembly . . . in fact it almost assembles itself . . . (*struggling with it*)—when—you—understand—it. I've only been at this a week. (*Handing the body of the machine to Montague.*) Look, sir, would you mind giving me a hand with this? It's a perfect devil until you get used to it.

ACT ONE

(*He connects the tube.*) You see, the whole thing fits together. (*The tube promptly falls out.*) Oh——!

MONTAGUE (*looks at him uneasily*): . . . I've got something to sort out in the next room. I won't be a minute. (*He puts the machine on the table.*)

WILLIAM: Fine.

[*Montague exits right.*]

I'm glad I persuaded you. Seriously this isn't a bad little machine at all. If you know anything about it.

[*He finishes assembling it.*]

Right, that's fixed it. Can you hear me Mr. Bostock?

MONTAGUE (*off*): Yes. All right.

WILLIAM (*shouting*): I'm going to put down a layer of soot and one of sand. Yes, the same old routine. Rather corny you might say but I can't persuade the firm to change it. I'm putting it on the hearth here. No need to worry—ten seconds and it's in the bag. (*He laughs.*) Now all we've got to do is plug it in. Where's the point? . . .

[*Having wandered about the room with the cleaner lead, trying to find the point, he now locates it on the wall beside the fireplace and plugs in.*]

WILLIAM: Ah, there it is. This reminds me of a rather dim colleague of mine. He smothered a new carpet with soot and then actually found there was no electricity laid on. He took a poor view of it when we laughed ourselves silly but——

[*Laughing, he switches on the plug and clicks over the switch on the cleaner itself. Nothing happens. He repeats the*

MEET A BODY

action. Still nothing happens. He bends down and examines the plug. He switches on the electric light, but here too nothing happens. Crestfallen, he surveys the damage and then coughs and looks up apprehensively towards the kitchen.]

Oh . . . Mr. Bostock.

[No reply. He crosses to the kitchen door.]

You remember that silly fellow I was telling you about? Mr. Bostock, have you got a minute. . . .

[Disappearing into the kitchen.]

Why didn't you tell me there was no electricity?

[Slight pause.]

(Off.) Mr. Bostock! Where are you?

[William reappears looking extremely puzzled and carrying Montague's bowler hat, which he examines dubiously, and lays on the back of the sofa.]

Mr. Bostock!

[He goes up the stairs out of sight.]

Mr. Bostock! (Off.) Hello there!

[A moment or two later he comes down again.]

That's funny. . . .

[He goes to the window to see if Montague is in the road and

ACT ONE

on the way he notices the mark on the carpet left, pauses to give it a curious look, then bends down and dabs his finger on it. He lifts his finger up, looks at it, and whistles. He runs his hand up the leg of the piano and stands up with a cry of alarm, wiping blood off his fingers. He glances nervously round the room, cautiously lifts the dust sheet on the table and peers underneath. Finding nothing, he makes for the front door and pulls up as he spots a cupboard in the wall. He goes up to it, hesitates, and then summoning up his courage, jerks open the door. A mop falls out. William gives a shout, pushes it back and retires hurriedly to the settee. This gives him an idea and he cautiously looks under the cushions, and prods the sofa. Then he bends down and peers under the settee. He pulls out an umbrella from underneath. Going down more or less flat, he searches underneath the settee and reaches as far as he can stretch, feeling with his hand.

Meanwhile, the front door has opened quickly, a girl appears, and carrying a number of parcels including a long modiste's box, she takes her key out of the lock, closes the door and walks in, to be greeted by the sight of William grovelling by the settee. Ann gives a scream. William looks up startled.]

ANN: Who are you? What are you doing here?

WILLIAM: Oh—good evening.

ANN: What are you doing down there?

WILLIAM: Rescuing an umbrella.

[He shows her the umbrella.]

ANN: Who are you?

WILLIAM: Yes. H'm?

ANN: I said. Who are you?

WILLIAM: I represent the Little Wizard of the Carpet.

ANN: What?

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: You asked me to call at 6.30—remember?

ANN: I did?

WILLIAM: That's right. You are Mrs. Bostock, I take it.

ANN: No.

WILLIAM: No?

ANN: No.

WILLIAM: Oh. . . . Then of course you wouldn't know. I made an appointment with Mrs. Bostock.

ANN: Who is Mrs. Bostock?

WILLIAM: Don't you know?

ANN: I've never heard of her in my life.

WILLIAM: But she asked me to call here and demonstrate a vacuum cleaner.

ANN (*coldly*): I'm afraid you've come to the wrong house.

WILLIAM: Oh, no. I took down the address.

ANN: Which house did you want?

WILLIAM: "Windy Ridge".

ANN: Well, this is "Appleby".

[*She begins to take off her coat.*]

WILLIAM: Oh, I see what's happened. *You've* come to the wrong house.

ANN: Don't be absurd. You think I don't know my own house when I see it?

WILLIAM: Your house?

ANN: Yes.

WILLIAM: Are you sure?

ANN: Of course I'm sure. I told you, I live here myself—at least, I'll start doing so next month.

[*She puts coat on window seat.*]

WILLIAM: I can see how it happened. All the houses on this side of the road are exactly alike.

ACT ONE

ANN: Do you think I don't know my own furniture when I see it? I got that table at Heal's—it only came yesterday—and the curtains, and the settee, and the—OH!

[*She has seen the soot and sand on the carpet. She wheels on him furiously.*]

Are you responsible for this?

WILLIAM: Only indirectly. You see, I was giving a demonstration and Mr. Bostock omitted to tell me there was no electricity laid on.

ANN: You've ruined my hearthrug.

WILLIAM: Are you sure it's your rug?

ANN: Of course I am. I tell you, this is "Appleby"!

WILLIAM: I'm awfully sorry—"Windy Ridge".

ANN: Have you been drinking?

WILLIAM: I regret to say—no.

ANN (*controlling herself with difficulty*): Well, it's easily settled. (*Moves up centre to door.*) The name's hanging over the door.

WILLIAM: Yes. I noticed it when I came in.

ANN: Exactly—"Appleby".

WILLIAM: "Windy—"—allow me.

[*He walks past her to the front door, opens it and stretches up on the threshold to reach over the top of the porch outside.*]

Apart from the fact that the customer is always right, I very much dislike having to prove a lady wrong, especially on so short an acquaintance, but I think you'll have to agree with me once and for all, the name is definitely. . . .

[*He brings down into view one of those detachable house*

MEET A BODY

name plates which are suspended by a wire for unhooking, with the name in bold letters. William breaks off as he looks at the name plate, which has "Appleby" on it.]

—"Wind—elby".

[Ann looks from the plate to him. There is a pregnant pause.]

I'll get a brush and sweep that up.

[Throwing the nameplate on the settee, he exits into the kitchen. Ann glowers after him and goes over to the cleaner and wrenches it out of the socket.]

ANN (*shouting*): For heaven's sake, don't bother. You've done enough damage already. Just take your wretched cleaner and go. (*Coiling up the cable.*) You blunder into the wrong house, probably the worse for drink, you deliberately ruin my new hearthrug—I ought to call the police.

[William re-enters carrying brush and dustpan and looking serious.]

WILLIAM: You're right—you ought.

ANN: What?

WILLIAM: Call in the police. I'm worried.

ANN: *You're* worried.

[Grabbing dustpan and brush in alarm as he begins to sweep up rug.]

Give me that, you'll only rub it in.

[Glaring at him, she begins to sweep vigorously. William thoughtfully picks up the nameplate from the settee.]

WILLIAM: Just suppose this really is "Appleby".

ANN (*loudly*): Will you please go?

ACT ONE

WILLIAM: This is the point—who was the fellow who let me in?

ANN: How do I know? (*Suddenly rising, leaving dust-pan on floor.*) Did someone let you in? Someone must have!

WILLIAM (*picking up Montague's bowler*): Here's his bowler. He left it behind.

ANN: You're sure it isn't yours?

[*He puts it on. It is much too small for him.*]

WILLIAM: Well, there you are.

[*He turns the hat upside down.*]

Exhibit A—one gentleman's bowler hat, size 6 $\frac{5}{8}$ —owner evidently suffers from dandruff. (*Sniffs.*) Must be either Denis Compton or Robert Beatty.

ANN: That's a tremendous help.

WILLIAM: It's almost all we have to go on. This—and the blood on the carpet.

ANN (*jumping*): What?

WILLIAM (*pointing*): There.

ANN: Oh!! (*She crosses left and peers at it cautiously.*) Where did it come from?

WILLIAM: I don't know. There's some more on the leg of the piano.

ANN: Are you certain it's blood?

WILLIAM: I'm afraid so.

ANN: But it can't be—not here in St. John's Wood.

WILLIAM: Murders have to happen somewhere.

ANN: *Murder?*

WILLIAM: Of course, that's taking an extreme view.

[*Ann looks about her fearfully.*]

ANN: You haven't found—anything, have you?

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: Not yet.

ANN: Why didn't you tell me before?

WILLIAM: We had to settle where the hell we were first.

ANN: I'm sure there must be some perfectly simple explanation—there always is.

WILLIAM: Maybe. Though on the other hand—well, never mind, let it go.

[*He puts on his hat and kneeling, starts to pack the vacuum cleaner in its box.*]

After all, it's only a theory—so far.

ANN (*stopping him*): You're not going? I mean, if anything has happened I ought to know more about it.

WILLIAM: Yes. I see your point.

ANN: Do you really think anything has?

WILLIAM: I'm bound to say it looks like it.

ANN: Oh . . . please don't go. Won't you sit down?

WILLIAM: Thank you very much. (*Taking out packet of cigarettes.*) Do you mind if I smoke?

ANN: Of course not. (*Slight pause.*) Well?

WILLIAM (*lighting his cigarette*): I don't want to reopen a painful subject, but I'm perfectly certain that the name over the door read "Windy Ridge" when I first got here. I remember a scratch on the paint.

[*During this Ann hurriedly picks up an ashtray and crosses to put it pointedly beside him.*]

ANN: But you've just seen. It's "Appleby".

WILLIAM: "Appleby" *now*. Suppose someone changed them over?

ANN: Why?

ACT ONE

WILLIAM: Let's call the victim X.

ANN: The victim?

WILLIAM: The body. The corpse. X has arranged to call on someone at "Windy Ridge". Somebody else—probably the man who let me in—(*holds up bowler hat*)—is very anxious indeed that X should never get there. So he takes this (*holding up name plate*) and sticks it over the porch of "Windy Ridge" and brings this back here. He then lies in wait in this room until X comes along, looking for the real "Windy Ridge". She sees the name over the door.

. . .

ANN: She?

WILLIAM: Exhibit B. The victim's umbrella, lady's model. . . . Well, Miss X sees the name over the door, rings the bell, and he—Dandruff—lets her in. And that, madam, is how you came by your bloody carpet.

ANN (*shivering*): It sounds terribly convincing.

WILLIAM: Thank you. One of my previous occupations was writing detective stories.

ANN: But what did he do with—with her afterwards?

WILLIAM: We don't know yet. But our friend, having disposed of Miss X, is about to make his getaway when an unknown factor turns up.

ANN: What's that?

WILLIAM: Me. He doesn't know that I have made an appointment with Mrs. Bostock. So without knowing it I find myself face to face with a murderer. His position is worse—he finds himself face to face with me. I try to sell him a vacuum cleaner—naturally he doesn't feel like one at the moment. His nerve breaks, he makes his escape by the back door, taking the precaution of changing back the name plates on the way.

ANN: What happened then?

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: I'm afraid the picture has reached the point where you came in. It fits, doesn't it?

ANN: Yes. But surely——

WILLIAM: What I can't understand is why he should choose this particular house to do it in.

ANN: I'm afraid that fits, too. You see, we haven't occupied it yet.

WILLIAM: We?

ANN: Myself and my fiancé.

WILLIAM: Oh!

ANN: We shan't be living here until after our wedding.

WILLIAM: How refreshing.

ANN (*coldly*): I meant that if whoever it was knew the house was unoccupied, he'd think he'd be perfectly safe.

WILLIAM: You've hit it. He was relying on the fact that he could leave her here undiscovered for days.

ANN: In that case, she—Miss X, that is——?

WILLIAM (*rising apprehensively*): Cannot be far away.

ANN: Oughtn't we to call the police?

WILLIAM: Not without the evidence. Ridiculous though it may seem there's just the possibility that I may be wrong. I have a romantic streak in my nature that sometimes leads me astray.

ANN: I suppose I have, too, in a way.

WILLIAM: Really?

ANN (*hopefully*): You don't think we've both been led astray?

WILLIAM: Not in any worthwhile sense.

[*Avoiding her eye, he moves away and starts to ferret about.*]

ANN: What are you going to do?

WILLIAM: Search this room, with your permission. You take your side, I'll take this. Yell if you find anything.

ACT ONE

ANN: Don't worry—I will. (*She brightens as a thought strikes her.*) She might have got out.

WILLIAM: Out of what?

ANN: The house. Got away.

WILLIAM: It's possible. But in that case, one would expect to find a trail of blood to the window or the door. Depending, of course, on the nature and situation of the wound.

ANN: Don't.

WILLIAM: I'm sorry. At one time I used to be a medical student. I remember once in the cutting room—

ANN: What? I thought you wrote stories.

WILLIAM: That was a spare time occupation. . . . We seem to have drawn a blank in here.

[*He suddenly moves right towards kitchen.*]

ANN: Where are you going?

WILLIAM: A happy thought has just struck me.

ANN: What?

WILLIAM: She might be in the fridge.

[*He disappears. Ann shudders and looks about her unhappily. She hurries to the mantelpiece, grabs a cigarette and is lighting it nervously when she suddenly starts and looks towards the door. William returns.*]

WILLIAM: She's not in the fridge. . . . What's the matter?

ANN (*gasping*): The door. . . . Somebody's trying to get in. Supposing he's armed!

[*William turns to look at the door and there is the sound of a key turning in the lock.*]

WILLIAM: Quick—behind the settee!

MEET A BODY

[He pulls her down behind the settee. The next moment the door opens and Reginald enters—the B.B.C. Announcer of the opening. He is dressed with extreme care, wearing a bowler and carrying a neatly furled umbrella. Under his arm he has two brown paper parcels, a picture wrapped in green baize and a large envelope. He throws the envelope on the sofa, crosses to the piano and lays the picture, hat and umbrella on it. The two parcels he puts on the window seat. Returning to the piano, he catches sight of William and Ann, who by now have crept, on all fours, half-way up the stairs.]

REGINALD: Ann!

ANN (*relieved*): Reginald!

REGINALD: Ann—what does this mean?

[Suddenly becoming aware of the absurdity of their position, she scrambles to her feet while Reginald stares, open-mouthed.]

ANN: Oh, Reginald, you're just in time!

REGINALD: So it appears. Who is this fellow?

ANN: It's Mr.—what was the name?

WILLIAM: Blake—William Blake. No relation to the famous admiral, of course. You remember the old song about Blake tying a broom to the mast to sweep the Dutch off the sea.

ANN: Except that it was Van Tromp.

WILLIAM: Van Tromp what?

ANN: Van Tromp fixed the broom to his mast. Blake fixed a whip.

WILLIAM: No, I'm sure you're wrong about that. There's an old song about it—(*He sings.*) "Now Blake was an admiral brave and bold. . . ."

REGINALD (*breaking in*): Ann! What is all this?

ANN (*to William*): This is my fiancé. Reginald Willoughby-Pratt.

ACT ONE

WILLIAM: I beg your pardon?

ANN (*clearly*): Reginald Willoughby-Pratt.

WILLIAM (*controlling a snigger*): I see.

[*Reginald turns to Ann.*]

REGINALD: Ann, I am still waiting for your explanation.

WILLIAM: May I explain? I came here to demonstrate a vacuum cleaner and——

REGINALD: That's hardly what you were doing when I came in.

ANN: You see, I'd forgotten you were coming over.

REGINALD: Apparently.

ANN: We were only hiding, Reginald.

REGINALD (*startled*): *Hiding?* From me?

ANN: No—him.

REGINALD: Who?

ANN: Mr. Bostock.

WILLIAM: Not that he's really Mr. Bostock, of course.

ANN: Because it's the wrong house.

WILLIAM: That's right.

ANN: But whoever it was, we think he did it.

WILLIAM: At least, the evidence seems to point to it.

ANN: So you see, that's why.

[*Reginald has been looking from one to the other as if he doubts not only their sanity, but his own.*]

REGINALD: Have you gone out of your mind?

ANN: But I've just told you—there's been a murder.

REGINALD: Murder? Where?

ANN: Here, we think—that is, he thinks.

REGINALD: You mean, in my house?

WILLIAM: Yes.

MEET A BODY

REGINALD: Rot!

ANN: How can you say that when you haven't heard his story?

REGINALD: Ann!

ANN (*subsiding*): I'm sorry, Reginald.

REGINALD (*to William*): Now could we have one thing at a time? And do please try to be coherent.

WILLIAM: Well, it was like this. I made an appointment with Mrs. Bostock of "Windy Ridge". I saw the name over this door, and. . . .

REGINALD: But this is not "Windy Ridge".

WILLIAM: If you don't mind. We've exhausted that topic. The door was open, I came in——

ANN: —and found *blood* on the carpet!

[*Reginald quickly looks around the carpet.*]

REGINALD: Blood! Where?

WILLIAM: There. And there's some more on the leg of the piano.

ANN: And that's not all, Reginald. He found a man here.

WILLIAM: Pretending to be Mr. Bostock.

REGINALD: Bostock?

ANN (*excitedly*): He wasn't actually Mr. Bostock, of course, because the real Mr. Bostock would be Mrs. Bostock's husband, if she has one alive, which naturally we don't know as we've never met her, but she might have, in which case there would be two of them, but only one real one.

REGINALD (*who seems to be stunned by this*): I don't feel I can bring myself to ask you to say that again, Ann.

ANN: But Reginald, it's frightfully important!

REGINALD (*to Ann*): Of course, my dear. Now don't you think you ought to sit down for a while and read a magazine or something? (*To William.*) Please go on.

ACT ONE

WILLIAM: The man disappeared while I was fixing the machine. I've no idea who he was.

REGINALD: That at least is clear.

[*Suddenly he spots the mess on the carpet.*]

Good heavens! What's that?

WILLIAM: An oversight. I was giving a demonstration and didn't know there was no juice. But you're right. Don't let's confuse the issue. I called Dandruff but. . . .

REGINALD: You called who?

WILLIAM: Dandruff.

REGINALD: Dandruff?

WILLIAM (*handing him Montague's bowler*): A nom-de-chapeau for Mr. Bostock . . . I searched the house but he had gone all right. Then Miss . . . (*to Ann*) . . . I don't think I ever had the pleasure?

ANN: Vincent—Ann Vincent.

WILLIAM: Ann Vincent. Hm. Pity to change it.

[*He catches Reginald's eye.*]

REGINALD: What?

WILLIAM (*quickly*): As I was saying, Miss Vincent arrived and found me looking for the body.

REGINALD: What body?

WILLIAM (*showing umbrella*): To go with this. Miss Vincent was quick to point out that I had come to the wrong house. This wasn't "Windy Ridge", it was—

REGINALD: } "Appleby".
ANN: }

REGINALD: Ann, please.

[*Ann subsides.*]

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM (*laughing*): "Appleby" . . . what a ridiculous name for a house.

REGINALD (*sharply*): Appleby happens to have been my mother's maiden name.

WILLIAM: I see the connection. I went to look over the porch, and sure enough it said "Appleby".

REGINALD: And what did you expect it to say?

WILLIAM: "Windy Ridge", of course—like it did when I got here. The name plates had been deliberately changed over.

REGINALD (*raising eyebrows*): Really? With what object may I ask?

WILLIAM: To decoy the lady with the umbrella here in the belief that this was "Windy Ridge". Hence the blood. This house was chosen because it hasn't been occupied yet. By the way, may I offer my congratulations?

REGINALD: Thank you.

[*He is studying the bowler hat, pulling out pieces of a newspaper which have been used to line it.*]

ANN: Reginald, you really must do something. I'm sure we ought to call in the police.

REGINALD: Now, now, Ann. (*To William.*) Is that all?

WILLIAM: Isn't it enough?

REGINALD: I should say it's altogether too much.

ANN: Arn't you going to do anything?

REGINALD: Nothing at all.

ANN: But, Reginald!

REGINALD: I never heard such tarradiddle in my life.

WILLIAM: Tara—what?

REGINALD: Diddle, Mr. Blake. I refuse to believe that anything in your story has the slightest criminal significance whatsoever.

ACT ONE

WILLIAM: What? My dear sir——

REGINALD: These things simply don't happen.

WILLIAM: Oh! Don't you ever read the papers?

REGINALD: In my position that is hardly necessary.

ANN (*with pride*): Reginald is an announcer at the B.B.C.

WILLIAM: Oh, I say . . . could you get me Mrs. Dale's autograph?

REGINALD: If I may say so, you have prematurely jumped to conclusions on very slender evidence, and so built up an absurdly melodramatic picture which the events cannot for one moment justify.

WILLIAM: Can you explain them any better.

REGINALD: I think I can. Let us go back to the moment when you first thought you saw the name "Windy Ridge" over this porch. Where were you then?

WILLIAM: On the other side of the road.

REGINALD: Did you cross immediately?

WILLIAM: Let me think . . . yes, almost—I only waited for a lorry to pass. To be exact, it was a brewer's lorry. I remember feeling thirsty at the time.

REGINALD: You're sure of that?

WILLIAM: I think so.

REGINALD: Or did you, as one often does—note this carefully, Ann—did you walk a little way back along the pavement to cross *behind* the lorry?

WILLIAM: I might have done. Come to think of it, I did.

REGINALD: As I thought.

ANN: What do you mean, Reginald?

REGINALD: It's really very simple, my dear. Blake went back to pass behind the lorry, so that when he reached *our* side of the road he was then opposite *this* gate instead of the one next door.

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: Where does that get us?

REGINALD: Perhaps I should have told you that the house next door is "Windy Ridge".

WILLIAM: Good Lord!

ANN: Is it?

REGINALD: Of course, my dear. (*To William.*) Not realising your mistake, you came up the garden path and into this house.

ANN (*gazing admiringly at Reginald*): Reginald, that's simply wonderful.

REGINALD: Just practical commonsense, my dear.

WILLIAM: Yes, but what about Mr. Bostock?

ANN (*rising*): Yes—because of course we still don't know who Mr. Bostock is except that he probably isn't—

REGINALD (*hurriedly stopping her*): For goodness' sake, Ann—the very mention of the name seems to make you gibber. (*To William.*) Describe him.

WILLIAM: Let's see. Nondescript, thin-faced, thirty-ish, medium height. . . .

REGINALD: Yes, yes, quite. One moment, please.

[*He goes to the bottle of whisky and tumbler on the side table, sniffs at the glass and turns round the bottle, setting his thumb against the level of the liquid.*]

You haven't by any chance been helping yourself to my whisky?

WILLIAM: Certainly not.

ANN (*quite indignant*): Of course he hasn't.

REGINALD: Well, someone has.

WILLIAM: Mr. Bostock?

REGINALD: Precisely. Furthermore—(*he holds up the bits of paper he has pulled out of the bowler hat*)—he lines his hat with the racing edition of the *Star*. Putting two and two together, your friend Bostock is addicted to other people's whisky and the turf. Agreed?

ACT ONE

WILLIAM: Well—oh, all right—so far.

REGINALD (*to Ann, brightly*): Now, my dear. Think. A nondescript man, thin-faced, thirty-ish, of medium height, who drinks whisky and backs horses. Who does this suggest to you? I'm sure we both have the same man in mind.

[*Ann thinks, then she gets it.*]

ANN: Hackett!

REGINALD: Precisely. Hackett.

WILLIAM: Who the hell's Hackett?

ANN: Mrs. Hackett's husband. Mrs. Hackett is our charwoman.

REGINALD: And probably the owner of that umbrella. A few days ago I gave Hackett some odd jobs to do. Obviously he came here this afternoon to do them.

WILLIAM: Then what about the blood on the carpet?

REGINALD: One of the odd jobs was unpacking some glassware. Probably he broke something, cut himself, bled on our new carpet, then drank some of my whisky to steady his nerves.

ANN: Or else drank the whisky first and then broke something.

[*They all laugh.*]

REGINALD: As I see it, your arrival no doubt caught him in the act, and he cleared out as soon as your back was turned. Well, I think that covers everything.

ANN: Reginald, you're marvellous, you really are.

WILLIAM: I must hand it to you. A very sound piece of reasoning.

REGINALD: I must say, Mr. Blake, I think you should have thought twice before alarming Miss Vincent by inventing such a ridiculous story.

MEET A BODY

ANN: He didn't exactly invent it, dear. I mean, after all, it was quite a natural mistake to make. We can't all explain things away as cleverly as you do.

WILLIAM: There are heights to which some of us can never aspire.

REGINALD: Perhaps I was unjust. But in future, Blake, remember to look for the obvious explanation first. (*To Ann.*) Well, my dear, if Mr. Blake is satisfied, I don't think we need detain him any longer.

[*Reginald crosses to drinks table and pours himself one.*]

WILLIAM: Very well! (*To Ann.*) I'm sorry if I alarmed you over nothing.

ANN: That's all right. In a way it was quite fun. . . . (*She hesitates, then turns to Reginald.*) Perhaps Mr. Blake would like a drink before he leaves.

WILLIAM: No, thank you. I'd be quite content if you would grant me one small favour.

REGINALD: What's that?

WILLIAM (*picking up tube of vacuum with small attachment*): Your undivided attention for one moment. I have here the Electro-Broom, the Little Wizard of the Carpet.

REGINALD: I'm sorry, but I'm afraid we're not interested.

WILLIAM: Ah, but no newly-married couple can afford to be without it. Picture it . . . the Electro-Broom's gentle, soothing hum will, in the years to come, drift upwards to the nursery like a lullaby and bring soft soothing slumber to the little tousled heads resting on the pillows.

REGINALD: Mr. Blake, I have already given you your congé.

WILLIAM (*looking about him*): I must have put it down somewhere.

ACT ONE

ANN: Reginald, I do think it's the least we can do just to listen a moment to what he has to say.

WILLIAM: Thank you.

ANN: Even if it's utterly pointless.

WILLIAM: I—well now, the ordinary cleaner sweeps as it cleans—

[*During the ensuing dialogue, William is vainly endeavouring to demonstrate the Electro-Broom.*]

REGINALD: Good heavens! Look at the time. I've got to get back to Broadcasting House. I don't know what I'm going to do.

WILLIAM: You could put on a gramophone record.

REGINALD: I haven't hung a single one of my pictures yet.

ANN: I'll do it for you afterwards.

REGINALD: But I know exactly how I want them.

WILLIAM: The superior cleaner beats as it—

ANN: You tell me how and I'll put them up.

REGINALD: But I've brought my "Mill House and Pool" with me—you know, the attributed to Constable.

ANN: Well, there can't be more than one or two different ways of hanging pictures.

REGINALD: That just shows your complete unawareness of these things. (*Unwrapping the painting in question.*)

WILLIAM: Perhaps I could be of assistance?

REGINALD: I hardly think so.

WILLIAM (*holding vacuum tube to Reginald like a microphone*): Would you care to say a few words?

ANN: But Reginald, you just said that you had to get back to the B.B.C. and you want the pictures hung.

REGINALD: You don't think I'd trust *him* with my attributed to Constable?

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM (*looking unimpressed at the picture*): Who attributed it?

ANN: We could leave that one out.

WILLIAM: We certainly could. Now if you want to get under sofas. . . .

REGINALD: I tell you, they'll have to wait.

ANN: But Mr. Blake has very kindly offered——

REGINALD: And I have refused. Besides, he'd knock holes in the walls.

WILLIAM: Do you know any other way of getting a nail in?

ANN: You'll be late anyway.

REGINALD (*suspiciously*): You seem very anxious to get rid of me.

ANN: You just said you had to be going.

REGINALD: Is that the only reason?

ANN: What are you suggesting?

REGINALD: I don't think I need particularise.

ANN: Take that back at once!

REGINALD: Certainly—when you have got rid of this fellow.

ANN: I'll do nothing of the kind.

REGINALD: Very well! I shall go back to Broadcasting House.

[*He goes to the door, picking up his umbrella, and pauses dramatically.*]

I'm just beginning to realise the true significance of the little scene that greeted my entrance. Goodbye!

ANN: How—how *dare* you! Goodbye!

[*She follows him up to the door, but as Reginald slams it, the cupboard springs open and the mop falls out. Ann screams. She replaces the mop.*]

ANN: He had absolutely no right to say that.

ACT ONE

WILLIAM: Certainly not. He should know you better.

ANN: He should indeed!

WILLIAM: Of course this is absolutely nothing to do with me—but may I make a suggestion? Always stand up to Reginald like that. It'll do him good.

ANN: I certainly will.

WILLIAM: Speaking out of turn—as someone on the outside looking in—he seems to think he's marrying an echo.

ANN: Well, he's not. He should never have said that—never. Even if he didn't really mean it.

WILLIAM: Now, don't weaken.

ANN: I'm not. . . . He simply goaded me into answering him back, didn't he?

WILLIAM: Unquestionably.

ANN: . . . I'll bet he'll be feeling sorry for this when he cools down.

WILLIAM: Only for himself.

ANN: How can you say that? You've only known him five minutes.

WILLIAM: Not at all. He's been saying goodnight to me on the air for the last five years.

ANN (*unhappily*): He'll have reached the end of the road by now.

WILLIAM: Oozing self-pity.

ANN (*suddenly looking at him very hard: William looks at the ceiling*): I believe you're deliberately trying to make things worse. Anyway, everything's gone wrong since you turned up.

WILLIAM: Did I choose Reginald for you?

ANN: That's nothing to do with it.

WILLIAM: As a complete outsider, I can't very well comment. Otherwise I might remark that it's everything to do with it.

ANN: What do you mean?

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: You two haven't a hope. He's a realist—you're a romantic.

ANN: Now you're being impertinent!

WILLIAM: I was only trying to help in a spirit of scrupulous detachment.

ANN: You mean, you're trying to detach me from Reginald.

WILLIAM: I won't say any more. It will only be misunderstood.

ANN: I was a fool to have listened to your cock-and-bull story in the first place.

[*She moves towards the door.*]

WILLIAM: Where are you going?

ANN: I'm going to catch my fiancé before he reaches the station. And when I come back I expect to find you gone—and my hearthrug cleaned up. You've messed up my house, but you're not going to ruin my life!

[*With this, she flings out, slamming the door. William shrugs and turns his attention to packing his vacuum. The tube proves difficult to get into the box, and he flings it down in disgust. He turns his attention to sweeping up the mess on the rug. As he picks up the dustpan, the soot Ann has already swept up falls out on the rug. He gives this up, too, in disgust. Wandering back to centre, William's eye catches sight of the "attributed to Constable" lying on the piano. He picks it up, and, singing the song "Blake was an admiral", tries the picture in various positions on the wall. As he is kneeling on the piano stool, holding the picture against the wall, he loses the tune. With one finger he plays the melody and, as it rises to B flat, the piano emits only a clicking sound. Murmuring "That's funny", William plays the tune again, but on the same note the same thing*]

ACT ONE

happens again. Rising, he lifts the lid of the piano and looks inside. A woman's arm flops inertly over the side.

William lowers the lid and is walking away when he realises with something approaching an electric shock what has happened. He trembles all over, emitting terrified whimpers, rushes upstairs and down again, and out of the front door. He runs in again presently, lifts the lid of the piano, and without looking pops the arm back inside, and bolts out of the front door.]

Curtain

ACT TWO

Scene I

The lounge of the house next door, immediately after the end of Act I. The setting is similar to the lounge of "Appleby" except that there is no staircase, a different fireplace, and French instead of casement windows. At the small table right centre Mr. Hawkins is playing chess with the local police sergeant. Mr. Hawkins is a shaggy man, 55 or so, cultured and a little old womanish. His manner is mild and inoffensive. It is apparently Mr. Hawkins's move.

HAWKINS: Sorry to keep you waiting, Sergeant.

SERGEANT: That's all right, sir. Take your time.

[The clock, an antique clock on the mantelpiece, chimes seven. The sergeant glances up.]

Pretty chime that clock's got.

HAWKINS: Mmm.

SERGEANT: Make it yourself, sir?

HAWKINS: Scarcely. It dates from 1760. I only reconstructed it.

SERGEANT: Rare lot of skill that needs I should think, all the same.

HAWKINS: It's my job.

[For a moment they study the board in silence.]

I think, I think I can see something. That's the trouble with me, I'm always thinking I think I can see something.

SERGEANT: Well, Mr. Hawkins, perhaps you can.

HAWKINS: What?

SERGEANT: See something.

HAWKINS (*roguishly*): A police trap—eh?

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

SERGEANT: Now you know I wouldn't deceive *you* Mr. Hawkins.

HAWKINS: Hm. Well perhaps you haven't this time. There, we'll try that.

[*Rather pleased with himself he makes a move. The sergeant looks at him in some surprise.*]

SERGEANT: Oh!

HAWKINS: Bit of a surprise, eh?

SERGEANT: Would you like that move back, sir?

HAWKINS: Eh! What the matter?

SERGEANT: Mate in two more moves for me I'm afraid.

HAWKINS: How do you make that out?

SERGEANT (*rapidly*): My bishop to here, check, you can't move here or here or here, so you'll have to move *here*. I move my queen here, check and you've had it. Q.E.D.

HAWKINS: Mate?

SERGEANT: Mate.

HAWKINS (*sighing*): And I thought I was being *such* a Machiavelli!

SERGEANT: Like it back?

HAWKINS: Oh no, no.

SERGEANT: Go on, have it back.

HAWKINS: No, no it would be bad for my character. Besides. . . .

[*He makes a vague gesture towards the clock.*]

SERGEANT: Yes, I'm afraid you're right.

[*They both get up. The sergeant goes to the hat stand in the hallway for his helmet.*]

HAWKINS: One for the road?

MEET A BODY

SERGEANT: Not when I'm going on duty if you don't mind, sir. Thanks for the game. You did a bit better this time.

HAWKINS: You're much too clever for me I'm afraid, Sergeant. Same time next week, then. Meanwhile don't let them promote you out of the district, Sergeant.

SERGEANT: Promotion? Fat chance of that!

[He puts bicycle clips round his trouser legs.]

HAWKINS: Come, merit must tell sooner or later.

SERGEANT (*moving right to kitchen door*): Merit don't enter into it very far, Mr. Hawkins. Only luck. Happening to be on the spot when something juicy breaks. But somehow or other I never am. Never. Goodnight, sir.

[Sergeant exits right. Hawkins starts to fill his pipe. The sergeant is heard in the kitchen.]

SERGEANT (*off*): Goodnight, Nellie.

MRS. BOSTOCK'S VOICE (*off*): Goodnight, Sergeant. Mind how you go on that bike of yours.

[There is a violent knocking on the front door. Hawkins opens it to admit a very agitated William. Seeing Hawkins, he bursts in without any preliminaries.]

WILLIAM: Where's your telephone?

HAWKINS: Eh?

WILLIAM: Telephone?

HAWKINS: May I ask——?

WILLIAM: Couldn't find a call box. Where is it?

HAWKINS: What *is* all this?

WILLIAM: Next door. We must call the police.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

HAWKINS: The police?

WILLIAM: Murder.

HAWKINS: What?

WILLIAM: Next door. Just found a body.

HAWKINS: Good gracious!

WILLIAM: A woman.

HAWKINS: No!

WILLIAM: Where's the 'phone?

HAWKINS: Oh dear! You've just missed the police sergeant. He was here only a minute ago. Playing chess, mated me in two. Telephone, yes, yes the telephone.

[*Picks up the telephone receiver.*]

WILLIAM: Hurry.

HAWKINS: Yes, of course. Which side?

WILLIAM: That side, Appleby.

HAWKINS: Appleby. A woman?

WILLIAM: Yes . . . Dial 999.

HAWKINS (*struggling with the telephone*): 9 . . . 9
Wait a minute, better if I catch Sergeant Basset at the station. Now what's the number? Oh yes. (*To William.*) Oh—would you mind closing the front door.

[*He starts to dial again. William in his agitation closes the front door from outside, thereby locking himself out. He knocks violently again and Hawkins re-admits him.*]

You're quite serious about this?

WILLIAM: Of course. (*He shuts the front door.*)

HAWKINS: Yes. I must say you look it. (*Apparently someone answers the other end of the telephone.*) Oh, police station. Yes. Oh—good evening. Is Sergeant Basset there yet? Mr. Hawkins. I know he's on

MEET A BODY

his way. He can't be more than a moment. Yes, I'll hang on. (*To William.*) Couldn't be suicide?

WILLIAM: Out of the question.

HAWKINS: Mm. (*In telephone.*) Sergeant? Oh thank goodness. You must come back here at once. There's been a death next door and the young man thinks it's murder. What—the man who found the body. Yes, next door.

WILLIAM: Appleby.

HAWKINS: Appleby. . . . Oh yes do, please. Yes, of course.

[*He listens for a moment, then hangs up.*]

He's coming round at once.

WILLIAM: How long will he be?

HAWKINS: Two or three minutes at the most.

WILLIAM: Good.

HAWKINS: Meanwhile he says everything is to be left exactly as you found it. Do sit down and let me get you something.

WILLIAM: Thank you. I won't say no.

HAWKINS: Rather not. Try to relax. (*He is pouring a drink at the sideboard.*) I didn't know the people next door had moved in yet.

WILLIAM: They're on the verge—just finishing furnishing.

HAWKINS: I see.

[*William turns to take the drink, grabs the bottle instead.*]

WILLIAM: Thanks. Oh—sorry. (*He swaps the bottle for the glass.*)

HAWKINS: And you—pardon me, but I suppose in the circumstances I ought to ask—

WILLIAM: I'm just a salesman who happened to have

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

an appointment. Stumbled on the thing by accident.

HAWKINS: It must have been a nasty shock.

WILLIAM: It was.

HAWKINS: Most upsetting. It upsets me just to hear about it. And the victim, was—it—I should say—she——?

WILLIAM: I don't know. Never seen her before in my life.

HAWKINS: Dear me. Hmm. In the circumstances I had better tell my housekeeper she can go for the night. These local people talk so. What do you think?

WILLIAM: I expect you're right.

HAWKINS: She won't think anything being a daily woman..

[*He crosses to the kitchen door and calls through.*]

We shan't want anything more tonight, you can go if you want to.

MRS. BOSTOCK'S VOICE (*off*): Thank you, Mr. Hawkins. The usual time in the morning?

HAWKINS: Er . . . yes.

MRS. BOSTOCK (*receding*): Goodnight, sir.

HAWKINS: Goodnight, Mrs. Bostock.

WILLIAM (*looks up sharply*): Mrs. Bostock?

HAWKINS: Yes.

WILLIAM: Then this is "Windy Ridge"?

HAWKINS: That's so. (*Bringing a cigarette box from the table.*) Cigarette?

WILLIAM: Thank you. Good Lord. Of course it would be. (*Suddenly.*) Were you expecting anybody tonight?

HAWKINS: I beg your pardon?

WILLIAM: A lady by any chance?

HAWKINS: I don't follow, why?

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: I don't know whether . . . well there's no reason why I shouldn't tell you. I've reason to believe that the woman who was killed was coming here.

HAWKINS: Oh good gracious. What makes you think that?

WILLIAM: You'll hear the full story when the police come. I believe the name plates on the porches were changed over for half an hour or so this evening. Yours was stuck over the porch next door. The victim called there thinking it was the real Windy Ridge. Incidentally so did I. I'd made a date with your Mrs. Bostock to demonstrate a vacuum cleaner.

HAWKINS: *What?* But what a fantastic suggestion—not the vacuum cleaner itself of course, that strikes a mundane note which seems *quite* out of keeping. But, my dear fellow, surely——

WILLIAM: You're certain nobody was calling here tonight?

HAWKINS: Only the police sergeant.

WILLIAM: Then I give it up.

HAWKINS: Unless . . . no it couldn't be that.

WILLIAM: What?

HAWKINS: I've an unmarried sister living at Purley, who's apt to call without warning. But I really don't see. . . .

WILLIAM: Did she paint her finger nails?

HAWKINS: Good gracious no. Maud disapproves most strongly of. . . .

WILLIAM (*cutting across him*): Well this one did.

HAWKINS: Oh thank goodness for that. I must say for the moment you gave me quite a turn. You know I find it difficult to believe that one minute I'm playing chess with a policeman, the next I'm mixed up in murder most foul. I suppose I shall have to appear in court?

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

WILLIAM: To say nothing of the *News of the World*.

HAWKINS: Really? You think so? And I detest sensationalism in any form.

WILLIAM: It shook me I don't mind telling you. Imagine opening a piano and seeing that.

HAWKINS: A piano?

WILLIAM: That's right.

HAWKINS: It . . . she was in a *pianoforte*?

WILLIAM: Yes.

HAWKINS: Good God! This is positively surrealist!

WILLIAM: Well, there she was as large as life and. . .
(*He breaks off, rising.*)—Lord, I'd forgotten!

HAWKINS: What?

WILLIAM: Miss Vincent—the girl who lives next door—she doesn't know and she's coming back.

HAWKINS: You mean somebody ought to warn her?

WILLIAM: If she sees what I saw—

HAWKINS (*hurriedly*): Yes, quite—don't dwell on it.
(*He coughs and eyes William.*) One of us ought to go, I suppose?

WILLIAM: It had better be me.

HAWKINS: Oh, really—I wasn't trying to—

WILLIAM: Oh that's all right.

HAWKINS: I admire your spirit I must say.

WILLIAM (*fingering his glass*): I rather admire yours.

HAWKINS: I'll wait here for Sergeant Basset.

WILLIAM (*drains his drink in a final gulp*): Well back to the Chamber of Horrors.

HAWKINS (*stopping him*): Just a moment. Oughtn't you to take some weapon with you, just in case?

WILLIAM: What? Please don't put ideas into my head.

HAWKINS (*bumbling about*): We've nothing in the house to meet these situations, except the tools of my trade—I'm a clock maker, you know. . . . Ah—wait a minute. (*He goes to a cupboard at the window and*

MEET A BODY

takes out a revolver of about 1860 vintage.) What about this?

WILLIAM (*recoiling*): Good Heavens!

HAWKINS: It *is* rather old. My great Uncle acquired it when he lived in Western America. He always used to say it gave him confidence—er—he was a rent collector.

WILLIAM (*examining it gingerly*): Is it loaded?

HAWKINS: Oh no, no. I don't think my great Uncle ever actually fired the thing. I imagine he was thinking of the—er—visual effect.

WILLIAM (*handing it back*): Thanks. I think on the whole I'll be safer without it. I don't want the police to mistake me for the murderer.

[*They go to the front door, which Hawkins opens.*]

HAWKINS: Good luck.

WILLIAM: Thanks. And before the Sergeant comes back, please put away that chess board. I shall feel strongly about any delay.

[*He goes away down the garden path.*]

Hawkins closes the front door and returns to the cabinet to put the gun away. As he does so, a low whistle is heard off right. It is repeated. Hawkins hurries out to the kitchen.]

HAWKINS (*off*): What the devil are you doing here?

[*There is a muffled reply.*]

(*Off.*) Wait there. Wait.

[*Hawkins returns into the room and draws the curtains,*

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

so that the room is in near darkness. Then Montague enters from the kitchen carrying a bundle wrapped in a dust sheet over his shoulder.]

(*Sternly, pointing to the sofa.*) Over there.

[*Montague dumps the bundle, which can dimly be identified as the body of a woman, on the sofa. Hawkins switches on the light in the room. Then he gives a cursory glance at the body and turns on Montague.*]

HAWKINS: I thought I told you to make certain the house next door was empty.

MONTAGUE: I did, but. . . !

HAWKINS: Then what the hell's happened? You've made an unholy mess of everything.

MONTAGUE: *I've* made an unholy mess! How was I to know that chap had made a date with Mrs. Bostock?

HAWKINS: You could have got rid of him.

MONTAGUE: I'd like to have known what you'd have done.

HAWKINS: I'd have bought his blasted vacuum cleaner of course.

MONTAGUE: Where is he now?

HAWKINS: Next door waiting for the police.

MONTAGUE (*alarmed*): Police? What the——!

HAWKINS: It's all right. As it so happens they won't be coming. Reconnect the telephone will you, there's a good fellow.

MONTAGUE (*complying*): Who disconnected it?

HAWKINS: I did, of course.

MONTAGUE: Suppose Munro's been trying to get through?

HAWKINS: I could hardly discuss the removal of Sir Gregory Upshott in front of Police Sergeant

MEET A BODY

Basset—it might have put him off his game. Surely even you can see that.

MONTAGUE (*suddenly bursting out*): I can't see what I'm not told—and I'm not told anything.

HAWKINS: What's this? Temperament? Temperament?

MONTAGUE: If you took me into your confidence instead of always keeping me in the dark—

HAWKINS: What's that to do with it, may I ask?

MONTAGUE: We're working for the same cause, aren't we?

HAWKINS: I always keep one shining ideal before me, Number One.

MONTAGUE: Look here, Mr. Hawkins—I came into this because of my political convictions.

HAWKINS: Your convictions unfortunately have not been confined to the political.

MONTAGUE: All right, throw that in my face. You know I only agreed to come in this because that bloke Upshott represents everything I hate—oil monopolists who grind the faces of the poor. . . .

HAWKINS (*interrupting*): The trouble with you, Alan, is that you've developed your peculiar ideology at the expense of your brains. What is troubling you, my boy?

MONTAGUE: I've got a right to be properly informed.

HAWKINS: This passion of the working man for a share in management! Sometimes I wonder what we're coming to.

MONTAGUE: I did what you told me with her, didn't I?

HAWKINS (*glancing at the body*): Apparently.

MONTAGUE: I didn't ask any questions, then, did I?

HAWKINS: No. I have to admit that you seemed to do the job all right.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

MONTAGUE: Although you didn't even tell me who she was!

HAWKINS: Didn't I?

MONTAGUE: You know you didn't.

HAWKINS (*sighs and glances at the body*): Poor Winifred.

MONTAGUE: Winifred?

HAWKINS: Sir Gregory's secretary. She was good enough to give me the fullest particulars of her employer's movements and habits. Yes, in a way we owe everything to her.

MONTAGUE: So *she* was your stool pigeon?

HAWKINS: Such a pity she smelt a rat. Imagine my indignation, when I discovered she was actually following *me*—and had even found out my address. You know me, honest and open to a fault. I taxed her with it only this afternoon when she telephoned. But she would insist on coming here at once. At such short notice too, no time to put off Sergeant Basset. Poor Sergeant Basset! Thinks he's so good at chess but I always have to let him win.

[*Montague rises nervously.*]

What *is* the matter?

MONTAGUE: Supposing that vacuum cleaner bloke comes back?

HAWKINS: That's unlikely for the next ten minutes. But if he does then I'm afraid you'll have to repeat your earlier performance.

MONTAGUE: I don't like it. Everything's gone wrong. Let's get out of here while the going's good.

HAWKINS: Calm down, Alan, calm down. Nothing's gone wrong that can't be put right. Meanwhile I would like to run over the arrangements at Newcliffe. Must get it right after all. Let's see—the bar parlour

MEET A BODY

at the Green Man is the first door on the right—and the radio set that you sold the landlord you put at the foot of the stairs.

MONTAGUE: That's right, on an old radiogram. You can't miss it. All you have to do is turn it round, take off the back, set the time clock and connect the detonator.

HAWKINS (*smiling*): I think I ought to be able to manage that.

MONTAGUE: It's not much of a pub. Not the sort of place you'd expect Upshott to patronise.

HAWKINS: He has his reasons for wishing to be discreet.

MONTAGUE: Oh, it's like that is it?

HAWKINS: Sir Gregory has responded to the call of the wild in the shape of the fourth typist from the left in his outer office. Tonight he's taking her down to the Green Man—incognito, of course, as he's a public figure.

MONTAGUE: A public gilded sepulchre!

HAWKINS: Now, now, Alan, you mustn't let your ideology get the better of you. Still it does make a nice pattern, doesn't it? To stab him, so to speak, through the chink in his armour. We are striking in our humble way a blow for morality. Doesn't that make you happy?

MONTAGUE: All I'm concerned with is carrying out our orders.

HAWKINS: There's no need to be so damned virtuous. *You're* being paid for it too.

MONTAGUE: I tell you, I'm only concerned with making quite certain Upshott never gets to the Middle East.

HAWKINS: With a little luck he might be blown there.

MONTAGUE: How do you know he'll be anywhere near the radio set?

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

HAWKINS: How do I know?

[*Montague watches him as he opens the case of a tape recorder which is standing on a table against the back wall.*]

MONTAGUE: What have you got there?

HAWKINS: The answer to your question. A tape recorder. Excuse me.

[*He starts the machine and as Sir Gregory's voice starts to come over on his speaker, he stop-watches the start. N.B. Record starts in middle of a sentence. Hawkins is resuming the timing of it, presumably interrupted.*]

MONTAGUE: What's that?

HAWKINS: Don't you recognise Sir Gregory?

MONTAGUE (*stares at the machine*): What?

HAWKINS: It's his speech at the luncheon today. I took this off the broadcast.

MONTAGUE: This isn't the time to go playing records.

HAWKINS: The point is, Alan, they're broadcasting a recording of his speech, *this* speech—at 10.45 tonight and Sir Gregory, like most politicians, is known to be very fond of the sound of his own voice.

MONTAGUE: You mean he'll listen to it.

HAWKINS: It's a psychological certainty.

[*At this point the telephone starts to ring.*]

HAWKINS: Munro! Answer it.

[*Montague goes to the telephone. Hawkins continues to time the recording with his stop watch.*]

MONTAGUE (*in phone*): Yes, Alan here. Yes, he is. What? Good. All right. I'll tell him. What . . .

MEET A BODY

going smoothly? I wouldn't exactly say that. O.K. (*He rings off and turns to Hawkins.*) Sir Gregory's on his way to Newcliffe.

HAWKINS: Splendid. Just a moment. . . .

[*He listens intently to the recording which at this point reaches "When I will disappear, this time finally, from the public scene". Hawkins checks the stop watch and stops the recorder.*]

"Disappear, this time finally, from the public scene". and so he will, bless his little heart, at the most appropriate moment, let's see (*consulting stopwatch*) three and five is eight—at 10.48 precisely. Ingenious, I think, on the whole.

MONTAGUE: It would be simpler to shoot him.

HAWKINS: So you have remarked on a wearisome number of occasions. Simpler perhaps but not safer. Besides I'm fond of any sort of mechanism. Even the human mechanism. (*Getting into his overcoat.*) I'll see you at Northolt at seven in the morning.

MONTAGUE (*indicating body*): What about her?

HAWKINS: Yes, that's a point. There's an inspection pit in the garage—I should think that would be quite a nice place. I'm sure I can rely on you not to linger.

MONTAGUE: You bet.

[*Hawkins moves to the door. Montague suddenly moves after him.*]

Wait a minute.

[*He suddenly thrusts out his hand, with emotional stolidity.*]

Good luck to our mission.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

HAWKINS: When I look at you, Alan, I'm glad my mind is a political vacuum.

[*He pauses as he turns again to go.*]

Do you know I feel quite excited. I honestly believe I'd do this sort of work without even being paid for it. I suppose if the truth be known I have a kink. Goodnight.

[*He goes, shutting the door. Montague stands for a moment, surveying the body. The sound of Hawkins's car is heard driving off. Then Montague switches off the lights and crosses to the kitchen, rolling up his sleeves in preparation for his grisly task. He exits. After a moment there is a faint groan from the sofa. The body writhes under the dustsheet shroud, then slowly struggles to sit upright.*]

Curtain

Scene 2

The Lounge of "Appleby." The same as Act One.

As the curtain rises, the stage is vacant. The front door is open in the little hall at the back. Ann enters, hatless and rather breathless, as if she had hurried up the road after leaving Reginald. She looks round as if expecting William to be there. She sees the vacuum cleaner still lying on the floor. She stares at it indignantly, glances round the room and crosses swiftly to the door right.

ANN (*calling*): Hey you! Are you still here?

[*There is no answer. She calls up the stairs.*]

(*Calling.*) Are you there? Hello! Mr. Blake! Hello!

[*There is no reply. Deciding William must have gone, Ann returns to the room and looks at the vacuum cleaner. Then her attention is drawn to the large cardboard box she brought in. It is lying on the window seat. Her face lights up—she crosses to it quickly, takes off the lid and delving inside pulls out several pieces of lingerie—first a wrap, then a scanty foundation garment. She looks at the garment, and then glancing around her as if in search of something she picks up a mirror from the table, runs across with it to the mantelpiece and stands it up. She holds the garment briefly against her, then hurries out right.*]

The moment she exits William comes in through the front door. He glances round and thinking Ann has not returned studies the room curiously for a second, moves across and picks up the umbrella, then takes up the bowler hat carefully. He examines the interior, sniffs it and makes a face. He crosses to the window, holds the bowler hat up to the light at arm's length and looks at it thoughtfully, at the same time drumming his fingers of one hand on top of the piano. Suddenly he realises he is touching the piano where he saw the body. He jumps away from it, puts down the hat and umbrella, he then glances around as if a thought had just struck him, makes for the stairs and goes up them.

Ann returns with her wrap around her. She crosses quickly to the little hall and shuts the front door. Feeling that she is now quite safe she comes back to the room and with an air of freedom swiftly takes off her wrap, throws it across the armchair and reveals herself in the foundation garment. She then moves the sofa in line with the mirror on the mantel and jumping up, balances on the arm and surveys

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

herself. She is just performing this difficult balancing feat when William comes quickly downstairs. Seeing Ann, he turns and bolts out of sight again, then he returns, looking deliberately nonchalant. Ann doesn't see him.]

WILLIAM: Keeping fit?

[Ann hears his voice and swings round.]

ANN: Oh!

[She loses her balance and falls into the sofa, quickly pulling a cushion down to cover herself up.]

(Shrilly.) Where did you come from?

WILLIAM: Upstairs.

ANN: Why?

WILLIAM: Well, it's usually up there.

ANN: You had no business here at all. How long have you been standing there?

WILLIAM: Only a second or two. Not more. I didn't count.

ANN: Get me my wrap please, over there.

WILLIAM: Certainly.

[He picks up the wrap from the armchair and moves back towards her with it. He stops short and throws the wrap across to her.]

ANN: Kindly turn your back.

WILLIAM: Yes. Of course.

[He smartly turns round so that his back is to her.]

Let me know when the lights turn green.

ANN: When I do, you can take your vacuum cleaner and clear out.

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: That's out of the question just now.

ANN: Very well then, I shall send for the police.

WILLIAM: That's why it's out of the question.

ANN: What?

WILLIAM: I've sent for them already.

[*Ann stares at him.*]

Called them from next door.

ANN: Turn round.

[*William does so mechanically.*]

What did you say?

WILLIAM: Police Sergeant Basset is on his way to investigate the murder.

ANN: What murder?

WILLIAM: The one Reginald called off.

ANN: What about it?

WILLIAM: It's on again.

[*Ann stares at him and suddenly seems to realise that she is quite alone. She looks at William, apprehensively, glancing nervously about her.*]

ANN: Oh. . . . is it?

WILLIAM: Please don't be alarmed, I'm quite sane and it's perfectly true.

ANN: But Reginald explained it away.

WILLIAM: Reginald would explain anything away.

ANN: He tore your silly story to shreds and you know it.

WILLIAM: I'm afraid I've put it together again. (*He catches sight of himself in the mirror, which Ann is taking over to the window seat.*) I say—who's that good-looking fellow following you?

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

ANN (*returning to sweep up the rest of the soot on the rug*): Reginald was absolutely right. Of course he was right. In spite of your cheap sneers he generally is right, because he has sense and intelligence and—

WILLIAM: But he hasn't got a body.

ANN: How dare you!

WILLIAM: I was referring to the corpse.

ANN: Oh. So you have a corpse now?

WILLIAM: Yes. I found it while you were running after Reginald. So we are now back in position one.

ANN: Indeed?

WILLIAM: You think I'm lying, don't you?

ANN: In my opinion you're a pathological case.

[*She takes the dustpan and brush out to the kitchen.*]

WILLIAM (*calling through the door*): Miss Vincent, you must understand that this is a serious matter. The police are on the way and the man who committed this murder is still at large. Perhaps only a few yards from us at this moment.

ANN (*appearing in kitchen doorway*): What was that?

WILLIAM: What?

ANN: That whistle.

WILLIAM: What whistle?

ANN (*listening intently*): There's someone in the garden.

WILLIAM: Are you sure?

ANN: Listen.

[*They both pause and listen.*]

They must be whistling to someone they think is in this house.

WILLIAM: Stay here.

MEET A BODY

[*He strides quickly to the front door, opens it and goes out. Ann dashes to the door and slams it after him.*]

ANN (*shouting through the letterbox*): If you want your vacuum cleaner you can call back in the morning. I'll tell Mrs. Hackett to put it out on the doorstep.

[*The letter box is pushed open.*]

WILLIAM (*shouting through letterbox*): Hey, let me in.

ANN: Certainly not.

WILLIAM: Miss Vincent!

ANN: Stop making that noise and go away.

WILLIAM: It's important, open the door.

ANN: I will not.

WILLIAM: Remember there's a body in there.

ANN: I know, but it's got a vacuum cleaner already.

WILLIAM: Is that your final word?

ANN: Of course.

WILLIAM: Very well, I'll go.

[*The letter box closes, then it opens again.*]

You'll find it in the piano.

ANN: What?

WILLIAM (*grimly*): *It.* Goodbye.

[*He slams down the letter box again. Ann looks at the piano, then uncertainly at the door. She moves hesitantly up to the piano, touches the lid fearfully, starts to open it, then suddenly pulls her hand away unable to go through with it. She burries to the door and pulls it open.*]

ANN (*calling*): Did you call?

[*He steps quickly inside.*]

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

ANN: If you said that just so that you could sneak back into this house——

WILLIAM: I give you my word—would you like me to prove it?

[He moves over to the piano and goes to touch the lid.]

I must warn you that it won't be pleasant.

[He's about to lift the lid when Ann suddenly stops him.]

ANN: No . . . don't.

WILLIAM: If you'd rather not look——

[He again goes to raise the lid.]

ANN: Wait. *(She looks at him fearfully.)* It was a woman's, wasn't it—after all?

WILLIAM: Yes, it was. She was murdered.

ANN: How do you know she was murdered?

WILLIAM: Well, people don't usually kill themselves and pop themselves into pianos.

ANN: Who could it be? I don't understand how it could possibly have happened here.

WILLIAM: The police may be able to answer both those questions, I can't. . . . The front door was locked, of course?

ANN: Naturally.

WILLIAM: Then the chap I met must have come in by the window.

[He crosses to the window and looks.]

Yes, this one's open.

ANN: You mean he came in—and waited?

WILLIAM: Yes. He must have opened the door to her.

MEET A BODY

ANN: Then she would have seen him.

WILLIAM: She probably expected to.

ANN: But when he attacked her, surely she would have screamed. Somebody would be bound to hear.

WILLIAM: He might have taken her by surprise.

ANN: How?

WILLIAM: This wants working out. He must have been in a position to. . . . Sit down a minute.

ANN: Why?

WILLIAM: I'll show you.

[*Ann immediately sits on the sofa.*]

I sit opposite to you—here. Let's say you're trying to blackmail me.

ANN: Why?

WILLIAM: Well, I have a wife and children.

ANN: Have you?

WILLIAM: No. Does it make any difference?

ANN: No, of course not.

WILLIAM: Quite so. I say blackmail because it's as likely as anything else. . . . Well, I play for time. Pour you out a whisky—the whisky—and while you're sipping it, I cross casually to the fire place, keeping up a brisk conversation—take the poker—and poke the dying fire.

ANN: It's never been lit.

WILLIAM: Very well, I don't poke the fire. I toy with the ornaments.

ANN: No ornaments.

WILLIAM: I pick up the poker or whatever else is handy. Quietly I approach the sofa from the back.

ANN (*suddenly pulling an envelope out from the side of the sofa*): Oh, he's left it behind.

WILLIAM: What?

ANN: Reginald. He's left the manuscript of his poem here.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

WILLIAM (*annoyed at being interrupted*): What of it?
. . . Quietly I approach the sofa from behind. . . .

ANN: But he was going to read it tonight on the
Third Programme.

WILLIAM: He's bound to have another copy. Quietly
I approach. . . .

ANN: I don't think he has.

WILLIAM: He's probably learnt it by heart.

ANN: He can't have done. It's a modern poem.

WILLIAM: Then he can make it up as he goes along.
Please pay attention. This is really important. The
more I think about it the simpler it becomes. All
this time I've been getting nearer, suddenly I lean
over and with the other hand——

ANN: But I'm sure Regin——

WILLIAM: —stifle your screams—and before you can
utter a sound I give you a violent blow with a blunt
instrument. You struggle, but I have my hand over
your mouth.

[*He grabs her mouth with one hand. Ann has been taken completely by surprise and in wild alarm she thrusts out her hands and seizes William by the throat. He tries so desperately to free himself that they roll off the sofa on to the floor. The key turns in the lock of the front door and Reginald comes hurrying in. He pulls up abruptly as he sees Ann and William rolling on the floor. They both look up and see him.*]

REGINALD: Ann!

ANN (*lamely*): Oh Reginald, I found your poem.

REGINALD (*in terribly strained voice*): What are you
doing on the floor with that fellow?

WILLIAM: Waiting for the police.

REGINALD: Do you expect me to believe that?

WILLIAM: I was simply conducting an experiment
with your fiancée.

MEET A BODY

REGINALD: I'm not interested in the preliminaries.

ANN: Listen to me, Reginald. (*To William.*) And you shut up.

REGINALD: I refuse to listen.

ANN: Reginald . . . someone's been murdered . . . the body is here in this room.

REGINALD: I beg your pardon?

ANN: It's in the piano.

REGINALD: Ann, what on earth *has* come over you?

ANN (*frantically*): I tell you there's a body in the piano.

REGINALD: What?

ANN (*excitedly*): It's a woman, Reginald. She was battered from behind with her mouth shut.

[*Reginald crosses swiftly to the piano.*]

(*Turning away.*) Reginald! Don't.

[*Reginald ignores her. Lifts up the lid of the piano while Ann covers up her face and turns away. Reginald looks inside the piano then lowers the lid. He turns to stare at William.*]

REGINALD (*after a pause*): I suppose you think that's funny?

WILLIAM: Eh?

[*He crosses to the piano. Lifts the lid, looks inside.*]

ANN (*turning*): What's happened?

WILLIAM: I tell you, she was there when I left the room!

[*Ann in turn crosses to the piano, and stares inside.*]

ANN (*bewildered*): There's nothing there.

ACT TWO, SCÈNE TWO

WILLIAM: But it's incredible. Somebody must have moved her. I struck B flat and it wasn't there. (*He strikes it now four times and it plays.*) Now—it's there, and she isn't.

REGINALD (*to Ann*): What you can hope to gain by this ludicrous charade, I can't think.

WILLIAM (*lamely*): It isn't a charade.

REGINALD: I was not addressing you. (*To Ann.*) It's absolutely beyond me how you could bring yourself to listen to the demented vapourisings of this common adventurer.

WILLIAM: I beg your pardon, Charterhouse and—well, never mind.

REGINALD (*ignoring this and continuing to Ann*): I can only say, Ann, that you've shown me a side to your nature which I never dreamed existed.

ANN (*recovering her spirit*): How dare you talk to me like that in front of a stranger.

REGINALD: Stranger! Huh!

WILLIAM: Not so much of the huh!

REGINALD: Be silent, sir. I enter my house. . . .

ANN: *Your* house!

REGINALD: Certainly it's my house.

WILLIAM: Who paid the deposit?

REGINALD (*turns back to face Ann*): I enter my house to discover you alone with that fellow, hiding for some obscure reason, behind the sofa. Later I come back to find the position has deteriorated to the point where you are rolling on the floor with him in your underwear.

ANN (*furiously interrupting*): If you say another word I'll smack your face.

REGINALD: Should I be so foolish as to return yet again, I shudder to think—

[*Ann smacks his face. Reginald stares at her for a full*

MEET A BODY

second, then turning on his heel grabs his hat and jams it on his head. Unfortunately it is the bowler hat left by Montague.]

This is the end of the chapter.

[He exits. William looks at Ann admiringly.]

WILLIAM: You were magnificent. Absolutely magnificent.

ANN (*rounds on him*): You dirty, lying hound!

WILLIAM: Eh?

ANN (*shouting*): Clear out and leave me alone. (*Throwing herself on the sofa.*) Oh, why did I believe such a damned silly story.

[William sits on the arm of the sofa.]

WILLIAM (*sympathetically*): But it's true. It really is true.

ANN: Don't come near me.

WILLIAM: But I did see it.

ANN: You didn't.

WILLIAM: I did. I tell you I saw a woman's arm. I touched it.

[He is interrupted by Reginald rushing in. He bangs Montague's hat on the table, jams on his own, and crosses to William and Ann.]

REGINALD: My poem.

WILLIAM (*to Ann*): His poem.

REGINALD (*fiercely*): I want it.

WILLIAM: He wants it.

[Ann feels for the poem, she is sitting on it, she drags it out from under her.]

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

ANN (*savagely*): Take it.

[*She passes the poem to William.*]

WILLIAM (*handing poem to Reginald*): I pass.

[*Reginald steps up to William.*]

REGINALD (*between his teeth*): By heaven, I'd give you the thrashing of your life . . . (*William rises*) . . . if I didn't have to read the 9 o'clock news.

[*He takes his poem and exits without troubling to shut the front door.*]

WILLIAM: Pity to let him go like that. The weather forecast tonight will be terrible.

ANN: If he was half a man he'd have given you a good hiding instead of just talking about it.

WILLIAM: I suppose it's hopeless to try and convince you?

ANN: Absolutely.

WILLIAM: I thought so. I'm beginning to wonder if I ought not to doubt it myself.

ANN (*again sarcastically*): Are you really? How remarkable.

WILLIAM: Yet I know I touched her arm. She was wearing a black dress.

ANN: And she felt so uncomfortable in the piano that she got up and went home.

WILLIAM: Why should I tell you I saw her there if I didn't?

ANN (*slowly*): Wait a minute. Didn't you say you 'phoned the police?

WILLIAM: Yes.

ANN (*sharply*): Then why aren't they here? When

someone reports a murder they don't hang about do they?

WILLIAM: By jove, you're right. Why *aren't* they here?

ANN: Because you never 'phoned them of course.

WILLIAM: No—now I come to think of it, I didn't.

ANN: You didn't.

WILLIAM: No. The fellow next door did—I—I wonder——

ANN: What?

WILLIAM (*thinking aloud*): Of course he didn't. He only pretended to make that call. Don't you see——

ANN (*interrupting*): I'm afraid I don't see. I'm going to change now, and if you haven't removed yourself when I come back, I shall 'phone the police myself and have you thrown out.

[*William is staring out of the window. The door is opening slowly . . . it swings back abruptly and the woman in black staggers slowly in—the woman of the last scene. She is in a complete daze; across her forehead is a streak of blood. Ann lets out a shriek.*]

WILLIAM: What's the matter—stubbed your toe?

[*He turns and sees the woman staggering to the centre of the room. He rushes forward to catch her as she collapses in a heap.*]

Quick—some brandy!

[*He lifts her bodily and places her on the sofa. Ann recovers her nerve.*]

ANN: We haven't any.

WILLIAM: Whisky then—anything. That bottle.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

[*Ann rushes to the drinks table, takes up the whiskey and a glass. She holds it upside down over the glass—a few drops come out.*]

ANN: There's only a drop.

WILLIAM: Right. Pity there isn't more—we could all do with a shot.

ANN: Is she the——? (*She looks fearfully towards piano.*)

WILLIAM: Yes.

ANN: Then she's not dead.

WILLIAM: Well—she *wasn't* when she came in the door.

[*He has been trying to make the woman take some of the whiskey.*]

Wait a minute . . . no, she's definitely swallowing.

ANN: Oh! We shouldn't have given it to her.

WILLIAM: What?

ANN: The whiskey.

WILLIAM: Why not?

ANN: Not in cases of shock.

WILLIAM: Why didn't you think of that before?

ANN: Well, you used to be a medical student.

[*The woman opens her eyes.*]

WILLIAM: She's coming round.

[*He helps her up into a sitting position.*]

WINIFRED: W—what . . . where——

WILLIAM: There . . . there . . . you're quite safe.

ANN: Ask her how she got in the piano.

WILLIAM: Give her a chance.

MEET A BODY

WINIFRED (*suddenly clutching at him desperately*): You've got to . . . stop them.

WILLIAM: Stop who?

WINIFRED: Sir Gregory—we must warn him!

ANN: Sir Gregory?

WINIFRED: Upshott . . . Sir Gregory Upshott . . . I work for him. (*Tensely.*) The time—quick—what's the time?

ANN: It must be nearly nine.

WINIFRED (*wildly, struggling to her feet*): 10.48 . . . it will happen at 10.48 . . . hurry.

[*She collapses and falls over William's shoulder. He puts her back on the sofa.*]

WILLIAM: She's fainted.

[*He gives her some more whisky. Winifred opens her eyes.*]

Tell us—what's going to happen at 10.48?

WINIFRED: Eh? . . . they're going to kill him.

ANN (*to William*): We *must* send for the police.

WINIFRED (*fiercely*): No—there's no time. They won't believe it—and he's using another name. (*Clutching at William.*) It's going to go off at 10.48.

WILLIAM: What?

[*Her head falls back.*]

She's out again. (*He bends over her.*) Listen.

[*No response. He turns to Ann.*]

You know who Sir Gregory Upshott is, don't you?

ANN: Isn't he something to do with the government?

WILLIAM: Yes—he's the special envoy we always send out East every time our oil's going west.

[*Begins to shake her.*]

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

Listen to me, you must tell us what this is all about.

[*William energetically keeps on shaking Winifred. She murmurs and half raises her hand, passing it over her forehead, and staring at William.*]

WINIFRED (*in a flat, strained voice*): . . . "the moment of impact may not be far ahead . . . disappear, this time finally, from the public scene". . . .

WILLIAM: Eh?

[*Montague appears in the doorway holding the ancient revolver which Hawkins offered previously to William. In the other hand he holds a pad. . . . He approaches the group on the sofa stealthily. Winifred meanwhile has slowly pushed William back and is sitting bolt upright, her stare curiously blank.*]

[*Ann and he look at each other blankly.*]

WINIFRED (*seizing William again*): That's when, don't you see? Somebody must warn him. They know he's going to the coast. They know it's the Green Man at New—

[*Montague has now reached the back of the sofa. Before Winifred can say anything more he suddenly presses the pad over her mouth speaking rapidly at the same time.*]

MONTAGUE (*to William and Ann*): Get back over there.

WILLIAM (*recognising him*): Oh . . . hello. (*To Ann.*) Mr. Bostock.

MONTAGUE: Keep your mouth shut.

[*He waves them back with the revolver. William does not move and Ann stays by his side.*]

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: Would you mind explaining what the hell is going on?

MONTAGUE: I warn you—I'm not in a mood to stand any nonsense. One squawk out of either of you and you've had it.

WILLIAM (*to Ann*): An unoriginal type I'm afraid.

MONTAGUE: You shut your mouth!

[*William suddenly looks up with bright surprise towards the door.*]

WILLIAM (*conversationally*): Oh, hello Reginald old boy—come in.

[*Montague involuntarily looks round, though the revolver still points directly at William. William shakes Ann free and takes a flying leap at Montague. They go down in a heap behind the sofa out of sight. There is the sound of a violent struggle, then William's head appears momentarily above the sofa.*]

WILLIAM: The bottle! (*Montague's hand grabs William's hair, and pulls him out of sight. Then William's head pops up again.*) The bottle!

[*Montague grabs him again and—he disappears with a jerk—more sounds of violence, then a hand appears. Ann puts the whisky bottle in it, it is swept down and followed by a thud. Then William rises slowly, bottle in hand, much dishevelled.*]

WILLIAM: Oh well—we got a double out of it after all. (*Picking up the pad.*) Chloroform. Well, this is a fine state of affairs.

ANN: I wonder what she meant.

WILLIAM: We might persuade him to tell us—if he comes round.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

ANN: No, no. This time we really *must* call the police.

WILLIAM: And tell them what?

ANN: That somebody is after Sir Gregory. Remember what she said—the moment of impact might not be far ahead.

WILLIAM: And something or other is going off at 10.48?

ANN: That's right.

WILLIAM: Can you imagine the reaction of the average copper if we told him *that*? We'd spend the night in the looney-bin!

[*He moves to the door, putting on his hat.*]

ANN: Where are you going?

WILLIAM: I'm driving down there in my car.

ANN: Where?

WILLIAM: To the place she said. The Green Man at New.

ANN: New?

WILLIAM: New. . . . Yes, that's a point.

ANN: That's what I was thinking.

WILLIAM: What we need is a map.

ANN: I think there's an A.A. book of Reginald's somewhere.

[*She crosses to the packing case of books beside the end of the piano. As she speaks, Ann searches for the book.*]

WILLIAM: That'll do if you can find one.

ANN (*searching*): The Green Man may not have meant a thing—she was half delirious.

WILLIAM: We'll have to chance that. She said something about the coast, so New-whatever it is must be somewhere on the coast. And she seemed to think there was time to get down there by 10.48.

ANN: Here's one.

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM (*sitting on arm of chair down left*): Give it to me—let's see what "News" there are.

ANN (*sitting on packing case*): New Brighton.

WILLIAM: That's in Cheshire.

ANN: Newbury.

WILLIAM: *That's* not on the coast—and New York's in America—so that leaves Newcliffe and Newhaven, and that's the end of the "News". Wait a minute—Newcliffe . . . London 55 miles. The Green Man, twelve stars, two beds. I mean twelve beds, two stars.

ANN (*pointing to another entry in the book*): What about Newhaven? They've got a Green Man too.

WILLIAM: Newhaven is simply a port. Newcliffe is a health resort.

ANN: Well, it doesn't sound as if it will be very healthy there tonight—that is, if it is Newcliffe.

WILLIAM: Fifty-five miles. I ought to do it easily in an hour and a half.

ANN: What about these two? We can't leave her with him—he might come round first.

WILLIAM: Soon settle that. (*He picks up the pad, sniffs it and recoils. Then he drops the pad on Montague's face.*) Sleep well. (*Glances at Winifred.*) She won't be round for at least an hour. (*To Ann.*) Now then—have you got any rope?

ANN: No.

WILLIAM: Anything then, string . . . picture cord?

ANN: Yes—picture cord.

[*Ann takes a length of cord out of the packing case, and takes it to William, who is holding Montague's feet in the air.*]

Of course, I still think it's Newhaven.

WILLIAM: Well I'm not going there.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

[*William starts to tie up Montague and gets the cord round Ann's waist as she supports Montague's legs.*]

ANN: Ouch—you've got me!

WILLIAM: At one time I used to be a Sea Scout . . . and to be a Sea Scout you have to know how to tie a sheepshank, a fisherman's bend, a bowline and . . . an old-fashioned granny. The old-fashioned granny is the only one I remember.

[*Having tied Montague's feet, he lets them drop with a thud and proceeds to tie up his hands.*]

ANN: I'm going to change.

[*She rushes out right. The rest of the conversation is carried on in shouts—Ann from the next room and William from behind the sofa.*]

WILLIAM: Why?

ANN: I'm coming with you.

WILLIAM: Oh no you're not.

ANN: You're taking me.

WILLIAM: I'm not taking any woman on a trip like this.

ANN: There's no danger till a quarter to eleven—she said so.

WILLIAM (*satirically*): And so far it's been roses, roses all the way.

ANN: We're both still here aren't we?

WILLIAM: Yes. And that's where you're staying.

[*He straightens up from behind the sofa.*]

That ought to hold him for a bit—even my old skipper couldn't untie my knots—that's why I left the sea.

ANN (*off*): What about her?

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: I was just thinking about her. I'll make her a bit more comfortable.

[*He lifts her on to the sofa. Ann reappears, having changed.*]

(*Looks at her admiringly.*) I say! If ever I get hitched up I hope my old woman can change as quickly as you do.

ANN (*who is slightly confused by this*): I didn't want you to go without me.

WILLIAM: But I am.

ANN: You're not.

WILLIAM: Listen—even if her story is fifty per cent nonsense we've certainly no time to stand here arguing. Besides, what would Reginald say?

ANN (*gives him a funny look*): I'd forgotten all about him.

WILLIAM: You couldn't do better. I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that. Goodbye. (*Again he turns to go.*)

ANN: Please wait.

[*She hurries to the window seat and from behind the curtains pulls out a telephone. William is making for the door when he sees this and turns back.*]

WILLIAM: I say—you've got a 'phone!

ANN: Yes.

WILLIAM: Well, I couldn't find it when I found the body. Anyway, you haven't moved in yet, I've been on the waiting list for one of those for two and a half years.

ANN: Reginald naturally has priority.

WILLIAM (*under his breath*): Reginald has. . . . Give me strength.

[*She is dialling.*]

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

ANN (*speaks into the telephone*): B.B.C.? Extension 37a. Mr. Willoughby-Pratt please.

WILLIAM: *He's* not coming. That's definite.

ANN: It's only fair to tell him where we're going.

WILLIAM: Have you a watch?

ANN: Not with me.

WILLIAM: That's awkward. Not even an alarm clock?

ANN: No. (*Nodding towards Winifred.*) What are you going to do with her?

WILLIAM: Don't worry about her—she'll be a nice surprise for Reginald.

ANN (*into telephone*): Reginald? This is Ann. . . . Listen Reginald. . . . But I *haven't* rung you up to apologise. . . . I've something much more important to tell you. Reginald, there *was* a body in the piano. . . . I know, but it came back. . . . I'm not being absurd. Listen! It's terribly serious, and I'm going down to the Green Man at Newcliffe with Mr. Blake. . . . Of course we'll be alone but what's that got to do with it? . . . Reginald! (*She turns furiously to William.*) He's rung off!

WILLIAM: Good.

ANN: I won't tell you what he said.

WILLIAM: I got a rough gist of the conversation.

ANN: How *dare* he?

WILLIAM: Well, I think that settles the question. (*Turning to go.*) Wish me luck.

ANN: Do you think I'd stay here after *that*? I'm ready. Come on, let's go.

WILLIAM: Can I ask you a personal question?

ANN: What?

WILLIAM: Why this sudden faith in me?

ANN: Well it looks as if you were right after all.

WILLIAM: It's taken two bodies to prove it.

ANN: Besides, to be absolutely frank—well, any man

MEET A BODY

who can attack someone who's pointing a loaded revolver at him has guts.

WILLIAM: I'm sorry to disillusion you, but *this* (*holding up revolver*) was offered to me by your next door neighbour and he assured me it wasn't loaded.

ANN: That's the last thing I expected of you.

WILLIAM: What?

ANN: Modesty.

WILLIAM: You don't believe me?

ANN: Of course not.

WILLIAM: 'Tis true, 'tis pity and pity 'tis, 'tis true!

[*He points the revolver at the ceiling, presses the trigger, and the gun goes off with a loud report.*]

Curtain.

ACT THREE

Scene: The Bar Parlour of the Green Man, Newcliffe.

Time: The same night, 10.20 p.m.

The Green Man is a small 18th century hotel standing on the cliffs of the Sussex coast. It is very prosperous in its way, doing a fair amount from weekenders. At the back is an open door which leads into a passage which runs off into the hall. To the left at the back is a flight of stairs which lead to a landing which goes off left, and on the landing is a grandfather clock, now standing at 10.20. Downstage of the stairs is an old-fashioned radiogram, on top of which is a small portable set. The fireplace lies to the right and in front of it is an old-fashioned sofa covered with flowered cretonne material. On the right at the back also are French windows leading out on to a small balcony.

The Curtain rises to disclose Charles Boughtflower, a stoutish middle-aged man in tweeds, earnestly checking several pieces of paper, one with another. The Landlord, a tall lank figure in the middle fifties, enters at back with Hawkins, who is wearing the coat he put on in Act II, Scene 1, which he discards as he comes in.

LANDLORD: This way, sir. This is the lounge. If you care to glance out of the window here Brightonwards you can see the lights of the pier. Right on the edge of the cliffs we are here, sir. As a matter of fact this balcony's famous in a way, a gentleman threw himself off of it last year. Doctor he was—Left a note saying he was taking the only way out of the health service.

HAWKINS: Really, I quite sympathise with him. Let me see, what's the time?—If I have a little supper—you say it's ready?

LANDLORD: Yes, sir. It's cold I'm afraid.

MEET A BODY

HAWKINS: Never mind. I suppose I can have a drink?

LANDLORD: 'Fraid not, sir. Bar closed at ten. Unless you're staying the night.

HAWKINS: No—er—I don't exactly anticipate that. Never mind, a cup of cocoa will do.

LANDLORD: Very good, sir.

[*Landlord rings the bell at the fireplace.*]

(*To Boughtflower.*) Good evening, Mr. Boughtflower. How's Wardour Street? Sold any good films lately?

BOUGHTFLOWER: I'm selling them in assorted sizes nowadays—wide, wider and blooming enormous. I tell you, I'm flogging Jane Russell at so much an acre.

LANDLORD: Ah—checking your pools?

BOUGHTFLOWER (*grunting*): Umm!

LANDLORD: Anywhere near this week?

BOUGHTFLOWER (*shakes his head*): I'm all right on my ones and twos but my draws have let me down.

[*Hawkins glances at the radio right with interest and crosses to it. Lily, a buxom barmaid in the early thirties, enters.*]

LILY: Did you ring, sir?

LANDLORD: Yes, Lily. Tell Tucker to get supper for this gentleman and a cup of cocoa.

LILY: O.K.

[*Lily goes out again. Landlord notices Hawkins examining the radio.*]

LANDLORD: Interested in wireless, sir?

HAWKINS: Er yes, it's a hobby of mine in a way.

LANDLORD (*proudly*): That's the last word in portables, they tell me. Chap came round yesterday

ACT THREE

with it—said I could have it for a month on trial free—and if at the end I don't want it he'll take it back without charging a penny.

HAWKINS: That sounds fair enough.

BOUGHTFLOWER: I'd let him have it back. It crackles.

HAWKINS: Probably some minor fault, you know. Such things are easily put right.

[*Lily re-enters.*]

LILY (*to Landlord*): Lady and gentleman waiting to see you in the hall. Say they've booked.

LANDLORD: Ah, yes. That'll be the couple for the big double. (*To Hawkins.*) The dining room's in there sir. (*He points to the door down left.*)

HAWKINS: Thank you.

[*Hawkins goes into the dining room, the Landlord goes out up centre. Lily looks to see that the coast is clear then turns to Boughtflower.*]

LILY (*crossing to mantelpiece for glasses*): Had you any difficulty getting away Charlie?

BOUGHTFLOWER: Like hell I did. We've got to be much more careful. My wife's beginning to tumble.

LILY: I knew that was coming. (*She takes the glasses to the hatchway.*)

BOUGHTFLOWER: Keeps dropping hints—harping on a friend of hers who's bringing an action for enticement.

LILY: You'll have to watch your step, Charlie, I don't want any trouble. The Guvnor wouldn't mind, but the brewers would.

BOUGHTFLOWER: You know, it's me being away weekends, puts ideas in her head.

MEET A BODY

LILY: Your wife doesn't expect you to sell films sitting at home, does she?

BOUGHTFLOWER: That's what I tell her. If you've got The Robe or Marilyn Monroe you can afford to sit on your backside but what have I got?

LILY (*advancing and putting her arms round his neck*): You've got everything, Charlie.

BOUGHTFLOWER (*grinning at her admiringly*): Well, I'm not the only one.

LILY: Still, you'll have to be more careful. You don't want her following you, or any of that caper.

BOUGHTFLOWER: Don't you worry. I've laid me red herrings all right. I'm supposed to be staying in Walton-on-the-Naze this weekend. Now, which room have I got? I'd like to have a wash. (*He picks up his case from beside the hatch.*)

LILY: Single on the top floor, next the Guvnor's.

BOUGHTFLOWER (*grinning*): I hope the floor boards don't creak.

LILY: They do, but I've marked the creakers with bits of paper.

BOUGHTFLOWER: Think of everything, don't you? O.K. kid.

[*He exits up the stairs. As Lily turns to go out the Landlord enters with Sir Gregory Upshott. With him is Joan Wood, a pretty but very nervous and self-conscious girl in her twenties. Lily goes out up centre.*]

LANDLORD: This way, sir. This is the lounge. I've reserved a double room for you at the front. It's got a nice outlook facing the sea, just above this one.

SIR GREGORY: Splendid.

LANDLORD: If you care to glance out of the window here Brightonwards, madam, you'll see the lights of the pier.

SIR GREGORY: There's a bath I take it?

ACT THREE

LANDLORD: Just across the landing, sir.

SIR GREGORY (*displeased*): Oh, I see. Hot and cold water I hope?

LANDLORD: Well sir, Saturday night there's a bit of a run, but I'll have the boiler stoked up for you.

SIR GREGORY (*even more put out*): We're not too late for supper by any chance?

LANDLORD: No sir. But I'm afraid it's cold.

SIR GREGORY: Really! You know, you fellows will have to smarten up your ideas a bit. You won't capture the foreign tourists this way.

LANDLORD (*taking Sir Gregory's coat to hall-stand in passage*): I don't want to capture no foreigners, sir. I'm quite happy with my weekend customers, thanks all the same.

SIR GREGORY: Oh! . . . (*he coughs.*) Hrrm! All right, we'll have to have it cold.

LANDLORD: Yes, sir. Something to drink first, sir?

SIR GREGORY: Drink? Oh yes, I'll have a whisky and soda. (*To Joan.*) What about you, my dear?

JOAN: I don't want anything, thank you very much.

[*The Landlord knocks on the hatch.*]

SIR GREGORY: Oh come, you can't let me drink alone. How about a bottle of champagne?

JOAN (*intimidated*): Champagne?

SIR GREGORY (*to Landlord*): Have you got any?

LANDLORD: I think so, sir.

SIR GREGORY: Any Pol Roger?

LANDLORD (*cautiously*): I don't remember the name, sir, but I'm as good as certain it's French.

[*Lily opens the hatch and takes in the glasses on it.*]

SIR GREGORY (*giving it up*): Oh, all right. Bring it.

MEET A BODY

LANDLORD: Would you care to see the room first?

SIR GREGORY: The room? Oh yes, of course, the room. (*To Joan.*) Come along my dear.

[*The Landlord goes to the foot of the stairs. Joan nervously tugs at Sir Gregory's sleeve.*]

JOAN: Not now.

SIR GREGORY: What?

JOAN: I'd rather stay here, if it's all the same to you, sir.

SIR GREGORY: Oh. (*Coughs.*) Very well. As you please. We'll see the room later, landlord.

LANDLORD: Yes, sir. Perhaps you wouldn't mind signing the register while I order supper.

SIR GREGORY: The register, oh yes. Quite so.

[*The Landlord brings the register across from the hallstand and puts it on the table.*]

LANDLORD: Here you are, sir. The dining room's in there, sir. I'll have your luggage sent up.

[*He exits up centre.*]

SIR GREGORY (*he watches him go, then turns to Joan*): My dear Joan, you really must try to appear more at ease.

JOAN: I don't feel at ease.

SIR GREGORY: Do you realise you called me "sir" just now?

JOAN: Oh did I? I'm afraid, Sir Gregory.

[*She sits at a table left centre.*]

SIR GREGORY: There's no need to call me that. Just Gregory now. What are you afraid of?

ACT THREE

JOAN: I know someone will recognise you.

SIR GREGORY: Of course they won't without my moustache.

JOAN: You look just the same to me.

SIR GREGORY: That's only because you know me.

JOAN: What about the cartoons?

SIR GREGORY: Nothing like me at all.

JOAN: You can't alter your bald head. Everyone knows that.

SIR GREGORY (*picking up his cap*): Just to please you I'll put my cap on.

[*Joan takes one look at him and bursts into tears.*]

What's the matter?

JOAN: You can't keep it on all the time.

SIR GREGORY: Now please Joan, don't be fanciful. No one will look at us or bother about us in the least. Just try to forget convention and look upon this as an adventure—a gay adventure. After all, what is convention? I've travelled a lot and I can tell you it changes with the latitude. The Moslems, for instance, have a totally different attitude to latitude. (*He laughs, delighted with his joke.*) I'm really excelling myself this evening.

JOAN (*flatly*): Mother's not a Moslem.

[*Sir Gregory's smile fades abruptly.*]

SIR GREGORY: I do wish you wouldn't keep on about your mother. Does she have to be brought into everything?

JOAN: I don't want her brought into this.

SIR GREGORY: You know, you've been the same ever since we left. You're not the little girl I knew in London, that I used to take out for those cosy little dinners in Charlotte Street.

MEET A BODY

JOAN: This isn't a cosy little dinner in Charlotte Street.

SIR GREGORY: Now you don't want me to wish I hadn't brought you away.

JOAN: I didn't want to come anyway.

SIR GREGORY: What?

JOAN: It was only because you kept on at me.

SIR GREGORY: I don't know how you can say that, Joan. You know I'm very fond of you and I've done everything I could to please you.

JOAN: Just because you promised to put me in Grade One—

SIR GREGORY: That was quite unconnected with this trip. Didn't I tell you I wanted to encourage you to be ambitious—take responsibility—get more experience.

JOAN: —Broaden my mind?

SIR GREGORY: That's right. (*He coughs and goes on hurriedly.*) Now do please try to pull yourself together and no more inhibitions, eh? (*He opens the register.*) Now let's see if we can think of something original to write in this book, shall we? Any ideas?

[*Joan shakes her head.*]

Extraordinary how one's mind becomes a blank with all the names in Christendom to choose from. Hmm, let's think of a famous writer. . . . What about Reade—Charles Reade?

JOAN: I've never heard of him.

SIR GREGORY: Famous novelist, my dear—he wrote *It's Never Too Late To Mend*. (*Suddenly realising implications.*) Well nobody reads him nowadays. How about Fotherington?

JOAN: It doesn't sound real.

SIR GREGORY: But it is. I once knew a horse called

ACT THREE

Fothrington. Wait a minute though, we can't use that.

JOAN: Why not?

SIR GREGORY: I've just remembered I must have put a name on the telegram I sent here.

JOAN (*alarmed again*): Don't you know what it was?

SIR GREGORY: Hmm, must have put something. James, that was it, James.

[*Joan suddenly bursts into tears again.*]

Now what on earth's the trouble this time?

JOAN (*crying*): I used to be engaged to a boy called James.

[*Hawkins enters from dining room. He hurries in carrying his attachè case and pulls up short on seeing Sir Gregory and Joan.*]

SIR GREGORY (*seeing Hawkins, becomes a little confused*): (To Joan.) Now, now my dear, don't cry, you probably left the watch in the car. You haven't lost it yet.

JOAN (*dumbly*): Haven't lost what?

[*Sir Gregory bustles her into the dining room in confusion. They exit. Hawkins who has been getting a bottle of indigestion tablets from his coat pocket in the hall, watches them go. He takes a quick look out of the door and crosses swiftly to the radio on top of the radiogram. Opening his attachè case he takes out a short length of flex, a pair of pliers and a small screwdriver. He then swivels round the radio and opens its back and deftly connects the flex to a couple of terminals. He glances at both his wrist watch and the clock and makes a swift adjustment with his screwdriver and has just finished when Boughtflower appears on the staircase landing. He looks down on Hawkins curiously.*]

MEET A BODY

BOUGHTFLOWER: Trying to fix that crackle?

[*Hawkins looks up surprised, but he quickly takes advantage of Boughtflower's words.*]

HAWKINS: Ah yes, I told you, wireless was a hobby of mine. (*Laughing.*) I'm afraid I'm one of those people who can't see any mechanism without wanting to tinker with it. I expect you've met them.

[*He gives a careful last look inside the radio and closes it.*]

BOUGHTFLOWER (*nodding as he comes downstairs*): The wife's father's just the same. Can't keep his hands off the television. Result is, we see everything through a rainstorm.

HAWKINS: Yes, I know. Sometimes fellows like him and me make the whole place quite untenable—in one way or another. (*Switching on radio, tuning in to dance music.*) Doesn't seem to be much crackle about that.

BOUGHTFLOWER: It certainly seems to be better. Finished your supper already?

HAWKINS: No. I came back to get my indigestion tablets, really.

BOUGHTFLOWER: It's usually that sort of supper here. (*Crossing to window.*) Still, you can't have everything, can you? If you look Brightonwards you can see the lights of the pier.

HAWKINS: So I gathered. Well, back to the feast—cold rabbit pie and cocoa. I'll see you later perhaps.

BOUGHTFLOWER: Yes. I'll still be here.

HAWKINS (*drily*): I hope so.

[*He exits. Boughtflower steps out on to the balcony. Lily enters with William and Ann.*]

ACT THREE

LILY: If you don't mind waiting here, sir, I'll fetch the Guv'nor.

[*William has glanced round the room quickly and spotted the grandfather clock which now shows 10.27.*]

WILLIAM: Is that clock right?

LILY: It's always right Saturday night, sir.

ANN: Why Saturday?

LILY: Well, you see, it loses ten minutes a week, so the guv'nor puts it on ten minutes every Saturday and by the end of the week it's back with Big Ben, so to speak.

WILLIAM: So long as you're sure that's the right time.

LILY (*glancing at her watch*): Bang on, sir.

[*She exits.*]

WILLIAM (*at once becoming active*): It won't be the only thing that's bang on if we don't get cracking. We've exactly twenty-one minutes.

ANN: What are you going to do?

WILLIAM: Have a look at the register.

ANN: What about telling the landlord?

WILLIAM: Let's see if Upshott's here first.

LILY (*off*): They're in the parlour, Mr. Masters.

[*Landlord enters.*]

LANDLORD: Evening, sir.

WILLIAM: Good evening.

LANDLORD: Evening, madam. Lovely night. If you're wanting a double room I'm afraid we haven't one left. It's always a bit of a rush weekends this time of the year.

WILLIAM: Have you any singles?

MEET A BODY

LANDLORD: I've only one free, sir. Bit on the small side, too.

WILLIAM: Oh. Suppose we'll have to manage with that. (*To Ann.*) Won't we, my dear?

[*Ann chokes and starts to speak. William fixes her quickly with a look.*]

I know it's a bit of a blow, but there's nothing else for it.

[*He winks at Ann.*]

LANDLORD: Mind you, the bed's on the big side for a single. There's a nice outlook. If you care to glance out of the window Brightonwards you'll see the lights of the pier.

ANN (*suddenly bursting out at William*): If you think. . . !

WILLIAM: Please, dear. I know it's a nuisance, but after all I did suggest sending a wire. (*To Landlord*). Can we have the register?

LANDLORD: Yes, sir. Here you are. Will you be taking supper?

WILLIAM: I don't know yet.

LANDLORD: The dining room's in there, sir.

WILLIAM: Thank you.

[*Landlord exits. Ann instantly rounds on William.*]

ANN: How dare you say we're staying the night?

WILLIAM: Quickest way to get the register.

ANN: There was absolutely no need to suggest we were going to—to stop here.

WILLIAM: No one will stop here if we don't get down to brass tacks. (*Glances again at clock.*) Only twenty minutes to find what is going to go off.

ANN: If anything is.

ACT THREE

WILLIAM: She said so, didn't she?

ANN: It might have been a figure of speech and it might have been Newhaven.

WILLIAM (*looking in dining room door*): I tell you, this is the place and 10.48 is the time.

ANN: Then why not get on with it instead of arguing?

WILLIAM: I— (*controls himself*) all right.

[*He starts to search the register. Ann looks over his shoulder.*]

ANN: What are you looking for?

WILLIAM: Upshott.

ANN: She said he was using another name.

WILLIAM: I know, I know. . . . Here we are . . . (*reading*) Mr. and Mrs. Alec Morrison, Charles Boughtflower, Mr. and Mrs. John Smith, Mr. and Mrs. Victor Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Smith, Mr. and Mrs. E. Smith, Mr. and Mrs. F. Smythe. . . . Gosh, that fellow showed imagination!

ANN: All British subjects, but Charles Boughtflower is the only one staying here on his own.

WILLIAM: And that's a fake name in any nationality.

ANN: Unless Sir Gregory *isn't* on his own.

WILLIAM: That's hardly likely. Have you ever seen him?

ANN: No. Have you?

WILLIAM: No. But I'm sure I've seen his photograph in the paper, and my impression is he's at least sixty, fairly tall, bald, and with a grey moustache.

ANN: That's curious, because my impression is quite different.

WILLIAM: Oh—is it?

ANN: I should say he's not more than forty two or three, dark, clean-shaven and rather stout.

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: We can't both be right.

ANN: I wasn't suggesting that for a moment.

WILLIAM: I know it's a lot to ask, but do you think there's a six to four chance of our agreeing to differ?

ANN (*sbrugs*): If you like. I don't mind.

WILLIAM: Then I'll go and look for my version.

[*Starts off towards the door.*]

ANN: How?

WILLIAM: By getting the landlord to introduce me to Boughtflower.

ANN: And what do I do?

WILLIAM: Look for whatever it is that's going to go off.

ANN: Where?

WILLIAM: How do I know? Why not start with the clock? That's a popular—wait a minute, he said he was a clockmaker. . . .

ANN: Who?

WILLIAM: Stand back.

[*He approaches the clock warily and nerves himself to whip open the door. The moment the door opens, the clock loudly strikes the half hour. William jumps back as Ann gives a little scream. William signs her to be quiet, and sticks his head inside the clock case, peering upwards.*]

WILLIAM (*withdrawing head*): Looks normal enough to me. My God, look at the time!

[*He starts hurriedly for the door.*]

ANN: Where else?

WILLIAM (*impatiently*): Anywhere you think. Use your imagination. Under the sofa—behind that picture—up the chimney—in the aspidistra. Yes, that's an idea—the aspidistra.

ACT THREE

[*He is looking at an aspidistra plant by his elbow, near the stairs. He picks it up, dives his hand into the pot and pulls out the aspidistra by the roots. As he is searching the inside of the pot with the other hand the Landlord enters.*]

LANDLORD: Beg pardon, sir, but have you brought any—

[*He stops short, his eyes glued on the aspidistra in William's hand.*]

ANN (*to William*): The landlord.

WILLIAM: Nothing doing . . . eh? (*Seeing Landlord.*) We're looking for a man about sixty, bald with a grey moustache. . . .

ANN (*quickly*): Dark, clean-shaven, and not more than forty-three.

WILLIAM: It's a matter of national importance.

LANDLORD (*taking the aspidistra and flower pot from William*): My mother planted that.

[*He exits mumbling.*]

WILLIAM: What's the use of talking to a fellow like that? It's a waste of time. Keep on looking. I'll go and find Boughtflower myself.

ANN (*staring towards the French windows*): There's a man out there on the balcony.

WILLIAM: Where?

[*Ann points. William goes closer to the window and looks out.*]

Doesn't look like him. Not in those tweeds.

ANN: It could be. After all, he is in the country.

WILLIAM: By himself, too.

MEET A BODY

ANN: And smoking a cigar.

[*They stare at him hopefully.*]

Look out, he's coming in.

WILLIAM: I'd better handle this.

[*Boughtflower enters from French windows, William crosses to him at once.*]

Good evening, sir. D'you happen to be Mr. Charles Boughtflower?

[*Boughtflower pulls up with a start.*]

BOUGHTFLOWER: I don't know you, do I?

WILLIAM: No. But we know you, sir.

BOUGHTFLOWER (*at once suspicious*): Eh?

ANN (*to William*): You see, I was right. (*To Boughtflower.*) You're here incognito, aren't you?

BOUGHTFLOWER: In what?

WILLIAM: We've followed you all the way from London.

BOUGHTFLOWER (*alarmed*): Followed me? . . . (*Backing.*) What's the idea?

WILLIAM: We've been given certain information. . .

BOUGHTFLOWER: Oh, you have, have you? . . . (*Indicating Ann.*) Is she with you?

WILLIAM: Yes, but—

BOUGHTFLOWER: Two of you, eh?

ANN (*impulsively*): You're not safe here.

BOUGHTFLOWER (*bitterly*): No, you bet your life I'm not. Oh well, I had this coming to me. (*He sits on the sofa.*)

ANN: You mean you knew all about it?

BOUGHTFLOWER: I had a damned good idea.

ACT THREE

WILLIAM (*to Ann*): Well, I suppose it's one of the risks of "Mr. Boughtflower's" profession.

[*Boughtflower takes this in a big way.*]

BOUGHTFLOWER: Risks? (*Cunningly.*) What proof have you got anyway.

WILLIAM: Well, sir, the evidence is pretty conclusive.

BOUGHTFLOWER (*bursting out*): I'm not caught yet, if that's what you mean.

WILLIAM: That's the spirit, sir.

BOUGHTFLOWER (*puzzled*): What?

WILLIAM: Now listen, sir—there's absolutely no time to lose—as I expect you realise. How soon can you get out of here?

BOUGHTFLOWER: Get out?

WILLIAM: You haven't a second.

BOUGHTFLOWER (*narrowing his eyes*): Whose side are you on?

WILLIAM: Need you ask that, sir?

BOUGHTFLOWER: I don't know what you get out of this, but I can take a tip when I'm handed one! I'll get my case.

[*He hurries to the stairs.*]

WILLIAM: For heaven's sake, hurry!

BOUGHTFLOWER (*mounting stairs*): You bet!

[*He pauses briefly halfway up the stairs, and sticks his head over the banisters.*]

So the old girl thought she'd get me, did she?

[*He rushes on, leaving William and Ann slightly mystified.*]

WILLIAM: Old girl? Must be a woman behind it somewhere.

MEET A BODY

ANN: So it *was* Newcliffe, after all. You win.

WILLIAM: Not yet. We've picked up the ace, but there's still the joker.

ANN: The what?

WILLIAM: The box of tricks. Keep on looking.

ANN: Where are you going?

WILLIAM: We've got to clear everyone out of the whole place. Now we've found Sir Gregory I'll be able to knock some sense into the landlord.

[*He runs out.*]

ANN (*calling after him*): Oh, Mr. Blake . . . Bill . . . supposing it goes off too *soon*?

[*She searches frantically round the sofa and fireplace then runs to the door and almost bumps into Lily, who stares at her curiously.*]

LILY: Your name Vincent?

ANN: Yes.

LILY: There's a man on the 'phone wants to speak to you. Toll call.

ANN (*dazed*): A man?

LILY: Sounds like your father. I haven't let on you're here, mind. Like me to tell him there's no one here of your description?

ANN: No, no—I'll speak to him.

LILY: All right—the 'phone's through.

[*She points to telephone which is on a table in front of the hatch, and exits. Ann crosses to it and picks up the instrument. Bar door opens and Landlord enters with another plant in a pot.*]

ANN (*telephone*): Hullo . . . hullo. . . .

ACT THREE

[*Landlord notices Ann, sniffs, crosses to aspidistra stand and puts new plant in it.*]

Who is it? *Reginald!* . . . Yes of course I'm here. . . . Yes, he's here, too. . . . *Reginald!* . . . Really! . . . What are you suggesting? . . .

[*Reginald is obviously doing all the talking. The Landlord has one eye on Ann, who has her back to him.*]

[*Angrily.*] What? . . . I don't know how you can say things like that. . . . Do you think we came down here for *fun*?

[*The clock is now at 10.33.*]

. . . What on earth do you mean? . . .

[*Landlord gives her another look, then takes out watch and compares it with the grandfather clock, puts the clock on ten minutes to 10.43.*]

. . . So you don't believe me? . . . In other words I'm a liar? . . . I tell you I haven't *anything* to conceal! . . . I'm not talking to you any longer. I tell you one thing—Mr. Blake's got more guts in his little finger . . . oh, *good-bye!*

[*William has come hurrying back in time to hear Ann's last words and see her ring off. Landlord is on the stair landing. William spots him.*]

WILLIAM: Ah, Landlord, there you are. This is important. You remember I asked you about a man just now?

LANDLORD: I remember.

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: We've just found him. He's Sir Gregory Upshott.

ANN: That's right. Registered in the name of Charles Boughtflower.

LANDLORD: What name?

ANN: Boughtflower.

LANDLORD: I see.

WILLIAM: Incredible though it may seem, we believe that an attempt is going to be made here tonight to assassinate him.

LANDLORD: I see.

WILLIAM: As far as we can make out they've planted some kind of explosive somewhere on the premises and we're expecting it to go up at 10.48.

LANDLORD: I see.

WILLIAM: Don't keep saying "I see" like that. Can't you understand—everyone in the hotel's in mortal danger!

LANDLORD: } I see!

WILLIAM: }

WILLIAM: You've got to get everybody out of here—*now!*

LANDLORD (*deliberately*): I don't know how many you've had but one thing I do know—you never had 'em here.

ANN: But it's going to go off!

WILLIAM: Look, let me put this in terms even you can understand—do you want to lose your pub?

LANDLORD: I don't want to lose my licence. I'm a broadminded man, but I'm not very partial to people who can't hold their liquor—especially if they bought it elsewhere.

[*He exits centre.*]

ANN (*wails*): Now what are we going to do?

ACT THREE

WILLIAM: Rouse the whole place while there's time!

ANN: How?

WILLIAM: Beat that gong.

[*He runs to a dinner gong near the entrance to the dining room, picks up the stick and is about to give it a good whack when Boughtflower comes hurrying down the stairs carrying a suitcase. Ann sees him.*]

ANN: Bill—look! Get Sir Gregory to tell him.

WILLIAM: Right. Listen, sir! You must talk to the landlord and make him undersand that everyone else has got to clear out, too.

BOUGHTFLOWER: Eh?

WILLIAM: They're in danger as well—but of course you know that.

BOUGHTFLOWER: What's this?

WILLIAM: You've got to knock some sense into that landlord.

ANN: He refuses to believe you're Sir Gregory.

BOUGHTFLOWER: Sir which?

WILLIAM: Sir Gregory Upshott.

BOUGHTFLOWER: Who is?

ANN: }
WILLIAM: } You are.

[*Boughtflower stares at them blankly.*]

WILLIAM (*assailed by a horrible doubt*): . . . Aren't you?

BOUGHTFLOWER: What d'you mean? I'm Charlie Boughtflower—always have been.

WILLIAM: My God, I believe he is!

BOUGHTFLOWER: Here—what's the game?

ANN: We thought you were Sir Gregory.

BOUGHTFLOWER: You mean you mistook me for Sir Gregory Upshott?

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: Do you know him?

BOUGHTFLOWER: I've seen him once.

WILLIAM: Where?

BOUGHTFLOWER: At Newmarket, leading in his horse.

WILLIAM: Would you know him again?

BOUGHTFLOWER: No, he was the other side of the horse. Here—what is all this anyway?

WILLIAM: It's a matter of life and death. Please try to help. We think he's staying here.

BOUGHTFLOWER: If he is, I haven't seen him and I've seen most of 'em since I got here.

ANN: Oh, dear. . . .

BOUGHTFLOWER: Wait-a minute. . . . I met a chap upstairs just now going into the . . . bathroom.

WILLIAM: What's he like?

BOUGHTFLOWER: I dunno—he was the other side of the door.

WILLIAM: Is he still up there?

BOUGHTFLOWER: I suppose so—only went in a couple of minutes ago.

[*William promptly dashes for the stairs.*]

(*Suddenly recollecting.*) Here—where does my old woman come into this?

WILLIAM: She doesn't.

BOUGHTFLOWER: What?

[*The time now says 10.47 Ann looks at the clock and lets out a scream of alarm. William stops and turns.*]

ANN: The time! Look at the time!

[*William looks at clock.*]

WILLIAM: My God!

ACT THREE

[*He takes a flying leap down the stairs up to Ann and the bewildered Boughtflower.*]

BOUGHTFLOWER: Will somebody tell me what the hell's going on?

WILLIAM: There's something somewhere in this building that's going off at 10.48.

BOUGHTFLOWER: Eh?

WILLIAM: It's intended for Upshott, most likely a bomb, but if we don't get out of here damned quick we'll all be blown to blazes.

BOUGHTFLOWER: Blimey O'Reilly!

[*He dashes out.*]

WILLIAM: Oh my God—look at the time, 10.48! Under the table. Quick!

[*He and Ann dive under the table left centre. The Landlord enters up centre with a tray of champagne and glasses. Seeing William and Ann crouched under the table, he starts and bolts for the dining room door lest their obvious insanity should take a violent turn. In his haste he drops his tray with a crash in the dining room.*]

ANN (*re-emerging*): Of course I did mention it might be the Green Man, Newhaven.

WILLIAM: Nonsense!

[*Nevertheless he crosses to telephone and lifts receiver.*]

(*Telephone.*) I want the Green Man, Newhaven. Do you happen to know the number? What? Good—thank you. Will you connect me?

ANN: There's scarcely any point in calling them up now, surely. Why not wait for the morning papers?

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: It's ringing. . . . (*Telephone.*) Hullo?
. . . Is that the Green Man, Newhaven? . . . Oh—
er—are you still there? . . . you are? . . . Oh,
well—er—good night.

[*He hangs up.*]

They're still there. Something's slipped.

ANN: Things seem to have a habit of slipping with you.

WILLIAM: You heard what that girl said. It was to go off at 10.48.

ANN: You may remember I *did* suggest it might only be a figure of speech.

WILLIAM: Don't be ridiculous. How could a figure of speech endanger his life?

ANN: Well then, we've come at the right time on the wrong day.

WILLIAM: What do you suggest—that we keep on coming down here until something . . . blows up?

ANN: I don't know why I let myself be talked into coming here in the first place.

WILLIAM: What! I suppose you think I arranged all this just to sell you a vacuum cleaner.

ANN: Nothing you did would surprise me.

WILLIAM (*complacently*): I admit I have a certain quality of unexpectedness. (*Coughs.*) Unlike Reginald.

ANN: He 'phoned up just now.

WILLIAM: I know. I—er—caught the tail end of the conversation.

ANN (*quickly*): Did you?

WILLIAM: Yes. You gave me quite a nice build-up.

ANN: I think it's time we started back.

[*She gets up.*]

WILLIAM: Oh—wouldn't you like one for the road? I would.

ACT THREE

ANN (*smiling*): All right.

[*He crosses to the hatchway to bar and raps on it. Hatchway slides up and the Landlord looks through.*]

WILLIAM: Can we have a drink?

LANDLORD: No.

[*He slams down the hatchway. William raps again. It slides up once more.*]

WILLIAM: Two to Charing Cross.

LANDLORD: Eh?

WILLIAM: Could we have a couple of dry gingers?

LANDLORD (*astonished*): Dry gingers?

WILLIAM: Well, we'll have a dash of gin in them, if you absolutely insist. We are sadly changed characters, landlord. Sober to a fault.

LANDLORD: No more funny business?

WILLIAM: No more funny business. Cross my heart.

[*He closes hatch. William moves back to Ann.*]

WILLIAM: He'll—er—think about it.

ANN: What time will we get back to town, Mr. Blake?

WILLIAM: About 12.30, Miss Vincent.

[*Pause.*]

WILLIAM: Tell me, how far have things gone with you and Reginald?

ANN: What do you mean?

WILLIAM: Anybody called any banns yet?

ANN: If you want to know, they have.

WILLIAM: Oh.

[*Slight pause.*]

MEET A BODY

ANN: Once.

WILLIAM (*brightens*): One up and two to play. Might be worse.

ANN: I can't see that it's anything to do with you.

WILLIAM: Can't you?

ANN: I only met you this evening.

WILLIAM: I know, but hasn't it been fun?

ANN: You've got a strange idea of fun. . . . Besides, I don't go back on my word.

WILLIAM: You haven't given me the only reason that matters. Are you in love with him?

ANN: Why do you think I'm marrying him?

WILLIAM: I can't think of any really satisfactory reason. Can you honestly tell me that your heart beats any faster when he says, "Here is the forecast for shipping"?

ANN: What is all this leading up to?

WILLIAM: Me.

ANN: Don't be ridiculous. We've only known each other a couple of hours and we haven't agreed once.

WILLIAM: On what firmer basis could a marriage of two minds be built?

[*The Landlord enters from bar with two drinks on a tray and puts them down in front of them.*]

LANDLORD: Two gin and dry gingers.

WILLIAM: You've come just in time.

LANDLORD: Eh? That'll be five shillings, please.

WILLIAM (*giving it to him*): Keep the change.

LANDLORD: Thank you, sir. Mind if I turn the radio on? We like a bit of music on Saturday nights.

[*William and Ann don't mind so the Landlord crosses and turns on the portable and exits centre.*]

ANN: What did you mean, he was just in time?

WILLIAM: Just too late.

ACT THREE

[*A Radio Announcer's voice is heard. The clock now shows 10.52.*]

RADIO ANNOUNCER: . . . Other parts were played by Hazel Warris, Percival Hermes and Guy Hamilton. The play adapted for broadcasting by Edward Scaife and produced by Ernest Steward. . . . The time is exactly 10.42.

[*William reacts, nearly choking over his drink.*]

RADIO ANNOUNCER: The next part of the programme follows at 10.45.

WILLIAM (*to Landlord, who is re-entering*): Landlord! That clock! Have you altered it?

LANDLORD: Of course. Put it on ten minutes.

[*The radio starts to play an interim record of the Chopin Waltz in A flat Major, Op. 69, No. 1.*]

WILLIAM: My God.

ANN (*wails*): We've still got six minutes to go!

WILLIAM: Six minutes!

[*He makes a blind dash for the stairs, watched in a dumb-founded way by the Landlord.*]

ANN: Where are you going?

WILLIAM: Upshott!

ANN: Where?

WILLIAM: First floor—in the bathroom!

[*He disappears from sight. The Landlord now turns back, deliberately picks up the two drinks, and puts them back on the tray, marching purposefully back into the bar and slamming down the hatchway. Ann is searching feverishly*]

MEET A BODY

behind the window curtains for the bomb. Lily enters with two glasses of Lager on a tray.]

LILY: Miss Vincent?

ANN: Yes?

LILY: He's on the 'phone again.

ANN: Who?

LILY: Your father. I've put you through.

[Lily exits to dining room. Ann crosses impatiently to telephone and picks it up.]

ANN (*hurriedly*): Hello? Yes. . . . Listen, Reginald—I can't talk now—there's no time. . . . What? No, I'll ring you back. . . .

[At this moment Hawkins enters hurriedly. He glances at Ann then, dismissing her as a casual customer, looks at his watch, then crosses quickly to the radio and turns it up.]

(Into telephone, getting more and more angry.) No! I can't explain. Not now. . . . There's no need to lose your temper. Well, why can't you wait till I get back? . . . All right, *break* it off. I'm sure it suits me. *Good-bye!*

[She bangs the receiver down. Hawkins walks away from radio to his overcoat.]

HAWKINS: Good evening.

ANN (*absently*): Good evening. . . . (*Calling out.*) Bill!

[She looks with wild anxiety at the clock, then hurries up the stairs after William. Sir Gregory and Joan come in from the dining room, watched by Hawkins.]

ACT THREE

SIR GREGORY: That cold rabbit pie was dreadful, diabolically dreadful. I must say, they manage these things differently in Iraq. Why, there they think absolutely nothing of serving up an entire sheep for the company. (*Looks at his watch and coughs.*) Well, my dear, I rather think it's time we—er— (*He glances up the stairs.*)

JOAN: Oh! Couldn't we have some coffee here first?

SIR GREGORY: We can have it sent up. In any event, it will certainly be foul.

[*He takes her arm and they start towards the stairs. Hawkins quickly interposes.*]

HAWKINS: Perhaps you'd care to join me?

SIR GREGORY: Eh?

HAWKINS: I was just going to order some.

JOAN: Oh, thank goodness!

SIR GREGORY: Very kind of you, I'm sure, but under the circumstances. . . . Come along, my dear.

HAWKINS: In that case there's no point in my offering you a cigar.

SIR GREGORY: Not just now, thank you very much.

[*He starts to lead the reluctant Joan up the stairs. Hawkins quickly sticks a cigarette in his mouth.*]

HAWKINS: Oh. I wonder if I might trouble you for a light?

SIR GREGORY: Light? Of course. Here you are.

[*He drops a box of matches over the banisters to Hawkins and continues up the stairs. The music fades out.*]

HAWKINS: Thank you.

[*As he strikes the match, the voice of a Radio Announcer comes through on the radio.*]

MEET A BODY

RADIO ANNOUNCER: This is the B.B.C. Home Service. The Middle East—a new approach. Here is a recording of the speech made today at a luncheon in the City by Sir Gregory Upshott, who has just been appointed Britain's Special Envoy.

[*Sir Gregory has disappeared from view. Hearing his name, he hurries downstairs, Joan behind him, smiling with relief.*]

SIR GREGORY: Oh! (*He hesitates . . . then.*) You run along, my dear, will you. . . : I shan't be a moment.

[*During this the recording of Sir Gregory's speech has begun. It continues during the ensuing dialogue and is given in full at the end of the play. Sir Gregory establishes himself in a chair near the radio. Joan slips into a seat beside him. Sir Gregory glances at her, motioning her to go back up the stairs. Joan shakes her head determinedly. Hawkins, gratified, starts to put on his coat.*]

During this, William appears at the top of the stairs with Ann. Hawkins sees him, recognises him, and turns abruptly away with his back to them.]

ANN: Are you sure it wasn't him?

WILLIAM (*as they hurry to the bottom of the stairs*): Positive.

[*They cross to centre.*]

ANN (*lowering voice*): Isn't it time to beat that gong?

[*Hawkins jams on his hat and makes a move for the door behind their backs. William glances at clock, uncertainly.*]

ACT THREE

WILLIAM: I don't know—wait a minute.

[*He stops as he suddenly sees Hawkins. He stares—then moves quickly over and intercepts him.*]

What a very small world it is, to be sure!

[*Hawkins is startled, but quickly recovers himself.*]

HAWKINS: Are you addressing me, sir?

WILLIAM: What are you doing here—repairing clocks? Or looking for Sergeant Basset, perhaps?

HAWKINS: I don't think we've met.

WILLIAM (*to Ann*): This is your next door neighbour—Windy Ridge.

HAWKINS: That does not happen to be my name.

WILLIAM: Take a look at the time.

HAWKINS: I can't recollect meeting either of you before. And yet your face is somehow familiar (*pulling himself free*)—though not so odiously familiar as your manner.

WILLIAM: Do you know what the time is?

HAWKINS: Naturally. It is time to go. Goodnight.

[*William pulls out the revolver he took from Montague and points it at him.*]

WILLIAM: Oh, no.

[*Hawkins looks at the revolver.*]

HAWKINS: Dear me, what's that?

WILLIAM: Your uncle's revolver, Mr. Hawkins—but unlike him I'm not relying on the visual effect.

HAWKINS (*to Ann*): The man's as drunk as a lord or as mad as a hatter. I wonder which?

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: You've got just over thirty seconds to tell us where you put it.

HAWKINS: Put what?

[*The Landlord's voice is heard, off.*]

LANDLORD: I tell you nothing's happened here. What d'you mean, blown up?

[*Landlord enters. Boughtflower excitedly pushing him in.*]

BOUGHTFLOWER: That's what he said.

LANDLORD: What?

BOUGHTFLOWER (*pointing to William*): Him! There he is. He's the one who told me.

LANDLORD: Oh—he did, did he?

BOUGHTFLOWER: You said the whole place was going up skyhigh.

WILLIAM: So it is—in 30 seconds. (*To Hawkins.*) Isn't that so?

HAWKINS: The man's just drunk.

[*During this, Sir Gregory has been struggling to hear his own radio speech, and has moved very close to the radio. At this point he gives up the unequal contest and turns on them angrily.*]

SIR GREGORY: Can't you conduct your argument elsewhere? The place is a bedlam and I am trying to listen to an important broadcast! Thank you!

[*Ann sees the clock, which is practically on 10.48. She lets out a cry.*]

ANN: Bill—the time!

[*Hawkins sees his chance and dives out of the door.*]

ACT THREE

RADIO: “. . . the moment of impact may not be so far ahead.”

WILLIAM: Listen!

[*William looks from radio to Sir Gregory then back to radio.*]

RADIO: “. . . If I can help to bring about a new settlement. . . .”

SIR GREGORY (*clearing his throat*): Hrrm!

[*The record does the same immediately afterwards.*]

WILLIAM: Good God! . . . Then you're Sir Gregory. That's your voice. It must be in the radio. Look out everybody!

[*He rushes forward and seizes the radio. He dashes with it to the French windows and hurls the set out over the balcony. The voice of Sir Gregory continues from the radio.*]

RADIO: “. . . I shall then indeed feel that my task will be done and I will be able to disappear, this time finally, from the public scene.”

[*An explosion is heard off, followed by a rumbling as of falling sections of cliff. . . . They have all followed William to the window. Lily comes in from the dining room.*]

SIR GREGORY: Good heavens!

LILY: What on earth was that?

LANDLORD: Only half the cliff being blown away. Pop upstairs and tell everyone it's all right, no bones broken.

LILY: O.K.

MEET A BODY

[*Exeunt Landlord and Lily, the latter running off up the stairs.*]

[*William comes in from the balcony with Boughtflower.*]

WILLIAM: Where's that fellow gone? (*The noise of a car driving off is heard.*) There goes his car. (*To Boughtflower.*) Get after him in yours—I'll 'phone the police.

[*Boughtflower hurries out centre. William crosses towards the telephone but is checked by Sir Gregory who comes from the window to him.*]

SIR GREGORY: Pardon me, sir, but you seem to know something about this.

WILLIAM: Up to a point, yes.

SIR GREGORY: What was that explosion?

WILLIAM: An attempt on your life, Sir Gregory.

SIR GREGORY: What?

JOAN (*wails*): He knows who you are. I'm not staying here now, I'm *not*, Sir Gregory.

SIR GREGORY: Be quiet. And *do* sit down. (*To William.*) Just a minute. You mean to say that in that radio there was an explosive?

WILLIAM (*who has replaced the telephone*): Certainly.

SIR GREGORY: Who put it there?

WILLIAM: The man who just went out. Answers to the name of Hawkins.

SIR GREGORY: I don't know the name.

WILLIAM: It's unlikely to be his real one.

SIR GREGORY: I see. Well—why are we waiting—? Telephone the police. Tell them who I am, and

—
WILLIAM: Is that advisable, sir? . . .

JOAN: Oh no, no—of course it's not!

ACT THREE

SIR GREGORY: That is for me to say.

WILLIAM: Naturally, but I didn't think you'd want to give evidence in court—with the young lady. I mean, think of the newspapers, sir.

JOAN (*wailing again*): And mother takes the *Daily Mirror*.

SIR GREGORY: She would.

WILLIAM: Why not leave here now, sir? I'll have to make a statement after you've gone, but if you move out now there'll be no proof you've ever been here. After all, no harm's been done . . . in any direction.

SIR GREGORY: Perhaps you're right. (*To Joan.*) We'll leave at once.

JOAN: Oh thank you, sir!

[*She goes to the mirror to tidy her hair.*]

SIR GREGORY (*to William, in an undertone*): You're M.I.; I take it.

WILLIAM: No, sir. Nothing so glamorous.

SIR GREGORY: Oh. Then what are you?

WILLIAM: I—er—well, you might say I just go about cleaning up things. Blake's the name, sir. I represent the Electro-Broom, the Little Wizard of the Carpet. (*He hands Sir Gregory his card.*) My card, sir.

SIR GREGORY: H'm? All I can say is, I owe you a great deal, a very great deal.

WILLIAM (*taking his card back*): Pardon me, sir. It's the only one I've got.

SIR GREGORY: H'rrm. Yes. (*To Joan.*) Are you ready, my dear?

JOAN (*brightly*): Oh yes, I'm waiting.

SIR GREGORY (*to William*): I'll see you get recognition for this.

WILLIAM: Thank you, sir. I hope you avoid it.

SIR GREGORY: I—hrrm! Good night.

MEET A BODY

WILLIAM: }
ANN: } Good night, sir.

[*Exeunt Sir Gregory and Joan.*]

WILLIAM: Another couple of minutes and I'd have sold him an Electro-Broom.

[*The Landlord comes hurrying in with two glasses of champagne on a tray. He puts the glasses on the table left centre in front of William and Ann.*]

LANDLORD: I want to thank you two. I've got to take back everything I said.

ANN: Perhaps you could sell *him* one.

LANDLORD: I've just been out and had a look at the cliff. If that thing had gone up in here there wouldn't have been a bottle left in the place.

WILLIAM: I'm sorry about your radio, Landlord.

LANDLORD: That's all right, sir. The old one still works.

[*He crosses to turn it on. Borodin's Nocturne fades in. Then he points to the champagne and smiles.*]

That's on the house, sir.

[*Landlord exits.*]

WILLIAM: Worried about something?

ANN: I'm feeling a bit limp after all that excitement.

WILLIAM: Ah, yes. (*Sighs.*) The purple patch has faded. Back to the humdrum—and Reginald.

ANN: I didn't tell you—he made another toll-call.

WILLIAM: Don't worry—he's sure to charge it to expenses.

ACT THREE

ANN: He's broken it off.

WILLIAM: What? . . . Oh. That makes a difference —or doesn't it?

ANN: I don't know. Perhaps he didn't mean it.

WILLIAM: You ought to have snapped up an offer like that.

ANN: I don't know what to do.

WILLIAM: You might consider me.

ANN (*turns to look at him*): Do you think so? Why?

WILLIAM: I need companionship. I couldn't face the future throwing bombs out of windows all alone. . . . It *was* fun, wasn't it?

[*The music has faded out.*]

ANN: Mmm.

WILLIAM: Ann. . . !

[*He is about to enfold her, when the radio makes an announcement.*]

RADIO: This is the B.B.C. Third Programme.

WILLIAM (*interjecting*): We could do without that.

. . .

RADIO: Five minutes of Free Verse.

WILLIAM (*interjecting*): Ann, what I wanted. . . .

RADIO: Here is Reginald Willoughby-Pratt, who will read a group of poems by Milton Boyle, to which the author has given the title "Vicious Cycle". Reginald Willoughby-Pratt.

[*Ann and William look quickly at each other. Reginald's voice is heard. It shows the effects of strain . . . a strain which increases.*]

MEET A BODY

REGINALD'S VOICE: " Her beauty has a kind of ugliness,
A strangulating loveliness,
Compressing the jugular of my sensi-
tivity
As ivy constricts trunk of tree, . . ."

[*William rises and goes to the window seat for Ann's coat.*]

" Turning arboreal royalty
Into beanpole servitor— . . ."

[*Ann rises. William helps her on with her coat.*]

" Burying the berries
in a fruitless operation—
So that the name of her,
Ann——"

[*His voice falters at this unfortunate coincidence. William and Ann are checked at the mention of the name.*]

" Asininely monosyllabic,
The mere label she goes by
Yet pulsing with drum beat—
Ann—Ann—Ann—Ann——"

[*William and Ann are again arrested as they make for the door. Reginald's voice cracks under the altogether intolerable strain—this is too much, much too much. His voice takes on another, completely human note.*]

REGINALD'S VOICE: Ann! I can't go on. I won't!
Listen to me, Ann, wherever you are! You can go to
your bloody vacuum cleaner! I'm *through*—you.
. . . !!

ACT THREE

[*He is switched off abruptly with an extra definite click. Ann and William look at each other in amazement. A new voice now breaks in from the radio.*]

RADIO ANNOUNCER: We must apologise to listeners for a technical hitch. And that brings us to the end of today's broadcasting in the Third Programme. Goodnight, everyone. . . .

WILLIAM: } Good-night.
ANN: }

RADIO ANNOUNCER: *Good-night.*

Final curtain

SIR GREGORY UPSHOTT'S SPEECH

Mr. Chairman, my lords, ladies and gentlemen . . . hrrm—I have always liked to think that I am fundamentally a modest man, but after your extremely flattering remarks, Mr. Chairman, I confess I am finding the part somewhat difficult to sustain—

[*Ripple of polite laughter.*]

Were I the walking compendium of all the commercial and diplomatic talents that he has described I would certainly be priceless indeed.

[*Laughter.*]

But I am afraid—I am very much afraid—that I am not. Nevertheless, I think I can promise that such ability as I may have will be unremittingly devoted to the task to which I have been appointed.

MEET A BODY

I have spent, I suppose, the best years of my life in the Middle East and at one time entertained serious thoughts of embracing the Moslem faith. As a youthful orientalist I studied the civilisation of ancient Egypt, and in later years I served under our minister in Cairo. I have hunted with the Kings of Iraq and shot with the Shahs of Iran. I watched the birth pangs of the new Palestine with a friendly eye and studied the obscurer dialects of Syria.

What do we find in those regions of today? A vital area for British Commonwealth interests, a variety of resources, strategic bases of stupendous importance, and, at the same time, diverse peoples, poverty, backwardness, pressures and frictions, agelong enmities, distrust and suspicion.

What is really wanted is a new deal. If our friends in those parts could look upon themselves and ourselves with a fresh eye and so bury the past—what is there that could not be done?

[*Applause and "bear, bears."*]

The Egyptian fellaheen must learn to lie down with the Israeli. Ourselves and the Americans must make an entirely new approach in Iran. Oil is, I confess, much in my mind—it has to be. The future of our military bases must come into it, too.

The international situation makes every aspect of my task urgent. Indeed, elements in certain countries that shall be nameless have threatened, openly and covertly, to take any steps that may be necessary to ensure that my mission shall be a failure. *Any* steps, gentlemen—that is what we have come to! For myself, I remain quite unintimidated.

[*Murmur of applause.*]

ACT THREE

—indeed I am greatly encouraged, because such threats would never be made unless they feared that my mission might be successful.

It is a platitude, but a true one, to say to our friends in that part of the globe that we must hang together or hang separately. In the common interest we must all unite. The moment of impact may not be so far ahead. If I can help to bring about a new settlement—hrrm!—I shall then indeed feel that my task will be done, and I will be able to disappear, this time finally, from the public scene.

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

by

RONALD MILLAR

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Laurence Olivier Productions Ltd., staged *Waiting for Gillian* at the St. James's Theatre, London on April 21, 1954, with the following cast.

JAMES MANNING	<i>John McCallum</i>
JILL MANNING	<i>Googie Withers</i>
THE HON. WILLIAM STEPHEN FITZHARDING BULE	<i>Frank Lawton</i>
P.C. EDDIE CATER	<i>Thomas Heathcote</i>
SERGEANT GROVES	<i>Norman Pierce</i>
ELSIE PEARCE	<i>Anna Turner</i>
DOCTOR BARRY FREWEN	<i>Noel Howlett</i>
FLO	<i>Kathleen Boutall</i>
A WOMAN	<i>Catherine Campbell</i>

Directed by Michael Macowan

Settings by Alan Tagg

Lighting by Joe Davis

CHARACTERS

(*In order of appearance*)

JAMES MANNING

JILL MANNING

THE HONOURABLE WILLIAM STEPHEN

FITZHARDING BULE

P.C. EDDIE CATER

DOCTOR BARRY FREWEN

SERGEANT GROVES

ELSIE PEARCE

FLO

A BYSTANDER

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I. Scene 1. *The Mannings' house in Buckinghamshire. A Friday evening in March.*

Scene 2. *The Same. The following Sunday afternoon.*

ACT II. Scene 1. *The Same. Five minutes later.*

Scene 2. *The Same. An evening a few weeks' later.*

ACT III. Scene 1. *The same. After dinner, six weeks' later.*

Scene 2. *"Flo's Cafe." A Year later.*

ACT ONE

Scene I

The living room of a pleasant country house in Buckinghamshire, on a Friday evening in March. French windows in the right wall, an archway down left leading to the dining room and kitchen. A hallway, up centre back, with stairs leading up to the right and the front door to the left facing the stairs. The remains of a cocktail party are littered about and the room is in considerable disorder. Glasses, bottles, canapes, ash, cigarette ends, create an air of untidiness in the otherwise charming room. The room is empty and the radio is blaring dance music. Presently James Manning enters through the front door. He is about forty, quietly dressed in city clothes, dark overcoat and homburg.

JAMES (*calls*): Jill! Jillie!

JILL (*from upstairs*): Hello!

JAMES: I'm home, dear.

JILL: About time, too.

JAMES: Yes, I know.

[He turns off the radio, clears an ashtray and beer bottle from an armchair. Jill appears on the stairs. She is an attractive woman of about thirty, with something of the child about her still. She wears a housecoat and is brushing her hair.]

JILL (*on stairs*): Well . . . hello, stranger!

JAMES: I'm awfully sorry, but the board meeting dragged on and on and I couldn't get away. Has everyone gone?

JILL: Everyone except Bill and he doesn't count. That's a bad thing to say. Everyone counts, don't they? Everyone on this earth counts as much as

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

everyone on this earth. And that's a beautiful thing to say. (*Kisses him*). Hello, darling.

JAMES: Hello, darling.

JILL: Had a bad time with your board?

JAMES: Not so much bad as bad-tempered. (*She gives him her hair brush and lies back on the sofa, her head on his lap while he brushes her hair for her.*) It's an extraordinary thing that manufacturing cigarettes should generate so much heat.

JILL: Poor darling. People get so worked up about everything, don't they . . . no peace . . . no peace.

JAMES (*brushing*): Peaceful now?

JILL: Mm . . . that's wonderful. I feel liberated. Like a bird.

JAMES: Rather a high flown bird.

[*A crash comes from the kitchen.*]

JAMES: What's that?

JILL: Only Bill.

JAMES: What's he doing in there?

JILL: Washing the—breaking the glasses. (*Calls.*) Bill!

BULE (*off*): Hello!

JILL (*calls*): What was it?

BULE (*off*): The ice bucket. It's all right—no bones broken.

JAMES (*eyeing the housecoat*): Is this what you wore for the party?

JILL (*giggles*): I wish I'd thought of it, it might have gingered things up a bit. No, but really, darling, I've had quite a day of it one way and another—and then your not being here and having to carry the ball all by myself—I felt if I didn't get into something and stretch, I should burst. (*Turns suddenly from him.*) You don't like me like this.

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

JAMES: Yes, of course, I—it's . . . very fetching.

JILL: No, you don't. I can always tell when you don't. I can feel great waves of disapproval flooding all over me. Bill, I'm in disgrace.

[*Bule enters from the kitchen arch. He wears an apron over a smartly cut suit. He is about James' age, rather more dashing, perhaps a year or two younger.*]

BULE: Well, that's more or less a permanent condition with me. Evening, Squire. That was a smooth little shindig you missed this evening.

JAMES: Yes, I'm sorry, I had an interminable board meeting.

BULE (*removing apron*): What do I do with this?

JILL: Just chuck it down.

JAMES: How was the party?

JILL: Terrible!

BULE: Oh, I rather enjoyed it. About half time a completely strange character with a bow tie and a whisky breath, came up to me and said "You're Bule." I said "Yes", he said, "Do you shoot?", I said "Only if someone starts something", and he nodded and said "Ah!" and went away quite satisfied.

JILL (*giggles*): That was Major Henderson.

JAMES: Did Jillie behave herself?

BULE: I'm happy to report that, in the absence of the breadwinner, the little woman did splendidly.

JILL: No, she didn't. I'm no good at these do's—I seem to forget things, and make the most awful faux pas and—Oh! I don't know, I can't do it.

JAMES: Can't do what?

JILL: Well, there's a sort of a knack to living in the country in England, and I just don't seem to have it, that's all. It's not my "thing", which isn't fair on

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

you, darling. You deserve a proper respectable wife, who'd be all that she ought to be.

JAMES: What did you forget this time? The olives again?

JILL: No, the harpoon things you spear them with.

JAMES: Never mind, darling, we can't all be efficient.

BULE: And some of us can't even be nice to look at.

JILL: He says the sweetest things, doesn't he?

BULE: Yes, well, with those kind words, I'll be toddling, children.

JILL: No, don't go. Jim, give him one for the road.

JAMES: From the look of things, there isn't one.

JILL: Yes, there is, there's a smidgin of Gordons in the whisky decanter. Back in a second, looking wildly respectable.

[Disappears upstairs again. James makes Bule and himself a drink.]

BULE: Smoke, Squire?

JAMES: No, thanks, I don't use them.

BULE: Really? You know, there's something vaguely indecent about manufacturing vices for other people, but not indulging yourself. What do you do in London, James? I'd visualised you as making the gaspers yourself with one of those little gadgets.

JAMES: That's right. I put the paper in and spread the tobacco on it and roll.

BULE: And lick the paper. Don't you run short of lick, James?

JAMES: What I am short of at meetings like that is patience. This one went on from 10 until 6.30 when the whole thing could have been over in an hour.

BULE: I don't see how you do it.

JAMES: Do what?

BULE: This Captain of Industry stuff.

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

JAMES: It's quite fun, really . . . I see you've got the new car.

BULE: The Lagonda? Yes.

JAMES: Pity about the near-side back door.

BULE: Why a pity?

JAMES: There's a scratch right across the paintwork, I noticed it as I came in, didn't you know?

BULE: Damn that man, I shall have to fire him. He is the worst chauffeur in the world, bar none.

JAMES: Touched it coming out of the garage, I should think.

BULE: Steals too.

JAMES: Who does?

BULE: My chauffeur.

JAMES: Sack him, my dear chap.

BULE: I mean to.

[James starts to empty ash trays into the grate, tidying up the room. Jill comes down the stairs. She is quietly dressed in an afternoon frock.]

JILL: Darling, don't bother, Elsie will see to all that in the morning.

JAMES: No bother.

JILL: Jim has a passion for tidiness. He's a far better housewife than I am. I don't know why we have Elsie, when Jim would so much rather do all the chores himself.

JAMES: Not really. I just like things to be neat and tidy, that's all.

JILL: Well, you give me a guilty conscience.

[James straightens a picture on the wall.]

BULE: James, for one glorious moment, I thought you were going to take it down.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

JAMES: Why should I take it down? It's quite harmless.

BULE: Bad pictures are never harmless, James. You see them whether you know you do or not, and they eat into your aesthetic sense and corrupt it.

JAMES: I think it's rather pleasant. So does Jill.

BULE: Does she?

JILL: I wouldn't mind if he was a handsome man, but he's got such a peculiar nose.

JAMES (*curtly*): Well, darling, as far as I remember, you put him there.

JILL: Oh, well, he's all right. Anyhow, he's an ancestor or something, isn't he?

BULE: Oh, a family portrait, I didn't realise that. It's a jolly interesting picture, old man. Solid and reassuring, like all the Mannings.

JILL: Male versions only.

BULE: Granted. You know, James, it must be very hard work being a solid type, a decent chap, and so on.

JAMES: I seem to remember that when I was at Oxford it was pretty hard work trying to be a bounder.

BULE: Ah, it may have been for you, James, but for me it was easy. It's all a question of one's natural instincts.

JILL: What is a bounder?

BULE: Someone with weaknesses different from one's own. If you're a sober type, a man who drinks is a bounder. But if he happens to cheat widows and orphans and so do you, then he's just a smart businessman.

JAMES: Oh come, that's a bit too easy.

BULE: By the way, James, are you coming to the Duke's party?

JAMES: When is it?

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

BULE: Thursday.

JAMES: Oh God, I can't. I've got to be in town that night.

JILL: What for?

JAMES: I'm having dinner with old Arthur Maitland. I told you about it.

JILL: Well, couldn't you put him off?

JAMES: I don't see how I can.

BULE: Who is this old Arthur who can't be put off, and why?

JAMES: Well, he's old and poor, and deaf as a post, and a bore.

BULE: All perfectly good reasons for not going to dinner with him. If he were young, rich, and acute of hearing and wit, I should see your point. As it is, I think you'd better come to the Duke's. Don't you Jill?

JILL: Well, I'm coming anyway.

BULE: What? Even if James doesn't?

JILL: Uh-huh.

BULE: Ah, I misunderstood. I entirely see your point about Arthur, James. Nice Arthur, dear old Arthur. One can hardly put old Arthur off.

JAMES: I couldn't understand why you felt so strongly about me coming.

BULE: James, you're too modest. I say, that tie's a brute, isn't it?

JAMES: Listen, Bill, you're obviously in a carping mood, so drink up your drink and hop it, there's a good chap.

BULE: Cast into the snow defenceless. Well, well. 'Night, Jill. 'Night, James, thanks for the party. No, don't bother, I can throw myself out.

[*Bule exits through front door. Pause.*]

JILL: Wasn't that rather beastly of you, darling?

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

JAMES: What?

JILL: Chucking the Honbill out like that.

JAMES: He irritates me. Incidentally, I wish you wouldn't play that game with him, Jillie.

JILL: What game?

JAMES: The Poor Old James game. I get a little tired of it.

JILL: Darling, I don't know what you mean.

JAMES: Well, the Honbill is always being clever or critical about somebody or something. I don't mind its being me, but I don't think you ought to gang up with him against me.

JILL: Darling, we were only fooling.

JAMES: I know, but it's all rather smart undergraduate stuff, isn't it, and you know you've always rather liked that picture.

[The noise of Bule's Lagonda is heard as he goes and for a moment its spotlight sweeps blindly across the windows.]

A pity old Bill's like that, otherwise he's an amusing cuss. And I must say I like his style in motor cars.

JILL: He was fun at the party, the one bright spot in fact.

JAMES: Was he? Good. Who else came?

JILL: Oh, the usual crowd, the Hendersons, the Margetsons—Henry Riley brought a vague man.

JAMES: I rather like Riley.

JILL: Look, Jim, can't you put old Arthur off, and come to the Duke's party with us

JAMES: It's a bit difficult. The old boy's hard up now and very sensitive. He may think I don't want to go.

JILL: Do you?

JAMES: Heavens no, it's a penance. He's practically stone deaf.

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

JILL: Well, surely it doesn't make sense to miss something you want to go to, just for the sake of bawling into poor old Arthur's ear trumpet?

JAMES: You've no social conscience. All right, I'll try and fix something.

JILL: But I think we ought to let the Honbill know tomorrow.

JAMES: Well, if the worst comes to the worst, you can always go without me, can't you?

JILL: But I wanted to go with you.

JAMES: Did you?

JILL (*suddenly contrite*): Darling, is it a hell of an effort to be as nice to me as you are?

JAMES: Of course. It strains every fibre of my being.

JILL: I'm not worth it, you know. I'm no good to man or beast.

JAMES: Useless Jillie, no good to anybody. Darling Jillie.

[*They kiss. There's a ring at the door.*]

JILL: Oh! That's Phyllis Scott. She left her gloves.

JAMES: Wretched woman, she always leaves something behind.

[*He goes to the door and opens it. P.C. Eddie Cater stands there. Eddie is young, alert, nobody's fool.*]

EDDIE: Evening, sir. Sorry to bother you at this time of night.

JAMES: That's all right, Eddie.

EDDIE: Good evening, ma'am.

JILL: Good evening, Eddie. Come in.

JAMES: What's the trouble?

EDDIE: It's my sister, sir.

JAMES: Elsie?

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

JILL: Our Elsie?

JAMES: What's happened?

EDDIE: Well, it's not her exactly, sir. It's her husband.

JILL: Joe?

EDDIE: Yes, ma'am. He got knocked off his bicycle by a car this evening. They've took him into hospital. Elsie's in there now.

JAMES: Is he badly hurt?

EDDIE: Pretty bad, sir. Fractured skull, they reckon.

JILL: Oh, Eddie, how dreadful. How did it happen?

EDDIE: Right outside his own gate, ma'am. Seems Joe got home and Elsie was getting his tea and Joe found he hadn't got any fags, so he says to Elsie: "I'll just pop up to Thomas's, shan't be a minute." Must have gone out and jumped on his bike and just as he came out the gate, a car come shooting by very fast and caught him.

JAMES: What car was it?

EDDIE: I don't know, Mr. Manning, I wish I did. It didn't stop, see.

JAMES: Just drove straight on?

EDDIE: That's right, just drove straight on and left him there as though he'd run over a rabbit.

JAMES: Do you think the chap who was driving knew he'd hit him?

EDDIE: I don't know, sir. Maybe, maybe not. Elsie saw it all out of the window. Of course it was half dark, but Elsie said it seemed to catch the bike more than him. She said he was just getting on, and this car came along and seemed to catch the bike and sort of threw him and the bike across the road. Doesn't seem the sort of thing that could happen and the chap not know he'd done it.

JAMES: No. Elsie didn't get the car's number, of course?

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

EDDIE: Well, no, sir. She was inside, see, and it was all over in a second.

JAMES: What a rotten business. He's a nice chap too, is Joe.

JILL: Do they think he'll be all right?

EDDIE: They won't say, ma'am, they seem to think there's a chance. (*Pause.*) Joe was in Crete. He come all through North Africa and Italy and never got a scratch. Then he comes home, and some silly fool mucking about, goes and does this. Married man too, with three kids.

JILL: Poor Elsie. Jim, you know what the Cottage Hospital's like, I think we ought to go up there and see. They'll never call in specialists, or anything, unless someone makes them.

EDDIE: Well, now, ma'am, excuse me, but the thing is, with your permission, they're coming here.

JAMES: Coming here?

EDDIE: Yes, sir, that is, Elsie, the Doc, and Sergeant Groves. You see, sir, you know them photographs of cars you had at the fête?

JAMES: You mean "Spot the model and win a coconut"?

EDDIE: That's right. Well, we was thinking if Elsie was to take a look at them she might be able to identify the car what hit Joe, and then maybe there'd be some chance of us catching whoever it was. You do still have them pictures, don't you, sir?

JAMES: Yes, I think so. They're in the desk. I'll. . .

[*The noise of the doctor's car arriving.*]

EDDIE: That'll be them now, sir.

[*The front door bell rings. James opens it. Dr. Barry Frewen, Sergeant Groves and Elsie Pearce enter. The*

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

Doctor is fiftyish, shrewd and penetrating. Groves is bluff and red-faced, a hearty. Elsie is 35, but looks older, a tired, quiet little woman. At the moment she is dazed, under shock.]

JAMES: Come in, Sergeant.

GROVES: 'Evening, sir.

JAMES: Eddie's just told us, Elsie. We're most terribly sorry.

JILL (*going to her*): Come in, Elsie dear. Come and sit down and I'll get you some tea, or would you rather have brandy?

ELSIE: Nothing, thank you, ma'am, nothing, really. . . . I think I'd just like to go and sit in my kitchen for a minute, if you don't mind, madam.

JILL: Of course. I'll come with you, shall I? And then you can tell me about it quietly, and we'll see what we can do.

[Jill takes Elsie out through the kitchen arch.]

GROVES: Sorry to bother you at this hour, Sir, but——

JAMES: That's quite all right. (*To doctor.*) How is he, Barry?

DOCTOR: Well, he's alive.

JAMES: Is he going to pull through?

DOCTOR: People always may pull through until they're actually dead.

JAMES: Bad as that?

DOCTOR: It's a piece of very bad luck, really. Joe's got an abnormally thin skull. If it had been normal he might have got away with a fracture. As it is—— (*he shrugs.*)

JAMES: Does Elsie know?

DOCTOR: She knows he's in danger. No point in keeping that from her.

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

JAMES: Is there anything we can do, Barry? Specialists, or——

DOCTOR: No. I've had Haygood already, excellent man, specialist on head injuries. Came, stayed a quarter of an hour, agreed with me, and went away again. As I say, he may pull through. I've seen people survive as bad, and worse, but not often.

GROVES: Well, now, sir, if you wouldn't mind letting us take a look at the silhouettes of those cars, and then I'll have Elsie in and see if she can pick out anything that looks at all like it.

JAMES: Yes, of course, they're here in the desk.

[*He gets them.*]

GROVES: Of course, it was getting dark and it all happened pretty quick.

JAMES: What time was it?

GROVES: About six thirty, sir.

EDDIE: Elsie says it was a big car.

JAMES (*suddenly*): That's odd. I mean, what would a big car be doing along that road by the Pearces' cottage? It's a backwater.

EDDIE: You can get to Stapleton that way.

JAMES: I know, but it's a longer way round than the main road.

DOCTOR: Maybe somebody didn't know the district and got lost. After all, Friday night, you begin to get the traffic from London.

JAMES: But not along there.

GROVES: No, I see what you mean, Mr. Manning. But there it is, it did come down there, worst luck. Well, now, Eddie, would you go and see if your sister'd like to come and have a look at these? Because the longer we wait, the more difficult it's going to be.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

[*Exit Eddie to kitchen.*]

JAMES: What chance have you of tracing a car in a case like this?

GROVES: It depends on a lot of things, sir. If the chap that was driving knew he hit him, if he's a real hit and run bastard, he'll keep his mouth shut and if his passengers do the same, it's like looking for a needle in a haystack. The best chance is if he didn't know, and if we appeal to the public to help, he'll come forward. I've known that to happen.

JAMES (*indicating the photographs*): I doubt if these'll help you. I tried to pick out our own Austin from them and got it wrong.

GROVES: I doubt it too, sir, but we've got nothing else to start from but Elsie, and at least she may be able to give us a line on what general sort and size of thing it was.

[*Eddie returns with Elsie and Jill.*]

GROVES: Now, Elsie, I've got all these pictures of cars. What I want you to do is to look at them and try and pick out the one that's most like the one you saw.

[*Elsie goes over to the photographs and stares at them.*]

ELSIE: I ain't got my glasses with me, Eddie. I ain't got my glasses, see.

EDDIE: Well, just do your best, dear.

ELSIE: There's a lot that's rather like it; that one, and that, and that——

EDDIE: Humber Pullman, Humber Snipe, Sunbeam Ninety.

ELSIE: Or that one.

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

EDDIE (*snaps*): That's a Yank, a DeSoto, that isn't like the others, Elsie.

ELSIE: It was dark, see, Eddie, and——

EDDIE: I'm sorry.

ELSIE: I heard it coming and I looked out the window and the light was in my eyes and it was only as it passed I saw it, and it was going fast.

JAMES: Try to think if there's anything you remember about it, Elsie. The noise it made, was it loud or quiet?

ELSIE: I didn't notice, sir, it was just the noise a car makes coming.

JAMES: Did you get any idea of its colour?

ELSIE: No, sir. It was dark, see. I reckon maybe it was black or some dark colour.

JAMES: Nothing at all that you can remember?

ELSIE: No, sir. Not except the light. It was very bright, white, like, and it sort of swept across my face.

JAMES: As the thing came round the bend, you mean?

ELSIE: Yes, sir. It was a big car, not like—not like——(*she is close to tears*).

GROVES: That's all right then, that's been a real help, Elsie.

DOCTOR: Have you finished with her now, Sergeant?

GROVES: Just one other thing, Elsie. D'you reckon whoever was driving saw Joe? I mean, must have seen him, or might it be that he never saw him at all? Did he seem to swerve or anything?

ELSIE: He saw him.

GROVES: What makes you so sure?

ELSIE: I never saw whether he swerved or no, but he saw him, and he didn't care.

GROVES: All right then, Elsie, that's all, and thank you very much.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

DOCTOR: I'll see you home, give you something to make you sleep.

ELSIE: No, no, I want to go back to Joe. Please, take me back to Joe.

DOCTOR: All right, my dear.

ELSIE (*to Jill*): I'll try to come in the morning, madam.

JILL: Don't you worry about the morning. You just go back to Joe and stay with him till he gets better.

[*The doctor, Jill and Elsie go out through the front door.*]

EDDIE: All we can tell from that is that it was something over about fourteen horse. And I wouldn't trust that far.

GROVES: No, nor I.

JAMES: What can you do now?

GROVES: We can ask anyone who was driving along there about that time to come forward. Apart from that we can check with our chaps, A.A. scouts and people like that if they saw anything like it round about there.

EDDIE: Like what?

GROVES: Yes, that's the trouble. Well, goodnight, sir, and thanks very much. Come on, Eddie.

[*He goes to front door, followed by Eddie, meets Jill returning.*]

JILL: Goodnight, Sergeant.

GROVES: Goodnight, ma'am.

[*Sergeant exits.*]

JILL: I *am* sorry Eddie. Is there anything we can do?

EDDIE: There's nothing *you* can do, ma'am. It's up

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

to us now. Goodnight, ma'am. (*He goes. Jill closes the front door.*)

JILL (*thoughtfully*): Eddie is very determined, isn't he, for a country constable. Like a terrier. One has the feeling he'll never let go.

JAMES: Well, naturally he wants to find that car. So do I, if it comes to that.

JILL: Why you?

JAMES: Well, I just don't think people ought to get away with that sort of thing. What puzzles me is what a big car was doing down there. Where was it going?

JILL: I'm still not sure what really happened. What time did she say it was?

JAMES: About half past six.

[*Pause. Jill picks up the drinks tray.*]

JILL: Food in five minutes. All right?

JAMES: M'm. Shall I give you a hand?

JILL (*going*): No, I can manage.

[*Jill exits with tray. James takes a coin from his pocket and wanders to cabinet. In a moment Jill reappears.*]

JILL (*re-entering*): Where's my apron? (*Seeing coin.*) Oh—is that a new one?

JAMES: Yes. George the Fourth sovereign. I've been trying to get hold of one for ages.

JILL: Oh. Good. (*She turns to go.*)

JAMES (*quietly*): Jill. (*She stops.*) You know him better than I do. Just how unscrupulous a character is the Honbill?

JILL: Unscrupulous? What do you mean?

JAMES: Your party tonight. What time did Bill turn up?

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

JILL: Same time as everyone else. About seven.

JAMES: He wasn't early?

JILL: No, there were quite a few people here before he was. It must have been after seven. Why?

JAMES: Joe Pearce.

[Pause.]

JILL: You're . . . not serious?

JAMES: I don't know. Joe was knocked down about six-thirty. Imagine coming from Bule's place to here. You could come that way.

JILL: You could, but why should you? It would mean driving right round us. It's miles quicker along——

JAMES: I know. But at least there's a big car that *might* have been on that road.

JILL: Yes, but——

JAMES: Wait a minute. There was a long new scratch on the near side of Bill's Lagonda tonight. I noticed it as I came in. Elsie says that the car that hit Joe seemed to catch the bicycle. If that had happened to Bill's car, it's just the sort of mark you'd expect to find on it.

JILL: But that might have been done in hundreds of ways.

JAMES: Of course it might. It might also have been done that way.

JILL: Even so——

JAMES: Elsie said the light of the car seemed to go right across her face. Now normal headlights wouldn't. But Bill's car has a big spotlight, and the light from that would.

JILL: Look, Jim, are you seriously saying that you think it was Bill who knocked down Joe Pearce?

JAMES: Well, I must say it all tends to fit together rather uncomfortably.

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

JILL: But——

JAMES: But what?

JILL: Well, damn it, he's a friend of ours.

JAMES: Up to a point—but what's that got to do with it?

JILL: Oh, it all seems to me absolute nonsense. Elsie's place isn't five minutes away, and Bill didn't get here for another half-hour at least, and anyhow he'd never come that way. Phyllis Scott came in a big car. It might equally well have been her. His car had a scrape on it, but cars are always getting scrapes.

JAMES: I don't suggest that it proves anything, but—

JILL: And anyhow, if he had been on that road anywhere near that time, surely he would have said so, when we were talking about it?

JAMES: That's what I'm wondering. You see, you trust him. I don't.

JILL: Why? Because he pulled your leg?

JAMES: No. I just don't think he's much good, that's all.

JILL: Darling, what are you trying to do? You're not a policeman.

JAMES: No, but I am a J.P., and if I can I want to find that car.

JILL: I should have thought it was better to spend your time worrying about what's going to happen to Elsie and the kids if Joe dies.

JAMES: I think both things are important. Look, Jill, if Joe dies through somebody's criminal negligence and leaves that poor devil Elsie a widow and those three kids without a father, we can't just shrug our shoulders and leave it at that. For one thing, Elsie won't get a penny compensation out of anybody.

JILL: Is that really so, Jim?

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

JAMES: Yes. Drivers have to be insured against Third Party claims. From what Elsie says, she'd have a claim against the driver. No driver, no claim.
(Pause.)

JILL: All right, darling, what do you want to do about it? ●

[Pause.]

JAMES: I think I should ask him straight out.

JILL: If you do it'll mean the end of our friendship.

JAMES: Is friendship with Bill so important to you as all that?

JILL: As all what? After all, I'm down here most of the time by myself. There aren't many people that I like. Bill happens to be one of them. In a city you can pick and choose from a wide field, but in the country you have to settle for those who inhabit the same half acre as you do.

JAMES: So Bill does matter.

JILL: Well, you can't expect me to be very pleased if we can't know him any more, simply because you've got this ridiculous suspicion about him.

[Pause.]

JAMES: All right. How about this? I'll be perfectly satisfied if I can find out where Bill was at the time this happened.

JILL: Oh, well, if that's all you want to know, he was at the Dawsons. I know, because he told me at the time he'd come on from there.

JAMES: But why on earth didn't you say so before?

JILL: I'd forgotten until you asked me. Anyhow, what difference does it make?

JAMES: Simply that if he was coming here from the

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

Dawsons, it would be absurd to go along Tarrant's Lane. And, anyhow, presumably he was with them when it happened.

JILL: Fine, so now you know what you want to, and we can all relax. (*Pause.*) I think I'll go over to Elsie's, and see if there's anything I can do for her and the children.

JAMES: Good idea.

[*Pause.*]

JILL: Come on, let's eat.

[*She goes out. James sits for a moment, thinking, then goes to the telephone and dials.*]

JAMES: Hello, can I speak to Mr. Dawson, please. . . . Away? When did he leave? . . . A *week* ago? Are you sure. . . .

[*James slowly replaces receiver as the curtain falls.*]

Scene 2

The Same. The following Sunday afternoon.

James is seated at the table, examining coins. Presently he gets up, picks up the Sunday paper from the sofa and glances at the clock. As he sits on the sofa, the clock strikes three.

Bule enters through the French windows.

BULE: Right on time, I think.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

JAMES (*rising at once*): You came by the orchard?

BULE: Instructions were carried out to the letter. But why all the hush-hush? You sounded positively conspiratorial on the blower. "Come Sunday at three. Come the back way." Why the back way?

JAMES: I didn't want you to run into Jill till we'd talked.

BULE: Ah. (*He pauses.*) And just what are we going to talk about?

JAMES (*bluntly*): Look, Bill, was it you who bowled over Joe Pearce?

BULE: No, it wasn't I. Was it you?

JAMES: No.

BULE: Then it was some third party. That's the answer, James. As Holmes used to say, eliminate all the other possibilities and the one that remains, however improbable, must be correct.

JAMES: All right, then. I'm sorry, but I'll have to ask you a question. You don't have to answer if you don't want to, but it would help me if you would.

BULE: Help you—in what way?

JAMES: I've been worrying about this since Friday night. I told myself that it was none of my business. But it is. It's everyone's business. If you will answer me it will set my mind at rest.

BULE: I doubt that, but fire ahead.

JAMES: Joe Pearce was knocked down at half past six on Friday. Where were you then?

BULE (*reflectively*): Half past six on Friday. Surely I was here at your party.

JAMES: No, you didn't get here until after seven. Jill says you told her that you'd come on from the Dawsons.

BULE: Well, if I told Jill that I'd come from the Dawsons, then I'd come from the Dawsons. I'm a truthful type, really.

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

JAMES: You can't have. The Dawsons are away.

BULE (*slowly*): Then I got it wrong. Or Jill got what I said wrong. Or you got what Jill said I said wrong. or something. Where is Madam, by the way?

JAMES: She's gone over to Elsie's. You admit that you weren't at the Dawsons?

BULE: I can't very well do that if Jill says I was, can I? I mean to say, surely, James, this is simply a Manning family dispute. Jill says I was at the Dawsons and you say I wasn't. You must fight it out between you.

JAMES: Never mind what we say. Where do you say you were?

BULE: I'll give you a clue, James. Wherever I was, I was minding my own business.

JAMES: In other words, you lied to Jill and you refuse to tell me the truth.

BULE: If you like. Does that—er—set your mind at rest?

JAMES: No, it doesn't. Look, Bill, Joe Pearce was knocked down by a big car driving on a spotlight, in a place where through traffic has no reason to go, but where a local driver might. You have a big car. You often drive on your spotlight. You might conceivably use that way in coming to our place. You had a fresh scrape on your car on Friday night that might have been caused by a bicycle's handlebars. I don't suggest that any of this proves anything. In fact, you've only got to prove that at half past six you were somewhere else and the whole thing's settled.

[*Pause.*]

BULE: But supposing I was somewhere else but just preferred not to prove it to you, James?

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

JAMES: Then you can't complain if other people suspect you.

BULE: I don't, my dear chap. I don't mind in the least.

JAMES: Or if the police ask you the same question?

BULE: Ah, I thought we should get around to the police. In fact, if I don't explain my moves to you, you'll go to them and say you suspect me.

JAMES: I shall.

BULE (*reflectively*): The trouble about being a good citizen is that it sometimes lands you in making an abject ass of yourself.

JAMES: I'm prepared to risk that.

BULE: I'll bet you are. I wonder why you're so anxious to prove that I did it. After all, we may not like one another much, but it wouldn't give me any particular fun to put you in a mess.

JAMES: I don't particularly want to prove that you did it. But I want to know who did, and having got this idea into my head, I must get it settled one way or the other.

BULE: Yes, I can see all that, but it isn't quite the whole story, is it, James?

JAMES: I told you how I felt about this. If I can find the driver of that car I shall do so, whoever it is. If it wasn't you, prove it and I'll apologise.

BULE (*slowly, after a moment*): Well, will this do? For reasons which are neither here nor there, I don't want to describe my movements at that time. But I give you my word of honour that I did not drive my car or any other car along Tarrant's Lane on Friday night, and I did not knock down Joe Pearce. Does that satisfy you?

JAMES: No, it doesn't.

BULE: Why not?

JAMES: Partly because I've heard you say a dozen

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times the truth doesn't interest you, and that there is absolutely no reason for telling it if it's inconvenient.

BULE (*crossly*): Really, James, you are an ass.

JAMES: And partly because there's no real reason to ask me to rely on your word when you can prove it quite easily. I'm not interested in your private life. I don't care in the least what you were doing or where you were. But I'm not prepared just to be told you'd rather not say, when you've already tried to set up a false alibi about it through Jill.

[*Pause.*]

BULE: All right. I've done my best but the good citizen defeats me. Supposing I was in Tarrant's Lane round about that time. What do you want me to do?

JAMES: You admit that you did knock Pearce down?

BULE: I don't admit anything of the kind. But supposing it's all just as you suppose. What then?

JAMES: Then obviously you go to the police.

BULE: And then?

JAMES: Then it's up to them. The only person who saw the accident was Pearce's wife.

BULE: Who'll say I was doing ninety miles an hour.

JAMES: Well, it was a bad show not stopping if you knew you'd hit him. The police don't like hit and run. And if he dies. . . .

BULE: They run me for manslaughter.

JAMES: Possibly.

BULE: And I go to jail.

JAMES: Possibly.

BULE: Really, you know, James—but really, it won't do.

JAMES: What do you mean?

BULE: Well, think. Joe Pearce is killed. His wife is

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

widowed, his children are orphans. Haven't enough people been made miserable by one bit of bad luck already, without wrecking somebody else's life by sending them to jail?

JAMES: Are you going to the police, or shall I?

BULE (*slowly*): James, you don't think about these things, that's your trouble. Those really are the alternatives?

JAMES: Yes.

BULE (*sighs*): Old sea-green incorruptible. How Galsworthy would have loved you. (*Smiles suddenly.*) All right, James, I'll go and own up. Tomorrow morning. And then the whole school won't have to stay in.

JAMES: Damn the whole business. Whatever happened, Bill? Did you know you'd hit him?

BULE: Of course not.

JAMES: Did you see him?

BULE: Yes, for a fraction of a second but he was well clear of the wings by then. I knew it had been fairly close, but that was all. I think he must have wobbled into the back of the car.

JAMES: Yes, the scratch was on the back door. You just touched his handlebars and that chucked him and the bike into the road. Barry said that if he'd had an ordinary skull he'd have been all right.

BULE (*wearily*): Yes, it was all very unfortunate. Who had I better go and see?

JAMES: Sergeant Groves, I should think. And take your solicitor with you.

BULE: Yes. That's an idea.

[*Noise of Jill's car driving up at the front door.*]

BULE: Madam?

JAMES: Yes.

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BULE: Look, if I were you, James, I wouldn't say anything about this to Madam. Not just yet.

JAMES: Because for once you don't show up in the best possible light?

BULE: I was afraid you'd say that. Well, well, at any rate now your mind will be at rest and you'll be able to sleep soundly.

JAMES: I'm sure it's the right thing to do, you know.

BULE: And I'm equally sure it's the wrong thing to do. However, I don't doubt we shall see.

[*He goes out through the French windows. In a moment Jill enters through the front door.*]

JILL: Phew! I need a cup of hot, strong tea rather quickly. (*Throws herself on to the sofa.*) Elsie's over at the hospital. I've been playing bears with the kids till I'm black and blue. I was quite a success—considering I've had no experience with children. They don't know about Joe. Have you heard any more?

JAMES (*shortly*): No. I'll put a kettle on. (*He goes out to the kitchen.*)

[*Pause.*]

JILL: Jim.

JAMES (*off*): Yes? (*He returns.*) Yes?

JILL: I've been thinking. About Joe. It's the holiday weekend and there are always dozens of day trippers about. It was more than likely one of them. Don't you think?

JAMES: No, I don't.

JILL: That's because you've got a bee in your bonnet about Bill. I was talking to Doris Elcott yesterday and she says——

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

JAMES: Look, darling, you're not going to like this, but I can't help it. I was right about Bill.

JILL: Right? Over what?

JAMES: It *was* Bill who knocked down Joe Pearce.

[*A moment—then:*]

JILL (*breathlessly*): But how could it have been? If he was coming here from the Dawsons—

JAMES: He didn't come from the Dawsons. I checked up and they were away. He told you that just to make an alibi. He admits it.

JILL (*slowly*): He admits that he knocked down Joe Pearce?

JAMES: Yes. I called him over just now and asked him flat. Oh, he denied it at first but I nailed him on the fact that he couldn't say where he was at the time. Apparently he didn't know that he'd actually hit Joe, but he admits that he saw him and that he knew it had been a near thing. So that's that.

[*Pause—then*]

JILL: Well, well, well. What now?

JAMES: He's going to the police. I've advised him to take his solicitor.

JILL: I should have thought Bill would have favoured keeping his mouth shut.

JAMES: He did, but I told him that if he didn't tell the police, I would.

JILL: Do you realise what will happen? They'll—

JAMES: They'll probably run him in for dangerous driving. If Joe Pearce dies, they may charge him with manslaughter, and if the charge is proved, he may go to jail. Yes, I do realise it, and though you probably won't believe me, I don't particularly like

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

it. But it isn't a question of what I like or what you like. It's a matter of common justice.

JILL: But good God, Jim, the thing was an accident. You could tell from what he says that it was.

JAMES: All right. If he wasn't to blame, I don't doubt that he'll get away with it.

JILL: Don't you ever make mistakes?

JAMES: All the time. And pay for them.

JILL (*after a moment*): Jim, darling, I'm going to ask you something, something you're going to find it difficult to do. I think it's worth asking because I know you're a generous person.

JAMES: What's that?

JILL (*slowly*): I'm going to ask you to ring Bill up and ask him to come back. When he comes, I want you to tell him that you won't force him to go to the police, but just leave him to decide for himself. I don't want it to be you who makes him. See?

JAMES: You could do that with some people, but with the Honbill it's hopeless. He wouldn't think about what was the right thing to do, or about Elsie and the kids, or about anything but what was convenient for him.

JILL: You won't do that for me?

JAMES: I'm sorry, darling. Not even for you.

JILL: But don't you see—

[*The telephone rings. James picks up the receiver.*]

JAMES: Hello? (*Gravely.*) Yes, very. How's his wife? I see. . . . Well, thanks very much for ringing, Barry. Goodbye.

[*He hangs up and turns to face Jill.*]

JILL (*very still*): Joe?

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

JAMES (*slowly*): Yes. He's dead. . . . (*Pause.*) Well, that rather settles it, darling, doesn't it?

JILL (*quietly*): Settles what?

JAMES: You can't play around with the truth when a man's been killed.

[*Jill laughs suddenly, a laugh with no laughter in it.*]

JILL: No. We must have the truth. You like the truth don't you, Jim? Well, here it is, if you're so keen on it. I was in Bill's car when it hit Joe. Or Joe's bicycle, or whatever it was.

JAMES (*stupidly*): You were in it?

JILL: Yes. And what's more, I was driving it!

Curtain

ACT TWO

Scene I

The same.

A few minutes later. Jill is in the same position as at the end of Act I. James is at the telephone.

JAMES (*at phone*): I don't doubt that you think so, but as it happens I don't. I prefer to know the truth, however ugly. . . . We won't argue about it. The point is, I think you'd better come back here. . . . Yes, now. And hurry.

[*James hangs up, turns to Jill.*]

He's coming. Go on, please.

JILL (*pleading*): Do I have to?

JAMES: It's not a question of having to. Surely I'm entitled—

JILL (*distracted*): Yes, darling, of course you're entitled. It's just that—once you start something like this—it's like taking the first stone away from a breakwater.

JAMES: I'm waiting, Jillie.

[*Pause.*]

JILL (*at length*): Well, on Friday evening Bill came over about five to help me get ready for the party. When I came to look I wasn't sure that we'd got enough gin. You remember, you were going to bring a couple more bottles down with you from town, and I'd been counting on them. Then you phoned to say you wouldn't be here in time, and that meant the gin wouldn't be here in time either. So we decided we'd better go and get some. We went

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

over to that pub near Levening. While we were there we had a drink and sat and talked.

JAMES: Were you tight?

JILL: No, of course we weren't.

JAMES: How many drinks did you have?

JILL: Oh, about two, I think.

JAMES: Yes, but how many drinks did you really have, Jill?

JILL: Well, as a matter of fact, I think it was three. Anyhow, we certainly weren't drunk. But Bill suddenly looked at his watch and found it was quarter past six. As these people were coming at seven and we hadn't finished getting ready, we had to bolt back pretty quickly. I asked him if I could drive and he let me. Well, anyhow, we were coming along Tarrant's Lane. I wasn't going very fast. You can't—it's too narrow. I never saw Joe at all, first or last. All that happened was that Bill suddenly said "Whoops, that put the wind up him" and I said, "What?" And he said, "Bloke with a bicycle—nearly came out right under your wheels." And that was all.

JAMES: Didn't either of you look back?

JILL: I think Bill did just glance back. It was pretty dark. I never thought any more about it until you said it happened at half past six.

JAMES: Why on earth didn't you tell me then?

JILL: I didn't want you to know I'd been out with Bill.

JAMES: Why not? Hell, there's no harm in going out to buy gin.

JILL: I thought you'd be cross and be sure it was my fault.

JAMES: What did you do when you realised what had happened?

JILL: I rang up Bill. He said he thought it couldn't

have been us and we agreed that we'd better keep quiet.

JAMES: Was that when he decided to say that he'd been at the Dawsons?

JILL: No, that was just me. He never said he had. I just told you that because then I thought you might stop suspecting him. . . . The kettle's boiling.

[*Goes out to kitchen. James goes to French windows, looks out, waiting for Bule. Jill returns with tea tray.*]

JILL (*setting it down*): There's no cake, do you think it'll matter. I meant to order a fresh one yesterday but with all this on my mind. . . . (*Pause.*)

JAMES (*quietly*): Jill, how often have you been going out with Bule?

JILL: Quite a bit.

JAMES: How much is there to it?

JILL: What do you mean?

JAMES: Are you having an affair with him, Jillie?

JILL: Darling, of course not. It—it isn't like that at all. It's just that I've been a bit bored and—and have been making an ass of myself, and—kicking up my heels rather. You see, I've been here by myself and—

JAMES: And that's all there is to it?

JILL: Of course. You believe that, Jim?

JAMES: Oh, yes. I didn't really think that—that there could be anything else. But I had to ask you because otherwise I shouldn't know where I was. Well, there's one thing, Bule's certainly got the laugh on me over this.

JILL: I don't think he's doing much laughing. Anyhow, you were dead right, weren't you?

JAMES: How?

JILL: About its being Bill's car. All you were wrong

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

about was who was driving it, and that you couldn't know.

JAMES: Yes. It was a nice piece of observation and deduction and it's given me great satisfaction.

JILL: I'm most desperately sorry to have let you in for this.

JAMES: That's all right. The thing we've got to decide now is what to do about it. (*She goes on her knees beside him.*)

JILL: Think for me, Jim. You've always had to think for me. I'm a useless person. I'll do whatever you say.

[*The front door bell rings.*]

JAMES: There he is. Come on.

[*Jill rises. James goes to front door, opens it. Bule enters.*]

BULE: Hello again, James. I gather Madam hasn't been able to keep her big mouth shut.

JAMES: I should have liked it better if she had opened it a bit sooner. As it is I'm not sure whether I owe you an apology or you owe me one.

JILL (*in a low voice*): The only person who owes anybody an apology is me. He's dead, Bill. Joe's dead.

BULE: Oh.

JAMES: I've been thinking it over. There's a chance that you might get away with it as an unavoidable accident.

BULE: Well, I've been thinking it over, too, James, and I can't say I'm too optimistic, particularly now the lad's pegged out. Wherefore, I can't help feeling we were in a stronger position when you and I parted this afternoon than we are now.

JAMES: How's that?

BULE: Well, the idea then was that Bule goes to the police and makes a clean breast of it. . . . "Sergeant, I cannot tell a lie, I did chop down Joe Pearce" or words to that effect. Bule then takes the rap and goes up the river, or else he's acquitted without a stain on his character. This didn't strike me as attractive, but there was at least some grain of satisfaction in it for Judge Manning. As it is, there doesn't seem to be anything in it for anybody. At least, James, I suppose being a decent citizen doesn't include sending your wife to jail.

JILL: Why not?

BULE: Well, not being a decent citizen I'm hardly qualified to answer—

JAMES (*snaps*): Then don't.

BULE: However, speaking from my modest perch in the treetops, where for some forty years I've looked down upon suffering humanity, I'd say if the honourable feller is forced to choose between two duties—one to his spouse and t'other to society—society's had it. Right, James?

[*No answer.*]

Which only goes to prove how much simpler life is if you have no sense of duty whatever.

JILL: Bill, don't. This is serious.

BULE: No, it isn't. The solution is obvious.

JAMES: What solution?

BULE: Bule takes the rap.

JAMES: Don't talk bunkum.

BULE (*indignantly*): Bunkum? What do you mean, bunkum? It's what you'd do, isn't it, James? What any decent man would do. Can't we all be Boy Scouts or have you bought the monopoly?

JAMES: Look, if you have anything serious to

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

suggest, let's have it. Just don't waste time playing the fool.

BULE: I'm not playing the fool. I'm perfectly serious. I'll say it was me. Or is it "I"?

JILL: Don't be an ass.

JAMES: You know perfectly well that's out of the question.

BULE: The trouble with you, James, is that so many things are out of the question. Here we are with three possibilities. The first is that I should say I did it. You say that's out of the question. The second is that we should all keep our mouths shut. You've already told me that's out of the question. The third is that Jill shall risk going to jail. And that seems to me to be—er—out of the question.

JILL: Why? If it was anyone's fault, it was mine.

BULE: Yes, but I shouldn't like it and neither would James. And neither would you, my dear. Believe me, what I'm proposing is purely selfish. I don't really want to be a martyr. It isn't my game. But I should dislike even more to see—

JAMES: Oh, for God's sake, shut up.

JILL: Surely it's all perfectly simple. We get hold of a good lawyer tomorrow morning. We decide with him just how we're going to put it and then we go along to the police. After that, it's up to them. If I get away with it, all right, I get away with it. If I don't—that's too bad.

BULE: My dear girl, I must say you're very frustrating. My one chance to play a straight bat and you knock down the wicket.

JAMES: You know perfectly well I can't take you up on that, otherwise you'd never have suggested it.

BULE: Take me up on what, James?

JAMES: The idea of saying that you were driving.

BULE: You're quite wrong as it happens. I should

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be slightly surprised if you did, but no more than that. You see, I don't understand good citizens. They're a closed book to me—like radio sets. They may do almost anything.

JAMES: You've got me in a corner.

BULE: What can I say, James? I haven't got you in any corner. You've got yourself there. You want to be a chap who loves his wife and is prepared to say: "To hell with Joe Pearce and everybody but her." But you also want to make it quite clear that you're a socially-minded citizen with a feeling for justice, who thoroughly disapproves of lying and subterfuge.

JAMES: Both those things happen to be true.

BULE: I know. That's your bad luck. For me there's no problem. I don't feel strongly about Justice or Fairness or any of the other abstractions. I don't think life is a just or fair business and I don't see much point in swimming against the tide. However, I intensely dislike inconvenience and discomfort. So my sole reaction to this mess is how to get out of it as conveniently and pleasantly as possible.

JILL: But it can't *be* like that!

BULE: Madam, on the other hand, is in the opposite corner. For some reason that's shrouded in mystery, she simply can't wait to put herself behind bars.

JILL: It's just that—that I——

BULE: Let's say it's just that you're currently rather confused, dear. So there we are, Squire. Three babes in the wood, in search of salvation. Taking it by and large, and all things considered, I must say a discreet silence seems the most sensible thing to me. However, I'll keep quiet, or go to the police, or give evidence, true or false, or any dam' thing that I'm told. You're the boss on the moral front. It's for you to decide—for the three of us.

[*Pause.*]

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

JAMES: All right, then, we keep quiet. And I wish us all joy of it.

JILL: As it happens, it isn't for Jim to decide. It's for me. And I'm not having that.

BULE: Oh, *really!*

JILL (*to James*): You know you won't like that! You know it!

BULE: Of course he won't. But he'd like it a whole lot better than the other thing.

JILL: You'd never forgive me if I did that to you.

JAMES (*irritably*): Don't be silly, Jill. There's no question of forgiving or not forgiving.

JILL: I won't do it.

JAMES: It's the only thing we *can* do.

JILL: No, Jim! No!

JAMES: Well, good God, isn't this just what you were asking for in the first place?

JILL: Yes, but only because Bill had said it was him. I never wanted it for myself!

JAMES: All right, then. You're the one who wants to tell the truth and I'm the one who insists on lying. Does that fix it for you?

BULE: Gently, Squire. Moderate the voice. Otherwise whether we actually tell other people about it or not will be purely academic.

JILL: I don't like it. I—I don't want it like this.

[*Turns suddenly and runs upstairs and off.*]

BULE: The social conscience seems to be infectious—or is it contagious? Now, James, if you'll forgive my saying so, a certain amount of quick thinking has got to be done.

JAMES: What about?

BULE: Well, if you could cotton on to the fact that it was my car that hit Joe, so could somebody else.

Gradually, if not with your Holmesian speed. So we'd better get that possibility covered. What put you on to it in the first place?

JAMES: The scratch, and its being at the right height.

BULE: That's all right. I've painted it out, so nobody saw it except ourselves and my chauffeur, and I've sacked him anyway. What else?

JAMES: The spotlight. From what Elsie said, it sounded as if the car was being driven on one, and I noticed you have one on yours.

BULE: Yes, it's a long shot, though, isn't it?

JAMES: They're all long shots but they add up.

BULE: The trouble is, if I sell the car, it's as good as a signed confession. I'm stuck with the damn thing. Do you think Elsie would know it again if she saw it in the same conditions?

JAMES: She might. But, of course, there'd be nothing to prove that it was the same.

BULE: There never was anything to prove it, my dear chap. If only Jill hadn't tried to fix up a fake alibi, bless her, you'd never have nailed me. Jill's all right, of course, whatever happens. Apart from people in a pub fifteen miles away, nobody even knows she was with me that evening, let alone driving. What's needed is an alibi for me, or rather for the car.

JAMES: Is all this really necessary? The chances are——

BULE: The chances are it will never enter anyone's head, but it might. And if some keen-eyed type should suddenly turn up and ask me the questions you asked me tonight, I should prefer to know the answer, for all our sakes. At six o'clock, I was in that pub. At quarter to seven, I was at home. Where was I in the meantime, James? Why is it quite impossible that I should have been in Tarrant's Lane at six thirty?

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

JAMES: I don't care what you say to them. Does it matter?

BULE: Of course it does. Like Melbourne, I don't care what damn lie we tell as long as we all tell the same damn lie. And some good citizen has got to confirm it. (*Suddenly slaps his knee.*) I've got it. You.

JAMES: Me?

BULE: Yes. I knew I was going to your party and I sent everybody out. When I got back the place was empty. I went straight home from the pub, got there about six twenty, and came on to you, arriving just after seven. In fact, at the time that matters I was at home.

JAMES: But you said it had to be confirmed.

BULE: It is, James, it is. Because at just about six thirty you rang me up from town and spoke to me. At home.

JAMES: For God's sake!

BULE: It's formal confirmation in case we need it. You asked me to pick you up at the station later in the evening because you knew Jill would be busy with the party. Don't look so unco-operative, James. We criminal types must hang together.

[*The front door opens and Elsie enters. She walks and speaks slowly, dully, as if dazed.*]

ELSIE: Excuse me coming in this way, sir. I must have left the back door key at home. I've come straight from the hospital, see. (*Simply.*) He's gone, sir.

JAMES: Yes, I know, Elsie. I'm terribly sorry.

ELSIE: I thought maybe if I come to work, it might take my mind off it, like.

JAMES: But it's Sunday, Elsie.

ELSIE: Yes, sir.

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[*Jill comes slowly down the stairs.*]

ELSIE: Oh, madam, I was just saying I thought it might help if I come to work. If you don't mind, madam. Thinking about things, it makes them all seem sort of on top of you, somehow, if you know what I mean.

JILL: Yes, I do.

[*Bule takes out his wallet.*]

BULE: Look, Elsie, I expect you'll be needing one or two things, won't you, so I'd be awfully grateful if you'd let me——

ELSIE (*at once*): Oh, no, sir. Please. It's ever so good of you but it's not as if it was anything to do with you, is it?

BULE: The point is that I'd like to help and I can. So——

JAMES (*curtly*): Elsie is our responsibility. She works for us. We'll take care of her.

ELSIE (*to Bule*): It was very good of you, sir.

BULE: Well, if you change your mind, you know where I live.

ELSIE: Thank you, sir.

BULE: Yes, well——(*to James and Jill*) I'll see you later. (*He goes.*)

JAMES (*gently*): Look, Elsie, it's not Mr. Bule's place to do it, but he's quite right. You will be needing help, won't you?

ELSIE: I expect we'll manage, sir, thank you.

JILL: Yes, but how, Elsie?

ELSIE (*slowly*): Well, I shall get a widow's pension. I don't know how much. Mr. Barnes is finding out. And then mother's got hers. And then I thought if I could go out a bit more, madam, Mrs. Taylor wants

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

somebody, and that would be so as we could manage.
JAMES: Even then, it won't be too much for five of you nowadays.

ELSIE: Well, you see, sir, if I was to go to Mrs. Taylor afternoons. . . .

JILL: But how about the children?

ELSIE: They're not home until four, except baby, and she's all right with mother for little whiles.

JILL: Look Elsie, you can't do it all by yourself. You must let us—(*Elsie suddenly turns and steps to the French windows. She stands rigidly as the noise of a car disappearing in the distance is heard. As the noise dies away, her shoulders droop and her whole body relaxes. She turns back slowly into the room.*)

ELSIE (*awkwardly*): I'm sorry, madam, I——

JILL (*quietly*): Why did you do that, Elsie? Why did you go and look out?

ELSIE: To—to see it go by, madam. I missed it. If I didn't look it might go by again. That car might. And then I shouldn't see it.

JAMES: You mean the car that hit Joe?

ELSIE: Yes, sir.

JAMES: That was Mr. Bule's car just now, Elsie.

ELSIE (*apologetically*): Of course. I—I'm sorry, sir.

JAMES: You know, Elsie, the car that hit Joe probably won't ever come by again. There's no reason why it should.

ELSIE (*quietly, but with absolute conviction*): It will, sir. One day. Eddie reckons it was someone about here. He said you said it was.

JAMES: I told him I thought it might be.

ELSIE: Yes. Well, he says go on watching. Watch for the light, he says. I might not know the car, but I'd know the light again anywhere.

JILL: Do you very much want them to—to be caught, Elsie?

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ELSIE: Who, madam? Them that did it?

JILL: Yes.

ELSIE: Yes, madam. 'Course. They ought to be caught and punished proper, oughtn't they?

JILL: Jim, I——

JAMES (*quickly*): They might not even know it happened, Elsie. Quite often these things are pure accidents.

ELSIE (*stubbornly*): Eddie reckons they must have known.

JAMES: But he can't be sure.

ELSIE (*solemnly*): No, of course he can't be sure. But he says to go on watching. Find the car with the light, he says, and you'll find them.

JAMES: Yes, well, I'm sure Eddie and Sergeant Groves will look after that side of it. Meanwhile, there's the question of you and the children.

JILL: Yes, you must let us help, Elsie.

ELSIE: You mean come more often to you, madam?

JILL: If you like. But, anyhow, you must have enough to live on and we'd like to see to it.

JAMES: What we mean is that we don't want you to be worried about money, and we should like to arrange for you to have what you need.

ELSIE: It's very kind of you, Mr. Manning, but I shouldn't wish that.

JAMES: Why not?

ELSIE: Well, you and Mrs. Manning's always been very good, sir. It isn't right for you to give me money. It's them that did it that ought to pay. (*Pause.*) I—I think perhaps I will go home, after all.

JAMES: Yes, of course. I'll drive you back.

ELSIE: I—I'd rather be alone, sir. If you don't mind. . . .

[*She turns and goes. A moment's silence. Then:*]

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

JILL: Jim. I don't think I can take it.

JAMES: What exactly can't you take?

JILL (*jerkily*): Elsie and the kids. And her going to the window every time a car goes by. She doesn't care about our money. There's only one thing that interests her. I don't blame her. I should feel the same in her place. I *can't* go on being all smiles and having her say how good and kind I am, when if she knew she'd hate my guts and like to see me dead.

JAMES: The argument was that nothing we could do would bring Joe to life again and going to the police would only hurt you without helping her. I've accepted that. Now it's accepted we must stick to it.

JILL: But *she* doesn't see it like that. And you don't really believe it. You only agreed to it because it was me and I was your wife and you felt you had to protect me. Bill believes it all right, that's the way he is. But it isn't right for you and you know it. For God's sake, let me go to the police and tell them the truth.

JAMES: We talked that out and decided against it.

JILL (*desperately*): But, Jim, don't you see, I'm in a much bigger mess than you think. I haven't got anybody. Don't you see?

JAMES (*slowly*): Haven't you got me?

JILL: No. I'm not on the level with you or Elsie or the police, or even Bill. I'm just wangling around and terrified that somebody is going to find out some of the dirt.

[*He stares at her.*]

JAMES: Are you trying to tell me that you *are* having an affair with Bule?

JILL: Of course! Of course! Of course!

[*Pause. Then:*]

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JAMES (*quietly*): I hadn't considered that.

JILL: Of course you hadn't. You asked me and I said "no", and you believed me. Surely you know by now that I always lie to get myself out of a jam?

[*Pause.*]

JAMES: How long?

JILL: About three months.

JAMES: Pretty nearly ever since we've known him.

JILL: Yes.

JAMES: Are you in love with him, Jill?

JILL: No, of course not. It—it was the purest nonsense. Just making a fool of myself because I was bored and—and cross with you.

JAMES: Why were you cross with me?

JILL: For not seeing I was bored, I suppose. Or not doing anything about it.

JAMES: I never knew you were as bored as that.

JILL: How could you, you were away all day. I'm just a useless idle woman. I've got no children. What was there for me to do but make a fool of myself?

JAMES: There was the house.

JILL: I'm no good at that. That's why I can't keep any servants. They know I'm no good and they despise me for it. So do I—but somehow that doesn't make any difference.

JAMES: All right, there's the garden. There was plenty to do there and you just dropped it.

JILL: I know, I know. I've let you down about that and I knew you thought so. But you don't know what it's like to be here all day with nobody to talk to but Elsie, and—and then when you came back to find I'd forgotten about the—the bloody peaches, or something, and that you were cross with me. There's never been a time for ages when you weren't

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

cross with me or disapproving inside, or disappointed and thinking I ought to do better.

JAMES: But why didn't you tell me all this?

JILL: How could I, I—

JAMES: You knew I wanted you to be happy. Why didn't you just tell me you weren't?

JILL (*helplessly*): I was afraid you'd be hurt and—and hate me. I knew you liked it here and I—I thought I ought to be able to make it work for you.

JAMES: Well, kicking up your heels with Bill Bule wasn't likely to make it work for me much, was it?

JILL: Of course not. But I never meant that to happen.

JAMES: Then why did it?

JILL (*slowly*): Well, I liked him. It was fun to be with him and just talk nonsense and laugh and not be disapproved of.

JAMES: Is he in love with you?

JILL: I shouldn't think so.

JAMES: If I divorced you would he marry you?

JILL: I don't think Bill Bule would ever marry anybody.

JAMES: There must be some straightforward explanation for this. What is it?

JILL: Oh, Jim darling, you want everything so clear-cut and tidy. Don't you see it can't always be like that? At least not for me. There's no simple answer. If I say I suppose I do love him in a way you'll think I mean something more serious than I do. And if I say "no, I don't love him at all" you won't believe me. I—I don't know what you want from me.

JAMES: The truth.

JILL: Yes, but the truth isn't just one thing. It's a—a sort of jumble of things.

[*Pause.*]

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

JAMES: Was it the child dying?

JILL: That was one of them. I felt I'd let you down over that. I still do.

JAMES: But that's absurd—

JILL: No. It was one more thing I could do for you that I didn't do properly. But it wasn't just that.

JAMES: Would it have helped if you'd had another baby?

JILL: It might have.

JAMES: Or is it my fault?

JILL: Your fault?

JAMES (*slowly*): I can see that Bill's attractive. . . .

JILL: It's not that, Jim.

JAMES: Then what is it? What can he offer you that I can't?

JILL: Nothing, really.

JAMES: Oh God, Jillie, stop defending and be helpful. I'm trying to find out what this is all about.

JILL (*slowly*): Well, it's completely silly, but I'm not frightened of him and I am of you.

JAMES: Frightened? of me?

JILL: Of course, I always have been. There's a—a sort of pattern which I think of as having run all through our married life. It's of having been awful or—or inadequate in some way, having spent too much or forgotten something, or what have you, and knowing that I have and probably lying about it; and of your finding out and lecturing me about it, very gently but a bit disappointed with me; and saying that I was sorry, and your being very nice about it, but saying I must make an effort. It was always that I must make an effort. And you were always right, and I knew I ought to. But, darling, I'm a bad thing. I'm lazy and shiftless and I hate making efforts and I always said I would and knew I shouldn't. I can remember now what a triumphant feeling

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

it was sometimes when you decided it was you who ought to make an effort. But it wasn't really any good because I knew that if you decided that, you *would*, you'd really do it. And I knew that I shouldn't.

JAMES: What a ghastly prig you make me sound. Why on earth didn't you just tell me to go to hell?

JILL: Because you were *right*, don't you see. You weren't asking for anything that wasn't perfectly reasonable.

JAMES: And it's been like that ever since we were married?

JILL: I hope I haven't made it sound horrid. I know it's completely my fault, but you did ask. . . . What are you going to do about it?

[*Pause.*]

JAMES: Is it finished?

JILL: Utterly. I shan't see him again, ever.

JAMES: Then—let's start picking up the pieces, shall we?

[*Pause.*]

JILL: I think you're the kindest and most generous man I know.

JAMES: Good. So do I.

[*He smiles at her. She smiles back.*]

JILL: And now—may I go and tell Eddie about Joe?

[*He turns away.*]

JILL (*urgently*): Please, Jim. If it were anyone but me you'd be the first—

JAMES (*to her, simply*): But it *is* you, Jillie. And we've just decided that you're my wife.

Curtain

Scene 2

The same. A few weeks later. The stage is empty. A bell rings.

After a moment, James comes downstairs and goes to the front door. He opens it. Sergeant Groves stands there with Eddie.

GROVES: Evening, Mr. Manning. I wonder if you could spare us a couple of minutes.

JAMES: By all means. Come in. Drink, Sergeant? Eddie?

EDDIE: No, sir. Not when I'm on duty, sir. Thank you.

JAMES: Is this an official visit?

GROVES (*embarrassed*): Well, sir, not really. It's just——

JAMES: What's the trouble?

GROVES: Well, Mr. Manning, it's like this. We've never found a trace of that car, the one that killed Joe, and the way we're going on we never shall and we all know it.

JAMES: Nobody's ever come forward?

GROVES: No, nobody has, neither the driver, nor nobody that saw any such car. It's a dead end.

JAMES: Well, it was always a pretty forlorn hope, wasn't it, Eddie?

EDDIE: Maybe it was, Mr. Manning, but I told you I was going to find that car and I'm going to, if it takes me the rest of my life.

JAMES: Yes, but how? After all, that car may be anywhere in England. It may belong to somebody who doesn't even know.

EDDIE (*quietly*): No, sir. There isn't anybody doesn't know if he travelled past there that night, even if

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

he didn't know he killed somebody. With all the broadcasting and appealing that's been done he'll know he's been asked to come forward. It's what I always reckoned. Whoever did it knows he did it and he's lying low.

JAMES: All right, supposing we accept that. If he goes on lying low, what can you do about it?

EDDIE (*slowly*): I've thought about this and thought about it, Mr. Manning. And I keep coming back to something you said right at the start—what was a big car doing down there at all? It's not the best way through from anywhere to anywhere else.

JAMES: It might have been somebody that didn't know the district and had taken a wrong turning.

EDDIE: It could be that, sir, I'll agree, but what you said was that it seemed to you most likely it was a local car down there, and I'm going to start by supposing it was. I know you feel like I do about this, sir, and want to get to the bottom of it, and I know you'll help us all you can.

JAMES: I don't quite see what you mean about helping you. Do you mean have I got any idea about what to do next?

GROVES: Well, not exactly, sir. It's like this. A few days ago, Eddie here got a tip. . . .

JAMES: I say, I'm sorry, Sergeant. Do sit down. Eddie. . . .

GROVES: Thank you, sir. (*They sit.*) Well, Eddie's been working on this tip, and now he's told me about it and I think perhaps we ought to inquire further.

JAMES: A tip? What sort of a tip?

GROVES: It's this, sir. (*He pulls a letter out of his pocket.*) It's addressed simply "P.C. Eddie Cater, Maidley, Bucks." (*He reads.*) "Have you found out where the Hon. Bule was at half past six when Joe Pearce was killed? If he says he was home it's a lie,

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cause he wasn't, but somewhere else. And ask him about a scratch on his car and how it got there and had to be painted out quick. This is true. Good luck."

[*He hands the letter to James, who studies it.*]

JAMES: One of those gallant affairs with no address and no signature, eh?

GROVES: Yes, sir.

JAMES: London postmark.

GROVES: That doesn't mean anything, sir. Anybody can post a letter in London. It must be somebody local, or that *had* been local, or how would he know about it?

JAMES: Yes. Not a very educated writing, but not disguised, I should say.

GROVES: That's what we thought, Mr. Manning. I reckoned a servant that had been at Mr. Bule's or something like that. Mr. Bule had a fair lot of changes lately. There was a maid and a chauffeur——

JAMES: Oh yes. Chap that he sacked for stealing.

GROVES: Did he? Well, that's the sort of chap it might be. Wouldn't come to us but would do this out of spite.

JAMES (*thoughtfully*): I should say it's probably the chauffeur. He'd know about the scratch on the car.

GROVES: So he would. Well, the proper place for a letter like that is in the fire usually, but Eddie felt—— well——

JAMES: That he ought to see if there was anything in it?

GROVES (*apologetically*): Well, we haven't anything else to go on, Mr. Manning.

JAMES: I don't see what else you could have done. If only in justice to Mr. Bule.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

EDDIE (*grimly*): That's what I thought, sir. If a chap's afraid to sign his name you can't take much notice of what he says. All the same, I thought I'd better follow it up just to make sure. So I did, and this is what came out of it.

[*Producing his note-book.*]

About the scratch. No doubt about that. There was a scratch and it's been painted out like the chap says. A long scratch on the door. No way of telling how long ago it was done, of course. Then about Mr. Bule's movements. We went over to see Mr. Bule this afternoon. Here's what he says. (*Referring to notebook.*) He says he was over at the Three Lions at Levening, the night of the accident, that he left there just after six and drove home, and was home by twenty-five past, and didn't go out again until near on seven when he came here.

JAMES: Well, he certainly came here because of the party that night. And certainly most of the people came about seven.

EDDIE: Yes, sir. Well now, Mr. Bule says he was home by 6.25 and this chap in the letter says he wasn't.

JAMES: Well?

EDDIE: Well, the next thing we did was to go over to the Three Lions and see if they remembered Mr. Bule being there. We just came from there now.

GROVES (*quickly*): Of course, it's not a question of doubting Mr. Bule's word, Mr. Manning, but after this in the letter—

JAMES: Of course, Sergeant.

EDDIE: Well, they do remember Mr. Bule being in because they know him. At least they're pretty sure it was that evening. It seems Mr. Bule was there, and he was with a lady. They didn't know her and can't recall what she looked like and they reckon, as far

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as they can remember, they did leave about six. Bought two bottles of gin.

JAMES (*after a moment*): In fact, they confirm what Mr. Bule said about leaving at six?

EDDIE: Yes, sir, they confirm that near enough.

JAMES: Well, if he left there at six he would certainly be home before half past.

EDDIE: Yes, sir, if he went straight home.

JAMES: Well, there's no reason to suppose that he didn't, is there?

EDDIE (*gently*): There's the lady, sir. Mr. Bule never said anything about her. Did he bring a lady here?

JAMES: Not as far as I know. But how does she come into it?

EDDIE: She could have proved what he said.

JAMES: But surely the people in the pub prove it anyway?

EDDIE: Not what time he got home, sir. But if the lady went home with Mr. Bule, she could prove it.

JAMES: But there's no reason to suppose she went home with him. They may just have been having a drink together and then he dropped her somewhere and——

EDDIE: That's just it, sir. If he went straight home, he would be there by half past. But if he took her somewhere and dropped her, then he might not have been. Like this chap says in the letter.

GROVES (*uneasily*): I don't know—I don't reckon—what do *you* say, Mr. Manning?

JAMES: What do *I* say? I don't quite follow you, Sergeant.

GROVES (*reluctantly*): Well, it's like this, Sir. Mr. Bule says you phoned him at his house from London that evening just about the time Joe was knocked down and killed. Is that right, sir? Did you phone Mr. Bule at six thirty?

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

[*The front door opens and Jill enters. She wears a gay cocktail dress and is apparently in high spirits.*]

JILL: The prodigal daughter returns. My, my, you all look very solemn and serious. What's afoot?

JAMES: Nothing, darling. We'll go into the other room.

JILL: No, no, I'll go. The atmosphere is positively pregnant with "women, keep out". This one's going to dip her head in the ice box and cool down. What a grilling day it's been, hasn't it, Sergeant?

GROVES: Yes, indeed, ma'am.

JILL: You aren't grilling my husband by any chance, are you?

GROVES (*laughing*): No, ma'am. Nothing like that. We shan't keep him a moment.

JILL: That's what they always say. I'd better pack your tooth brush and pyjamas, darling, just in case.

[*She goes upstairs.*]

GROVES (*pleasantly*): Madam seems in high spirits, sir.

JAMES: She's been to a party.

GROVES: Ah, that accounts for it. Though, come to think of it, she was in pretty good form earlier on today, wasn't she, Eddie? Nearly bumped into us driving out of Mr. Bule's this afternoon. Just as we were driving in. Thought it was Mr. Bule himself at first, until I recognised your Austin. And then, of course, I saw the madam. Well now, sir, about that telephone call, if you could confirm what Mr. Bule says, it would make it a whole lot easier all round. Can you confirm it, sir?

[*Pause—then:*]

JAMES (*in a dead voice*): Yes. That's quite right. I'd

forgotten. I phoned Mr. Bule at his house that evening from London just before half past six.

GROVES (*with a broad smile*): Well, there you are, Eddie. What did I tell you? Thank you, sir. That's just what we wanted to hear. Very sorry to trouble you but I wanted to satisfy Eddie here that what this fellow said in the letter was just spite. Somebody who doesn't like Mr. Bule most likely. The last thing we want to do is to have any suspicions of a gentleman like Mr. Bule, do we, Eddie?

EDDIE (*quietly*): 'Course not. But it's like you said, Mr. Manning, there hasn't got to be nobody you rule out 'til you're certain. Nobody. You are *sure* about the time of your call, sir?

JAMES (*flatly*): Yes. I'm sure.

[*Eddie turns slowly and goes out.*]

GROVES (*confidentially*): I'm sorry about this, Mr. Manning. I know Mr. Bule's a friend of yours and of course I didn't much like it, but—well, Eddie's worked very hard on this. Between ourselves, I wish he'd stop bothering his head about it. I never reckoned it was any good and he's spent time on it that could have been better used. But there it is, it's his brother-in-law, see, and he's very stubborn, Eddie is, when he gets an idea in his head. Very stubborn. Well, good-night, sir.

JAMES: Goodnight, Sergeant.

GROVES: And thank you for clearing the air, sir.

[*He goes. James is alone. After a moment Jill comes downstairs.*]

JILL: Sorry I barged in on you like that, darling. What did they want?

JAMES (*slowly*): They wanted me to confirm Bill's whereabouts the evening Joe Pearce was knocked

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

down. I'd agreed to say I phoned him from London, if you remember.

JILL: Yes, of course I remember. Well, you told them and now everything's all right, I suppose.

[*Jill helps herself to a drink.*]

JAMES (*slowly*): Have you anything to tell me, Jill?

JILL: No, the Lovells do was just the usual crowd. I think I drank too much. I hate women who get tight. Does it show?

JAMES: No.

JILL: Barry was at the Lovells. I've been talking to him about the Pearce business.

JAMES: Why?

JILL: Oh, he brought it up. I didn't. He asked me how Elsie was and said it was a damn shame. I agreed with him. We had quite a pow-wow. By the way, did you know Barry was House Surgeon at Guy's when Daddy was taking his Pre-Med?

JAMES: No.

JILL: Nor did I. The old boy was full of compliments. Said Daddy was the most brilliant student of his year and a whole lot more flim-flam. I said something about never really knowing the parent because he had to go and get himself killed trying to climb that ruddy mountain when I was an infant, and Barry suddenly went up in smoke. Said he wasn't trying to climb it. He climbed it. Apparently the rest of the party got stuck on the lower plateau, or whatever you call it, but Daddy went on alone to the summit. His heart snuffed out and there he died. But he'd got to the top. Did you know that? I didn't. Oh, well! I've been talking to Elsie too.

JAMES: What about?

JILL: Oh, I was being sweet to her. I always am, you know. She thinks I'm kind, and nice and rather

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wonderful. It's funny—I wanted to say, "And give the bathroom a special 'do' and anyhow I killed your husband," just to see her face. No, that's not true. I only just thought of it. But don't you think it's a nice idea?

JAMES: No.

JILL: But don't you really, darling? After all, it would be so easy. Supposing I did? Supposing I went and told Elsie and Eddie and everybody. Then they'd send me to prison and after that you'd like me again. That's what's wrong with us, you know. I say, I hope you're not taking any notice of this. I do seem to be remarkably tight. Sorry, partner.

JAMES (*carefully*): What else did you do today?

JILL: Oh, nothing wildly exciting. Just pattered about here, I think. Why?

JAMES (*after a moment*): I called you from town. There was no reply.

JILL: Oh, yes, I remember, I had my hair done. Do you like it?

JAMES (*suddenly, bluntly*): Look, I know you've been to Bule's, so you needn't go on.

JILL (*slowly*): When have I?

JAMES: This afternoon. As you drove out you nearly crashed into Eddie and Sergeant Groves going in. The next time you want to commit successful adultery I suggest you take a few driving lessons first. You might just get away with it.

JILL: Jim, it isn't a bit like you think! It isn't, really!

JAMES (*blazing*): What I think is that you were unfaithful to me, that you lied about it, that you promised it was all over and that within a few days you sneaked back to your lover when you thought I wasn't looking. Is that true or not?

JILL (*wearily*): Of course it is. That wasn't what I meant.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

JAMES: Then what did you mean?

JILL: Only that—no, it's no good—you wouldn't believe me.

JAMES: Why should I? Have you ever told me the truth? About anything? Think hard, I'm really interested.

JILL (*suddenly*): Take me away, Jim! For God's sake take me away! Don't you see that I'm in a mess here all round? It isn't Bill, it's the *Pearce* business. I can't even think about it unless I can get away somewhere and get some sense into things. Let's start again, somewhere—anywhere.

JAMES: How can we possibly start again? Don't you see that I haven't the faintest idea what sort of person you really are now?

JILL (*gradually*): I wanted to tell and you stopped me. I knew what it would do to us. You've hated yourself for lying—and hated me for turning you into a liar. Oh, you haven't said anything, but I know. You haven't . . . wanted me since, have you? (*Pause. Slowly.*) And you—you aren't there for me any more, either, Jim. Something's . . . gone. I don't know what, but—something. You—you aren't *you* any more. (*Pause.*) Bill . . . was still there, the same as always. Because he doesn't care—about lies and deceit and the rest of it. That's the way he is. It hasn't done anything to him. There has to be someone . . . somewhere. So I went to Bill. Do you believe me?

JAMES: I neither believe you nor disbelieve you. I just don't follow these vague metaphysical justifications for what after all is no more and no less than common or garden adultery. The plain hard fact is—he's your kind and I'm not. He's never done a day's work in his life and nor have you. He's never taken an inch of responsibility for anything and nor have

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you. Compared with him I've no doubt I seem pretty pompous and dull. Well, let's face it, by his standards I am. But I warn you of this. Bule wouldn't lift his little finger to keep you off the streets. He isn't interested in anything in the world but the Honourable William Stephen Fitz-Harding Bule, and if you think he is, you're deceiving yourself. Oh, he likes you fine. Why shouldn't he? He's got a good free mistress who can even pay for her share of the drinks. Well, I wish you joy of him. A man who comes to my house as my guest, poses as a friend of mine and under cover of this seduces my wife.

JILL: It was my fault!

JAMES: He knows that I've forgiven you and that we're trying to get together, yet he joins you in doing me dirt again the moment my back is turned!

JILL: Jim, this has gone so far that in justice to Bill, I must tell you something. I never did break it off with him as I promised.

JAMES: I repeat, have you *ever* told me the truth about *anything*?

JILL: I told you I loved you and that was true.

JAMES: I used to think you and I spoke the same language. We don't. It's taken a man falling off a bicycle to make it clear to me, but, by God, it's clear to me now!

JILL (*quietly*): Does that mean you want me to go?

JAMES: Yes, it does. It means exactly that.

[*Pause.*]

JILL (*slowly*): You've never known me, have you? Eleven years . . . and we've been alone together all the way.

Curtain

ACT THREE

Scene I

The same. After dinner, a few weeks later. The furniture has been rearranged, and gives now more the impression of a bachelor's home. Dr. Frewen is at the bookshelf, studying a volume. James enters down left with a box of cigars.

JAMES: Do you smoke these things, Barry?

DOCTOR: No, thank you.

JAMES: Have you read that one?

DOCTOR: Yes, Mary gave it to me for Christmas. I thought it a very bad book in a very good binding.

JAMES: I just got it to read during the night.

DOCTOR: Oh, that reminds me. (*Takes a small bottle from his pocket, hands it to James.*) A poor exchange for an excellent dinner, but they should do the trick.

JAMES (*studying bottle*): You know, I've never taken one of these before. The one thing I could always do was sleep.

DOCTOR: You will again—with those.

[*Elsie enters with coffee tray.*]

Capital dinner, Elsie. Ate far too much, of course. Do you always feed the brute like that?

ELSIE: We all got to keep our strength up, haven't we—so as we can go on. I always say, if your tummy's all right, the rest of you will take care of itself, won't it?

DOCTOR: You can have my job tomorrow, my dear. You're qualified.

ELSIE (*to James*): Will you have the wireless, sir?

JAMES: No. Not tonight. Black, Barry?

DOCTOR: Thanks. (*To Elsie.*) How's the baby?

ELSIE: Better, thank you, Doctor. (*Handing coffee.*)

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I was a bit worried, leaving her in the evenings, but it's only till madam comes home and then of course Mother's there, and Eddie looks in on his beat. Ever so good with the children, Eddie is. Policemen always are, aren't they?

JAMES: Thank you, Elsie.

ELSIE (*going*): Yes, sir.

JAMES: Don't bother with the dishes. I'll see to them later. You get on home.

ELSIE (*indignantly*): Leave you to wash up by yourself, sir? Whatever next?

[*Exit Elsie.*]

DOCTOR: Nice woman, that. Plenty of guts. She cook for you every night?

JAMES: Three times a week. Her mother takes care of the children and she's glad of the extra money. It works very well.

DOCTOR (*quietly*): "Till madam comes home."

[*Pause.*]

JAMES: Yes, well, how about a brandy?

DOCTOR: No, thank you.

JAMES: I think I will. (*Moves to drinks tray and helps himself.*)

[*Pause.*]

DOCTOR (*suddenly*): Jim, why don't you stop being an ostrich? Your wife did you dirt, you chucked her out. Fair enough. Let the tongues wag.

JAMES (*deliberately*): Look, Barry, Jill had a breakdown. She was ordered abroad by her doctor. You gave me your word.

DOCTOR: Yes, I did, didn't I? All right, if that's the way you want it.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

JAMES: I prefer not to wash my dirty linen in public.

DOCTOR: Oh, come, that's not the reason for all this flummery, and you know it. You're leaving the door open.

[*Pause.*]

JAMES (*slowly*): She's my wife, Barry.

DOCTOR: Well, is she, or isn't she? Six weeks ago you told her to go and she went. Since then she's been on the Continent with Bill Bule. That's hardly marriage as I understand it. Am I being very impertinent?

[*Pause.*]

JAMES: No.

[*Pause.*]

DOCTOR (*earnestly*): Look, Jim—this is none of my business, but what have you *done* about it since—except not sleep at night?

JAMES (*hesitating*): What should I have done?

DOCTOR: What do most husbands do when there's a crash? Talked to your solicitors?

JAMES: Well, no, I—

DOCTOR: Told your bank to stop her allowance?

JAMES: Not yet. You see—

DOCTOR: Told a cock and bull story to keep the locals quiet and stood holding the front door open for her to walk through it whenever she wants to?

[*Pause.*]

You've started a war, Jim, and you're trying to fight on both sides. It won't work.

[*Pause.*]

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

JAMES: I can't really believe it's serious. Not with Bule. It doesn't make any kind of sense.

DOCTOR: Why do you say that?

JAMES: I know Jillie.

DOCTOR: Are you sure?

JAMES: She happens to have been my wife for eleven years.

DOCTOR: My dear man, what's that got to do with it? (*Pause.*) She came to see me, you know.

JAMES (*surprised*): When?

DOCTOR: The day after you sacked her.

JAMES: You mean she was ill?

DOCTOR: Not physically. She asked me to recommend her a good psychiatrist.

JAMES: Why?

DOCTOR: She . . . wants to find herself. That's unusual, you know. Most people want only to escape from themselves. But Jill's like her father, as I remember him.

JAMES: Where did you send her?

DOCTOR: I didn't. She needed a shoulder to lean on. I offered her mine. What a pretty woman she is, isn't she? She looked most decorative, sitting there in my surgery, telling her troubles.

JAMES (*carefully*): Just . . . what did she tell you?

DOCTOR: I'm sorry. The consulting room is like the confessional—sacred. But if it's any help to you—(*deliberately*) she told me nothing that you don't know already.

[*There is a long pause as the two men look at each other. Then James turns away.*]

JAMES (*taut, tense*): My God, Barry, what's the right thing to do? What's *right*?

DOCTOR: For her? Or you? Or society?

JAMES: For all of them.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

DOCTOR: Yes, that's the trouble with people like you. Only God can be sure of getting things right for everybody—and even He, one imagines, must find it a problem at times. But you want to work it all out and produce a solution that would satisfy a Chartered Accountant. (*Pause.*) I understand Jill wanted to tell. You stopped her.

JAMES: What else could I do?

DOCTOR: What would you have done if it had been some other woman?

JAMES: It wasn't some other woman. It was my woman. What kind of a man would give his wife away? It would almost certainly mean a jail sentence. She couldn't possibly take it, a girl like Jill. Even Bule saw that.

DOCTOR: Are you sure it wasn't *you* that couldn't take it?

JAMES: All right. I couldn't take it. I'd do the same again.

[*Pause.*]

DOCTOR: Jill says your stopping her sent her back to Bule.

JAMES: I can't accept that, Barry. I'm sorry.

DOCTOR: I can. Good heavens, Jim, don't you see you destroyed the one thing that held you two together? Most men have only one really dependable quality for a woman to cling to. You had integrity. The salt of the earth type, as they say. (*Slowly.*) But if the salt hath lost its savour. . . . (*Pause.*) (*Rising.*) Well, I must be off. Someone may be needing a doctor. I have enjoyed my evening, thank you so much. Oh . . . (*pointing to pills on coffee table*) take a couple of those and get to bed early. Good-night, my dear fellow.

[*He exits.*]

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

[James stares after him. Elsie comes in, collects the coffee cups, puts them on the tray.]

ELSIE: I've done you a grapefruit for the morning, sir, (*picks up tray*) and there's a kipper in the larder, if you feel like fish for a change.

JAMES (*abstracted*): Oh. Right.

ELSIE: Will that be all, sir?

JAMES: Er—yes. Thanks, Elsie.

ELSIE: I'll say goodnight, then.

JAMES: Goodnight. . . . Oh—Elsie. Isn't it Maureen's birthday tomorrow? Here. (*Takes out a note.*) Put that in her ditty-box for me. (*Puts note on tray.*)

ELSIE (*overcome*): Five pounds! Oh, sir! You shouldn't. Whatever will Maureen do with all that money?

JAMES: A fiver is hardly a fortune.

ELSIE: Well, thank you ever so much, I'm sure, but—*five pounds*. People are wonderful. . . . (*She goes out with the coffee tray.*)

[James finishes his brandy, picks up the pills thoughtfully. He is about to go up to bed when he hears the noise of a powerful car approaching at speed. Suddenly the spotlight sweeps across the French windows. James goes to the French windows, throws them open, steps on to the terrace. He stands a moment looking out, then crosses quickly to the hall and throws open the front door, and goes out. The car's engine cuts out. It has obviously stopped outside the house. Bule is heard off.]

BULE (*off*): Oh, hello, Squire. Greetings from Granada.

JAMES (*off*): What are you doing here?

BULE (*off*): Look, can I come in for a second or will

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

you feel bound to chuck me through the nearest window?

JAMES (*off*): Come in.

[*Bule enters, followed by James.*]

JAMES: I thought you were still abroad.

BULE: We came back ten days ago. Look, I'm sorry to barge in on you like this but do you happen to have Madam?

JAMES (*quickly*): What's happened?

BULE: I—I just thought Jill might have been in touch with you, that's all. (*Looking about, glancing upstairs.*) She's not here, is she?

JAMES: No. Why?

BULE: Oh, nothing important. Sorry to have troubled you. (*Moves to go.*)

JAMES: If you've had a row or something, for God's sake tell me because——

BULE (*turns*): Not exactly a row, it's just that she was a bit upset and I thought——

JAMES (*flatly*): She's walked out on you.

[*Pause.*]

BULE: For the moment. I imagine she'll come back.

JAMES: Why did she walk out?

BULE: Really, James, I don't think there's any point in going into it. (*Moves to go.*)

JAMES: There's every point. (*Blocks his path.*)

BULE: All right. (*He comes down into the room.*) Jill stayed in my London shack while I went up north for a few days. We were going down to Cornwall this weekend and I found I'd made a double date and couldn't go.

JAMES: So after leaving her alone in London all the

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week you came back and were going straight off again?

BULE: Well, yes, that's what it comes to. It was a pure piece of forgetfulness and I realised she'd be disappointed. But she went rather surprisingly off the handle.

JAMES: What did she say?

BULE: Oh, you know the sort of thing women do say when they're in a flap. Wild talk.

JAMES: You mean she said she'd kill herself?

BULE: No, I don't think she did. She said she wished she were dead but it was all rather incoherent.

JAMES (*impatiently*): You must have understood something.

BULE: Well, one thing she kept saying was, "I wanted to and you wouldn't let me and now it'll never come right." What particular thing she wanted I've no idea. But it was apparently something I'd stopped her from doing. Coming back to you, I imagined. Seems I was wrong.

JAMES (*sharply*): Say that again.

BULE: Say what again?

JAMES: What she kept saying.

BULE: Well, I can't be sure of the words but it was something like "you wouldn't let me and now it will never come right." I tried to calm her down and then I went into the next room to telephone and when I came back she was gone. The doorman at the flats said he heard her tell the cab driver "Marylebone Station" so I thought she must be coming back here and I drove straight down. She's not at my place, she's not here. Where the devil is she?

JAMES (*slowly*): Unless she's put herself in the river, which I don't think she has, I think I know where she's gone.

BULE: Where?

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

JAMES: I think she's gone to Elsie's.

BULE: Oh.

JAMES: That was what you wouldn't let her do—only it wasn't you she was talking about, it was me.

BULE: I see. Yes, that never occurred to me. (*Pause.*)

Well, what now, general? You're the boss on the moral front. Let the men in the ranks know their orders.

[*Pause.*]

JAMES (*suddenly*): What time did she leave your place?

BULE: About eight.

JAMES: Eight. That means she was going for the eight-seventeen. It's supposed to get in at nine-twenty, but it never does. It's nine twenty-two now. Yes, we might just beat her to it. Come on.

[*James turns off the lights as he and Bule exit. Noise of car driving off. The spotlight sweeps across the window. Then the room is in darkness. Almost at once Jill appears in the French windows. She comes slowly, hesitantly into the dark room. She makes her way gradually across to the fireplace. As she leans on the mantelpiece Elsie enters from the kitchen. She is wearing her coat, obviously about to go home. She sees the French windows open, crosses and closes them. As she turns she sees Jill.*]

ELSIE (*starts violently*): Madam!

JILL (*quietly*): Hello, Elsie.

[*Moves to light switch, turns on light.*]

ELSIE: Oh, madam, what a turn you gave me. I—I didn't know you was here—

JILL: Yes . . . yes, I—I'm here . . . at last. And

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now that you're here . . . we can get it all over with. . . . (*Sits down suddenly.*)

ELSIE: Well, I was never so surprised to see anyone in all my life. Didn't even know you was in England, madam. Thought you was still abroad.

JILL: No . . . I . . . got back a few days ago.

ELSIE: I expect you feel ever so much better, don't you, for the change?

JILL: Soon. I'll feel better soon.

ELSIE: That's right. The master will be pleased you're back. I'll call him.

JILL (*rising quickly*): No, don't do that, I—— (*Sways, puts her hand to her head, sits down again.*)

ELSIE (*anxiously, moving to her*): You're not well, Madam.

JILL (*weakly*): I'm all right. It's just that I—I haven't eaten all day and I'm . . . rather tired.

ELSIE: Nothing to eat! Well, goodness, no wonder. I'll get you something right away.

JILL: No, don't go! I—I couldn't take anything. Really.

ELSIE: But, madam, you must eat——

JILL: No—I—I'm all right. Just give me a minute to—— (*trying to steady herself.*) Tell me . . . about the children. How are they?

ELSIE (*still anxious about Jill*): Baby had a nasty cough, but it's better, thank you, madam. She cried a lot, of course, and it's a job to quiet her. Joe was wonderful with her.

[*Jill's expression tightens.*]

Look, madam, you're not well—let me get the master and——

JILL: No. It's you I came back to see.

ELSIE: *Me*, madam?

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

JILL: Yes. I went to the cottage. Maureen said you were here. I—didn't know.

ELSIE: I've been working evenings, madam, while you was away. Is something wrong, madam?

JILL: It's been wrong. But it's going to come right now. It's got to come right. You see, Elsie dear——

[*The spotlight of the Lagonda sweeps across the windows. In a flash Elsie is at the window, staring out.*]

ELSIE: That's it, madam! That's the one! The one that killed Joe!

[*Elsie turns and stares at the door, riveted. Pause. Then it is thrown open. James strides in. He stops dead as he sees Jill. They stare at each other.*]

JAMES: We've been looking for you.

[*Bule enters.*]

[*Elsie stares at Bule, then turns to James.*]

ELSIE (*at a loss*): Mrs. Manning's . . . not well, sir. She—she ought to be in bed.

JAMES: Yes. Thank you, Elsie. Don't worry. I'll take care of my wife. You get on home now. Goodnight.

JILL: No, don't go, Elsie! Jim, I'm going to tell her!

JAMES (*firmly*): You can see Elsie in the morning, dear.

JILL: Jim, you wouldn't stop me now! You wouldn't do that to me.

JAMES (*gently*): Look, my dear, you've got everything a bit mixed up.

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

JILL: No! No! It isn't mixed up! You're mixing it up and I had it all clear!

BULE: Jill, you're talking nonsense.

JILL (*ignoring him, to James*): You didn't believe it was right. If only you'd stuck to what you *believed!* But you swung round and said the other thing and then I got confused because——

JAMES: I thought I was giving you what you wanted.

JILL (*wretchedly*): I know, I know. But you were *wrong*.

JAMES: Well, let's talk about it when we're alone, shall we?

JILL (*desperately*): No! No! If we're alone, you'll talk me out of it again and it will never come right and we shall go on and on. (*Turns to Elsie.*) It was me, Elsie, it was me!

BULE: Jill, this is absurd!

JILL: Jim, help me! Help me!

BULE: Jill, I'm sure Elsie can't make head or tail of all this. I know I can't. So come along and——

JAMES: Shut up! (*Turns to Elsie, deliberately.*) Elsie. What my wife is trying to tell you is that she was responsible for Joe's death.

[*A moment's pause, then:*]

BULE (*gently*): Oh, James, James. A bad general. You never let the man in the ranks know. . . .

ELSIE (*in an odd voice, staring at Jill*): She doesn't know what she's saying, sir.

BULE: Of course she doesn't.

ELSIE (*whipping round on him*): No, Mr. Bule, she doesn't know what she's saying. But there's some that could tell about that if they had a mind to, or so Eddie reckons.

BULE (*smiling*): Well, well, and what does Eddie reckon?

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

ELSIE (*fearlessly*): He reckons you were driving down the lane sneaking up to Mr. Manning's back gate after madam and that's how it happened. And now you know.

BULE (*still smiling*): Eddie's a hell of a good detective. That's exactly what did happen, Elsie.

JILL: It's not true, Elsie. He was there, but I was driving the car.

ELSIE: No, no, madam. It was him. Eddie knows, see, but he can't prove it. You wouldn't do that, not drive on and leave him there, madam. You wouldn't do that. It was him, and that's his car. I see it come tonight like it did the night it killed Joe.

JILL: It was that car, but I was driving.

ELSIE (*appealing to James*): Mr. Manning. . . .

JAMES: It's true, Elsie. It was Mr. Bule's car that hit Joe, but Mrs. Manning was driving it.

[*Elsie stands quite still. Then:*]

ELSIE (*almost in a whisper*): But he said he done it.

JAMES: He was only trying to protect my wife.

[*Elsie turns slowly and looks at Jill.*]

ELSIE (*wonderingly*): And you never said, madam.

JILL: I didn't know. Oh, God, I didn't know I hit him. (*She puts her hands over her face.*)

ELSIE: You didn't know? But you must have——

JILL: I didn't. And then when I found out, they wouldn't let me say!

BULE: You see, Elsie, it was like this. . . . (*He stops. Eddie stands in the doorway.*)

EDDIE (*to James*): Good evening, sir. Excuse me comin' in like this, sir, but is that your car outside, Mr. Bule?

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

BULE: Yes. It's mine.

EDDIE (*very still*): I thought I recognised it. Haven't seen it around much in these parts lately. You've been abroad, sir, I understand?

BULE: Yes, that's right.

EDDIE (*not taking his eyes off Bule*): I saw the car standing there—with the lights full on. So I turned them off. I hope I did right, sir?

BULE: Yes, thanks. I forgot about the lights. . . . Smoke, Eddie?

EDDIE: No, thank you, sir. (*Turns to Elsie*). Have you seen Mr. Bule's car, Elsie? You come and look at it. (*Takes her by the arm and leads her up to the door. He opens it with a sudden movement, the spotlight shines full on his face and Elsie's. Looking off.*) Well . . . I never turned the spotlight off, did I? I'm sorry, sir.

BULE: There's a separate switch. (*Pause.*)

EDDIE: It's a lovely car. I dare say you saw it when Mr. Bule came, didn't you, Elsie?

ELSIE (*in a low voice*): Yes. I saw it.

EDDIE (*carefully*): Ever seen it round your way, Elsie?

[*No answer.*]

EDDIE: Ever seen it in Tarrant's Lane?

[*No answer. Elsie moves away from Eddie and the door. With a sudden change of manner, he follows her.*]

EDDIE (*suddenly tense and urgent*): Else, a car come by your place one night. It killed your Joe and left you a widow and by yourself, and the kids without a father. Them that was in it didn't care and didn't so much as stop. I've been looking for that car ever since, see?

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

ELSIE (*frightened*): Yes.

EDDIE: You saw the car that killed your Joe. You saw it go by. Was it anything like that car out there now?

[*No answer.*]

EDDIE (*twisting the sword*): They killed your Joe and drove on and left him lying there in the road like a dog. *Was that the car?*

ELSIE (*with a great cry*): *No!* No, it wasn't! Not like it!

EDDIE (*quickly*): Why not? You said it was a big car. You said so all along and——

ELSIE (*trembling*): Wasn't like that. Not—not so big—and not the same, Eddie. Not the same.

EDDIE: Are you *sure*?

ELSIE (*facing him, with sudden resolution*): Yes, Eddie. Yes, I am. And you'll never get me to say different. *Never.* See?

[*Silence, then:*]

EDDIE: I see. . . . All right. Then I can't do no more. I've done my best for you and Joe, see. But I can't do nothing without you and—I see how it is. Goodnight, Mr. Manning. Goodnight, madam. I'm sorry for disturbing you.

[*He goes to the door.*]

JILL (*suddenly*): Eddie.

[*Eddie turns in the doorway.*]

BULE (*quickly*): Jill, don't be a fool——

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

ELSIE (*overlapping*): No, madam! No!

JAMES (*violently*): Stop it!! (*He goes deliberately to Jill's side. Very gently and tenderly.*) Go on, my darling.

JILL (*trembling*): Finish it for me—finish it.

JAMES: No. You can do it—alone.

[*Jill gives him a look of deep gratitude. For a moment their eyes hold. Then she turns slowly to Eddie.*]

JILL (*steadily*): Eddie, you won't need Elsie. I killed Joe.

[*No one moves but Elsie, who turns away with a little sob. Tableau. The lights fade.*]

Scene 2

Flo's Café. A year later.

A small drab café in a dingy street in a London suburb. The tablecloths on the three or four tables are far from clean. On a counter to the right, currant buns and slices of cake. Behind the counter a big brass tea urn. On the wall opposite, a clock. At back of the counter, a string curtain of beads leads to the back parlour. Up centre a door to the street. When it opens a bell pings. Through the window at the back can be seen part of a big, ugly stone building. It is early morning.

At rise, Flo is busying herself behind the counter. A woman sits at a table sipping tea. In a moment the door bell pings and James enters. He is dressed in city clothes, dark homburg and overcoat as at the beginning of the play. He looks about him, tentatively, uneasy in these surroundings.

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

THE WOMAN (*gets up, mutters*): 'Bye Flo. (*She exits.*)

FLO: Close the tent, dear. It's nippy this morning.

[*James closes the door, comes to a table and sits.*]

What'll it be, dear? Tea and toast, buns, slice of seed cake?

JAMES: Er—just tea, please. For two. .

FLO: Ah. You're waiting, are you?

JAMES: I beg your pardon?

FLO: For someone over the way. Oh, don't mind me, dear. I've been in meself. I have, honest. That's why I'm open at six every morning. I know what it's like to come out and be needing a cuppa and no one to offer you one. Yes, Fingers, they used to call me. Fingers Flo. On account of I couldn't keep me hands to meself, you understand. Terrible, I was. Pickin' pockets, stealin' from shops. You never saw anything like it. Mind you, I'm over it now. Know what cured me? Takin' this place. Oh, I know it's not much to look at. It's the position see. Whenever I feel the old itch comin' over me, all I got to do is to take a look out the winder at Buckin'am Palace opposite—and it's "Get thee be'ind me, Satan." I tell you, you can't see the devil for dust.

[*Flo pours tea from the urn.*]

JAMES: Is that clock right?

FLO: Bang on the dot, dear. What time are they goin' to open up them pearly gates for her?

JAMES: I understand it's at seven.

FLO: Won't be long now, then. Three more minutes, that's all, then Bob's your uncle. . . . What did they give her?

JAMES: A year.

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

FLO: A year! Poor soul. Still, you'll have seen her on visiting days, so you won't be strangers.

JAMES: We've not met since the trial.

FLO: Go on!

JAMES: I wanted to come. She . . . asked me not to.

FLO: Still, there's always the post. You wrote to each other, didn't you?

JAMES: Yes. We wrote.

[*Flo sets the tea on the table.*]

FLO: She'll be all right. Women are tough, you know. Tougher than men.

JAMES: I . . . think perhaps that's true.

FLO: 'Course it's true. You keep your pecker up and listen for the clock tower—you'll hear it striking the hour in half a jiffy—and then, you mark my words, your lady'll come marching in through that door, large as life and twice as handsome, before you can say Jack the Ripper, just you see if she doesn't. I'll be in the back. If you want me—just give a shout.

[*Flo disappears through the bead curtains. James sits facing the door. He looks at his watch. Suddenly the prison clock starts to strike seven. His eyes are riveted on the door. The chimes are still. Silence. Then suddenly the doorbell pings, the door opens, and Jill is there.*]

She stands quite still in the doorway.

She wears the same clothes as in the previous scene, but she has no make-up on and her hands are gloved. They stand and look at each other, absorbed by the physical sight of each other after twelve months.]

JILL (*at length, quietly*): Hello, Jim.

JAMES: Hello.

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

[Without taking her eyes from her husband Jill closes the door behind her. She comes to the nearest chair. His hat is on it, he removes it. She sits. He sits opposite her.]

JAMES: Tea?

JILL: Thanks. Oh—let me do it.

[She pours. Then:]

They're difficult, aren't they—the first moments. I knew they would be.

JAMES: It'll be all right in a minute.

JILL: Yes.

[Pause.]

JAMES: You look. . . . the same.

JILL: The same? Do I?

JAMES: Except . . . there's something. . . . Oh, yes. I know—gloves. I never could get you to wear gloves.

JILL: It's just that my hands are rough—from the work.

[Pause.]

JAMES: Was it—hard work?

JILL: No. . . . Your hands get rough—and after a time the smell of the sacking clings to your body, but—no, not hard . . . not really.

[Pause.]

Did you get my last letter? Of course. Or you wouldn't be here. Have you been waiting long?

JAMES: No. Not long.

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

JILL: I thought you'd prefer to meet in here—instead of right outside the prison.

JAMES: Yes.

[*Pause.*]

JILL (*brightly*): How are you? Have you been busy? I expect you've been terribly busy, haven't you? How's the garden?

JAMES: The tulips are out, and there are still some of the daffs left that we planted below our bedroom window—if you remember.

JILL (*warmly*): Yes, of course, I remember.

[*Pause.*]

JAMES (*with a sudden quiet intensity*): How long have we got?

JILL (*quietly*): I told Barry to be here at ten past. Is that all right? I didn't trust myself to be strong and sensible for more than ten minutes. I'm not sure I can manage it that long. You'll have to help me, darling. . . .

JAMES (*with urgency*): Look—Jillie—are you *sure*? Have you really . . . thought this through?

JILL (*gravely*): Yes. I've thought. We both have. Haven't we?

JAMES: Now—at this moment—I'm thinking I want you back more than I've ever wanted anything in the world.

JILL: I want to come back, at this moment, more than anything in the world. That's why I didn't want us to be together, until we'd made up our minds. So we wouldn't be influenced by the wrong things—like the way you're looking at me now.

JAMES: How am I looking at you?

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

JILL: Like a lover.

[*Pause.*]

JAMES: Where will you go?

JILL: To a hotel. Just for tonight. Tomorrow I'll find a room—hotels are expensive—and then look for a job. Probably something in the dress line.

JAMES (*urgently*): You don't have to do this. You don't have to do any of it.

JILL: Jim, you promised! If you fight me, you'll win. I—I'm just not strong minded enough to fight back.

[*Pause.*]

JAMES: I'd almost rather you were going to Bill.

JILL (*suddenly, almost gaily*): Oh. I had a letter from Bill. Asking if by any chance I would care to "make an honest man of him". I was rather touched.

JAMES (*incredulous*): You mean he actually asked you to——

JILL: Oh, I don't think he really *wanted* to marry me, it was a sort of beau geste. He said if I said yes we'd go on a trip round the world. And if I said no, he'd go anyway—to drown his sorrows. He's probably drowning them now with some lovely in Honolulu. . . . How's Elsie?

JAMES: She's going to be married.

JILL: No! Who?

JAMES: Ted Armstrong from Schroder's Farm.

JILL (*warmly*): Oh, I'm glad, I'm very glad. (*Quietly*) And you, Jim? How about you?

JAMES: I'm married already.

JILL: It's never too late to start over again . . . so they say.

WAITING FOR GILLIAN

JAMES (*carefully*): There's a point you reach where it is too late.

JILL (*very still*): What . . . point is that?

[*Pause.*]

JAMES (*gradually, his eyes never leaving her*): The point where loving and being in love have come together. Where the girl you first loved for her loveliness, for the joy she gave you in being alive and young—where you find yourself loving her more when her eyes are tired, and her hair's in curlers . . . when her cheeks are shiny and there's grease on the pillow beside you. You know then you've found the mystery of marriage. You know then she's your wife—your person—forever. You know then there can never be . . . anyone else.

[*Jill turns away, choking back the tears.*]

JAMES (*steadily*): Come home, Jillie.

JILL (*fighting for control*): Don't! Don't. I'm trying so hard to be honest and clear—don't make me mess it all up again for you.

JAMES: You wouldn't be messing it up. You'd be mending it.

JILL: I'm not ready! Not yet.

JAMES: But why? Why?

JILL: Darling, you always want everything put into words, and some things just don't go. (*She half turns towards the prison.*) (*Haltingly.*) In there—we all wore grey. All the women. Some of them looked quite pretty in it. It looked awful on me (*struggling to explain something intangible*) I'm not a grey person, darling. I—I'm black, or white—I don't know which—yet. I only know I'm not grey. I can't be

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

grey. I've tried. It tears me apart and you too. You've seen how it does. (*Quietly, but deliberately.*) I have to find out what I am, Jim. I have to find out.

[*Pause—James rises.*]

JAMES (*at length—quietly*): You'd better not keep Barry waiting.

[*Jill rises slowly. Suddenly she turns to him.*]

JILL: Will *you* wait?

[*He looks at her in wonder. Their eyes hold. Suddenly his arms go round her and he kisses her passionately. They cling together.*]

[*She stands, not moving—then quite suddenly she smiles.*]

JILL (*very simply*): I feel suddenly like I used to feel when you brushed my hair for me.

JAMES: Liberated?

JILL: Like a bird.

[*She smiles radiantly. Then she moves to the door and opens it. The bell pings. The noise of rain is heard.*]

JAMES: Jillie. (*She turns.*) You'd better take this. It's raining. (*Holds out his umbrella to her.*)

JILL (*simply*): Oh, no. I shall like the rain. (*For a moment she stands in the doorway. She smiles at him. Then she is gone.*)

[*He stands looking after her, motionless, the umbrella in his hand.*]

Slow curtain.

BOTH ENDS MEET

by

ARTHUR MACRAE

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H. M. Tennent Ltd. presented *Both Ends Meet* at the Apollo Theatre, London, on June 9, 1954, with the following cast:

MR. WILSON	<i>Richard Pearson</i>
MARGARET ROSS	<i>Brenda Bruce</i>
TOM DAVENPORT	<i>Arthur Macrae</i>
CLARISSA DAVENPORT	<i>Jane Downs</i>
EDWARD KINNERTON	<i>Richard Easton</i>
JIMMY SCOTT-KENNEDY	<i>Cyril Raymond</i>
SIR GEORGE TREHERNE	<i>Alan Webb</i>
LORD MINSTER	<i>Miles Malleston</i>

Directed by Peter Brook

Setting by Alan Tagg

CHARACTERS

MR. WILSON
MARGARET ROSS
TOM DAVENPORT
CLARISSA DAVENPORT
EDWARD KINNERTON
JIMMY SCOTT-KENNEDY
SIR GEORGE TREHERNE
LORD MINSTER

SCENES

The entire action of the play takes place in the living room of a flat in Knightsbridge.

Time: The present.

ACT ONE

Morning.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1. *The same day, afternoon.*

SCENE 2. *The same evening.*

ACT THREE

The following morning.

ACT ONE

The living room of Tom Davenport's flat in Knightsbridge. The flat is on the ground floor, and in addition to the door of the room, there are French windows leading into a garden.

It is morning.

Mr. Wilson is sitting in a chair. He wears an old raincoat, is holding his bowler hat on his knees and looks faintly ill at ease as he gazes round the room.

Suddenly the telephone rings, startling Mr. Wilson. He looks at the telephone, half rises, sits again, then goes and lifts the receiver.

MR. WILSON: Hullo? (*He listens, then peers short-sightedly at the number on the transmitter. Definitely.*) Yes. This is Mr. Tom Davenport's house. . . . Mr. Tom Davenport . . . yes. (*Nervously talkative.*) No, he's not in, but I know he's expected, because I'm waiting to see him, and the charlady said. . . . (*He is cut short.*) Yes, with pleasure. (*He takes a pencil from the pad beside the telephone.*) Well, this is an honour. I've had the pleasure of meeting you . . . twice . . . but you wouldn't remember . . . it was sort of business, so I didn't get the opportunity to say how much I've enjoyed your performances on the stage. No, I'm not a friend of Mr. Davenport's, I'm just waiting for him. What, when I met you? Well, both times I was waiting at the stage door. Well, I *am* a fan, but actually as I said, it was . . . you know . . . business. (*Embarrassed.*) Well, I don't expect you want to talk about it. (*With nervous jocularly.*) Actually I was waiting with one of those annoying bits of paper . . . (*he waves the writ which he has unconsciously taken from his pocket*) . . . about . . . you know . . . silly old Income Tax. A

ACT ONE

writ. Yes, that's right. I . . . Hullo? Hullo?
(*The caller has gone, and he replaces the receiver.*)

[*He rises, takes a few irresolute steps, then moves up to the French windows. As he takes a step through the windows to look at the garden, the voices of Tom Davenport and Margaret Ross are heard. Mr. Wilson stops and looks towards the door. The door is flung open, and Maggie and Tom enter. Tom is carrying one or two heavy parcels, and Maggie has a well-filled carrier bag. They are in the middle of a heated argument.*]

TOM: You are absolutely and completely wrong.

MAGGIE: I am absolutely right.

[*Tom dumps his parcels.*]

TOM: Listen! (*He is about to speak.*)

MAGGIE: No! *You* listen! It is the first night of your revue. Think what that means. . . .

TOM: It won't be the first night of the first revue I've ever written. I have, after all. . . .

MAGGIE: It's just that I want the revue to be all right . . . so you'll have some money and . . . and we'll possibly be able to. . . .

TOM: There's no possibly about it. I've told you. We'll be married. . . .

MAGGIE: When your ship comes home.

TOM: Yes.

MAGGIE: I'm beginning to wonder whether, somewhere over the horizon, your old ship hasn't sunk.

TOM: No, no. Darling, you know I've got this journalist coming this morning. I don't think you'd better be here, do you?

MAGGIE: Why not?

TOM: It might give the wrong impression.

BOTH ENDS MEET

MAGGIE: You are ridiculous. D'you think he's going to suppose I'm living in your flat?

TOM: Well . . . you are an actress, and . . . I'm only thinking of your reputation. Now, you run upstairs to your own little flat. . . .

[*He turns with her and faces Wilson.*]

WILSON: I'm so sorry. Did I give you a fright? The charlady let me in. She said. . . .

TOM: I'm so terribly sorry. How are you? I hadn't realised it was so late. Would you excuse me for one minute? I'll just put these things in the kitchen. You know Miss Ross, of course, Margaret Ross. I'll be one second and then I'll be able to answer any questions you like. (*Going.*) You'll have a drink, won't you?

WILSON (*stunned*): Oh . . . er . . . no . . . I don't think. . . .

TOM: Of course you will. Maggie, look after the Press. Whiskey, brandy, gin. . . .

WILSON: Oh, I never touch them. (*With a faint smile.*) Too expensive.

TOM: Expense, what does that matter? (*Gaily.*) Entertaining! It all comes off the Income Tax. Shan't be a second.

[*He has gone.*]

[*Mr. Wilson gives Maggie a watery smile.*]

MAGGIE (*at drink table*): What will you have?

WILSON: No, I really won't . . . Not while I'm . . . working, so to speak.

MAGGIE: I suppose you have to be careful.

[*Mr. Wilson looks at her enquiringly.*]

ACT ONE

I imagine people are offering you drinks all day long?

WILSON (*puzzled*): No, I can't say they are.

MAGGIE: Really? Your colleagues, all the ones I've met. . . .

WILSON: You've had some of my . . . colleagues to see you?

MAGGIE (*faintly surprised*): Yes.

WILSON (*he leans forward sympathetically*): I'm so sorry.

MAGGIE: But they've always been charming. . . .

WILSON (*eagerly*): Well, that's what I say. I mean, just because we do an unpleasant job, it doesn't mean we're unpleasant.

MAGGIE (*puzzled*): Excuse me, but I don't think you can be what I thought you were. Are you a reporter?

WILSON: No.

MAGGIE: I'm sorry. Mr. Davenport's expecting someone from a newspaper. We thought it was you. (*Suddenly.*) Unpleasant? Did you say your job was unpleasant?

WILSON: Well, I mean, it's not nice.

MAGGIE: What is it?

WILSON: Well, it's just that . . . I've come with one of these annoying old things. (*He half shows the writ, and replaces it.*)

MAGGIE: One of what annoying old things?

[*He half shows it again.*]

Is it a bill?

WILSON: Not exactly.

MAGGIE: Well, what is it?

WILSON: It's a . . . you know . . . a stupid old writ.

MAGGIE: A *writ*?

WILSON: For silly old Income Tax.

MAGGIE: But he told me he'd *paid* it.

BOTH ENDS MEET

WILSON: Well, I don't know . . . but there it is.

MAGGIE (*overwhelmed with black misery*): Now it's writs! We shall never be married.

WILSON: Oh, now. . . .

MAGGIE: Never! I can see that quite clearly. Never!
(*She stares ahead of her.*)

[*Tom re-enters. For the benefit of the Press, he is a little over-vivacious.*]

TOM: Well, here we are! All merry and bright. I'm delighted to see you—always glad to welcome the Press. (*To Mr. Wilson.*) You haven't got a drink. That won't do. (*Suddenly.*) Do you like champagne? I've got some wonderful champagne. Krug, 1945. Very difficult to get. My Aunt Sophie sent it to me last Christmas. Poor old dear, she died last week in Switzerland. Six bottles of Krug, she sent me, and she wasn't at all well off. Just say the word and I'll go and get a bottle.

WILSON (*horrified*): No!

[*Tom stops.*]

You can't give *me* champagne.

TOM (*immensely cheerful*): If we can't give you champagne, who can we give it to? (*He has turned with a bright smile to Maggie.*)

MAGGIE: Who indeed?

TOM: You must have something. Whiskey, sherry, Dubonnet? (*About to pour.*)

WILSON (*quickly*): No, no, I never touch it. Port's the only thing I ever. . . .

TOM: Port. Fine.

WILSON: But not now. . . .

[*His voice falls away despairingly, as Tom pours a large port.*]

ACT ONE

Well, only very small.

TOM: Do sit down and relax and be comfortable. Sit down. Now, are you quite comfortable there? You wouldn't like a cushion? (*Goes and gets one.*) Have a cushion. Make yourself at home. Relax. Put your feet up. (*Sitting.*) Now, about the new revue. Of course, it's only half written . . . I'm doing the lyrics and sketches . . . I think we'll have a very good cast . . . (*laughing*) . . . and I must say, if we've got nothing else, we have got one excellent idea.

MAGGIE: You're going to need it.

TOM: What?

MAGGIE: May I make a suggestion?

TOM: Of course.

MAGGIE: Let him do the talking.

[*Tom is about to speak.*]

Just let him get a word in edgeways.

WILSON: It's the embarrassment. (*Distressed.*) I should have spoken . . . I shouldn't have. . . . Oh, I *hate* my job.

TOM (*incredulous*): You hate your job? But it must be such fun. Always meeting new people. Going into their homes.

WILSON: I'm not a reporter, Mr. Davenport. I've come with this.

TOM: What is it?

MAGGIE: I wouldn't be at all surprised if it weren't a writ.

TOM: Don't be silly, dear. (*To Mr. Wilson.*) What's it about?

WILSON: Income Tax.

TOM: Income Tax?

WILSON: Yes, silly old Income Tax. Ought to be done away with, *I* say.

BOTH ENDS MEET

TOM (*with some grandeur*): But my dear fellow, you can't come barging into my home and present me with bills for Income Tax.

MAGGIE: It's no use saying he *can't*. He's here.

WILSON: I really am very sorry, but I'm just doing my job. . . .

TOM: Doing your job? (*Pouring the port back into the bottle.*) But what sort of a job is it, I'd like to know. Pushing your way into . . . into law-abiding citizens' houses. I . . . I'm a rate-payer.

MAGGIE: That's got nothing to do with *anything*.

TOM (*turning on her*): I wish you'd be a little more helpful.

MAGGIE (*at him*): I don't *feel* helpful. You swore that you'd paid your Income Tax. . . .

TOM: I have paid it. Perhaps they haven't noticed. (*Loftily, to Mr. Wilson.*) There's some silly mistake. You take that back to your people and tell them there's some silly mistake.

WILSON: I'm afraid I can't do that. . . .

MAGGIE: Why don't you read it?

TOM: I haven't got my glasses. Anyway, what's the point of reading it? (*Looking for his glasses.*) Really, I don't know what's happening to this country. (*Turning to Mr. Wilson.*) If I owe the butcher some money, he doesn't come here and wave his bill in my face. The milkman, the grocer—they don't behave like this. Well, *really*—if the butcher, the milkman and the grocer can behave like gentlemen, I think it's high time the British Government learned to do the same. (*He has found his glasses, puts them on, and looks at the paper. Suddenly:*) It's a writ!

WILSON (*miserably*): Yes.

TOM (*in utter despair*): But . . . but this is the end of everything. (*He sits.*)

WILSON (*miserably*): It's not right, it really isn't.

ACT ONE

I think they're overdoing all this Income Tax business, I really do. . . .

MAGGIE: How much is it?

TOM: Three hundred pounds. (*To Maggie.*) I haven't got. . . .

[*Maggie coughs quickly.*]

Surely . . . surely they should have warned me, before. . . .

WILSON: I expect they wrote to your accountant.

MAGGIE: He rang up a fortnight ago, if you remember. You told me to say you were abroad, because you hadn't. . . .

TOM (*quickly*): Yes! Yes, but still. . . . (*He looks at Mr. Wilson.*) Well, what happens?

WILSON (*eagerly*): Well, either you settle up, and then everyone's happy . . . (*Getting no response, he adds in a saddened voice*) . . . or else it's the proceedings. You know—the Court, and all that.

TOM: The proceedings! The Court and all that! (*Incensed.*) Marvellous, isn't it? I'm supposed to be earning my living—writing a revue. (*Savagely.*) Witty lyrics—screamingly funny sketches! They're going to be hilarious. What splendid ideas I shall have as I jog along to Court in the Black Maria. The proceedings, the Court and all that. . . .

[*The doorbell rings.*]

(*Quickly.*) If it's the reporter, you'd better say I'm out.

[*Maggie goes, leaving the door open.*]

(*To Mr. Wilson—indicating the door.*) That poor girl!

BOTH ENDS MEET

We've been wanting to get married for years—now she finds herself linked to a potential convict.

WILSON: Oh, I don't think there's any question of imprisonment. . . .

[*From outside, voices are heard.*]

MAGGIE: Clarissa! Hullo, darling. How well you're looking.

CLARISSA: I've had the most wonderful time.

[*Et cetera.*]

TOM (*quickly going and shutting the door*): It's my niece. She's been abroad. Would you mind if I said you were . . . what?

WILSON: An old Army friend?

TOM: Very good idea.

WILSON: If there's callers, I'm nearly always passed off as an old Army friend.

TOM: Oh, good. That is kind of you. . . .

[*The door opens and Clarissa enters.*]

CLARISSA: Uncle Tom? (*She is delighted to see him, and flings her arms round his neck.*) Darling. I am glad to see you.

TOM: Did you have a lovely time?

[*Maggie has re-entered.*]

CLARISSA: Lovely—heavenly! Darling, *Rome!* It's the most beautiful of all. Why don't we go and live there?

TOM: Why not? In the ruins.

CLARISSA: I've never had such a holiday. It was. . . .
(*She turns and comes face to face with Mr. Wilson.*)

ACT ONE

TOM: Oh, Clarissa. This is an old Army friend of mine. Mr. . . . er . . . how stupid. I'll forget my own name next. . . .

WILSON: Wilson.

TOM: Wilson, of course.

WILSON: How d'you do?

CLARISSA (*to Tom*): Oh, could you lend me ten shillings . . . for the taxi?

TOM: Ten shillings? From Victoria?

CLARISSA: Darling, just ten shillings.

TOM (*having looked*): I haven't got ten shillings.

CLARISSA: Maggie, could you. . . ?

[*Maggie shrugs.*]

(*Before she can be stopped.*) Mr. Wilson? Would you mind awfully. . . .

TOM (*horrified*): Clarissa! Really!

CLARISSA (*surprised*): But you said he was an old friend.

TOM: Well, he *is* an old friend, but one doesn't . . . er . . . one doesn't want to. . . .

CLARISSA: I'll give it back the next time I see him.

MAGGIE: You might not see him again.

CLARISSA: Oh, isn't he staying in the house?

[*Maggie looks at Tom.*]

MAGGIE: I really don't know.

WILSON (*who has been searching, and has found a ten-shilling note.*) Look, it's quite all right. You could always post it.

CLARISSA: Thank you so much, that is kind of you. Shan't be a second.

[*She goes.*]

TOM: I'm so sorry. . . .

BOTH ENDS MEET

WILSON: Quite all right. Makes me feel a bit . . . a bit more human.

TOM: You really are unhappy in your work, aren't you?

WILSON: Oh, I hate it.

MAGGIE: Tom, I've had an idea . . . (*she turns to Mr. Wilson*) . . . are you allowed to take a cheque?

WILSON: Oh yes.

MAGGIE (*turning to Tom with a bright smile*): Well, then? Everything's all right.

[*He, perplexed, is about to speak. Maggie's brightness becomes steely.*]

Everything's all right!

TOM: Is it?

MAGGIE (*to Tom*): I'll write a cheque and you can sign it. Can't you?

TOM: Yes, I can.

WILSON: Oh well! That's a happy relief to one and all.

TOM: You know, it's not your fault but your people are driving me mad. There was a time when I was quite a calm, good-natured sort of person. I'd walk in the Park, I'd sniff the air and feel well, I'd look at the trees, I'd pat the poodles. What happens now? I sniff the air and think, "What's the good of feeling well? It only means I'll live longer and have more tax to pay". As for the poodles, I just look at them and think, "Why couldn't I have been born a poodle? Washed, fed, petted, taken for walks". (*He signs the cheque.*)

MAGGIE: Never mind, perhaps you'll come back as a poodle.

TOM: If you think once having gone, I'm coming back, you're out of your mind.

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MAGGIE: Well, that's that.

[*Clarissa re-enters.*]

WILSON: Thank you so much.

MAGGIE: And I expect you'd like this back.

WILSON: Oh yes, the silly old . . . doings.

MAGGIE: Yes, well, goodbye. So sorry you have to go.

TOM (*going to Mr. Wilson*): It has been nice seeing you.

WILSON (*to Maggie*): Good-bye. (*To Clarissa.*) Good-bye.

CLARISSA: Good-bye, Mr. Wilson.

TOM (*escorting him to the door*): Do come again . . . (*hurriedly*) . . . not on business, of course.

[*They go through the door, talking.*]

CLARISSA: Oh, Maggie. I'm in such a fever of excitement. Oh, and I bought you these off a barrow. (*She picks up and hands her a bunch of flowers.*)

MAGGIE: Clarissa! . . . They smell divine.

[*Tom re-enters.*]

TOM: Well! Dear old Wilson's gone.

CLARISSA: Is he a dear? I thought he seemed a bit shady. As if you might . . . find something valuable missing after he'd gone.

MAGGIE (*at Tom*): I can assure you that Mr. Wilson has not gone off with anything of the least value.

TOM (*whole-heartedly*): No, indeed. Maggie, I'd like to ask you. . . .

MAGGIE (*quickly*): Yes, of course, but I must just. . . . (*She has unwrapped the flowers.*) Oh, Clarissa. These are lovely.

CLARISSA (*dismayed*): Oh! But they're half dead already.

BOTH ENDS MEET

MAGGIE: No, no. Just a little tired.

CLARISSA: I'll put them in water.

[*Maggie hands them to Tom to hand to Clarissa, who hurries out.*]

TOM: Maggie! What about that cheque?

MAGGIE: It was perfectly all right, except that I put next year's date.

[*They smile at each other, then laugh.*]

TOM: Oh, Maggie. Maggie, darling. (*Hugging her.*) You are the brightest, sweetest little . . . I don't know what.

MAGGIE: I hope I'm not a bright, sweet little crook.

TOM: Of course not. You made a mistake.

MAGGIE: That's what I thought. Now we've got that nasty writ out of the house it'll give you time to think.

TOM: Think! The first thought that occurs to me is that sooner or later, he'll be back.

MAGGIE: We'll just have to fly to the front window and look, and if it's him pretend you're out. We'd better telephone Jimmy.

TOM: Why?

MAGGIE: Well, he *is* your solicitor. (*She goes to the telephone.*)

TOM: You are sweet to take it so calmly.

MAGGIE (*looking in small telephone book*): Well, what's the use of. . . .

TOM: Yes, but that's what's so wonderful about you. You don't fuss and fume, and make the obvious remarks about it being all my fault. (*Mimicking.*) "Of course you had a good financial year four years ago, dear, but you should have saved at least half of it, so that two years later when you'd forgotten you'd

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ever earned it, you could give it all back to the dear, kind Government."

MAGGIE: Tom. I want to talk to you. Seriously. Don't let's think about getting married.

TOM: What?

MAGGIE: I mean, don't let's think about getting married now. We know we're going to be married one day. Why don't I just frankly and openly move in here?

TOM (*deathly serious*): Maggie! This is not the first time you've made this . . . frankly unpleasant suggestion.

MAGGIE (*suddenly going into gales of laughter*): Oh! You are silly.

TOM: It's not silly to have a moral sense.

MAGGIE (*still laughing*): Oh, la-di-da! You know the truth about you. You're a martyr to your conscience. Cromwell, that's who you are.

TOM: All right, I have a conscience. It *is* an unpleasant suggestion. I'd be appallingly uncomfortable . . . for you as well as for myself. And so would you be.

MAGGIE: But *why*? Nobody would mind.

TOM: Oh no. Nobody would mind. They'd think it very gay and jolly and great fun. But I love you.

MAGGIE: Well?

TOM (*inarticulate*): Well? Among other things, that means I respect you.

MAGGIE: And if I moved in here, you'd secretly think of me as a loose woman?

[*Tom makes a frustrated gesture.*]

Oh, darling, I know. (*She draws him to her:*) You're muddled and rather pompous, but never mind.

[*They kiss.*]

Your solicitor seems to be out.

TOM: I'm not muddled or pompous. Good heavens! We know the way this country's arranged. A couple of married wage-earners pay five times more tax than a couple of unmarried ones living cosily together. But I'm already forced to pass dud cheques, forced to fly to the window to see whether or not I can open my own front door. I certainly do not intend to be forced into living in sin, simply to diddle the Inland Revenue.

MAGGIE (*into telephone*): Hullo? Is Mr. Scott-Kennedy there, please? Well, if he comes in or telephones, will you say Mr. Davenport would like to speak to him? Thanks very much. (*Replacing the receiver and turning.*) You know, the last time I suggested moving in here, you had quite a different objection. You said Aunt Sophie might get to hear of it, and think how shocked she'd be.

TOM: So she would have been. Terribly shocked.

MAGGIE: Well, that doesn't apply any more, does it?

TOM: Darling! *When* we are married. . . .

MAGGIE: *When!* D'you know something? The day you ask me to marry you, I made a list on a piece of paper of the wedding presents I wanted. You should see that piece of paper now. It isn't paper at all. It's papyrus. And half the things on the list have gone off the market.

TOM: You will admit it'd be madness to rush into marriage at the moment, when I haven't a bean.

MAGGIE (*thinking*): D'you think Aunt Sophie might have left you something? You said she had a lovely house in Paris—a large house. . . .

TOM: That was ages ago. She's been living for years in a small hotel in Geneva.

MAGGIE: That suggests she was very rich.

TOM (*catching her excitement*): Oh, Maggie. Wouldn't

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it be wonderful? I *am* her nearest relative. Suppose it were five thousand!

MAGGIE: Ten.

TOM: Ten thousand. Think what we could do with ten thousand.

MAGGIE (*in a dream*): You could pay your Income Tax.

TOM (*in a dream*): We could get married. (*Suddenly.*) Do you know who's really the reason we can't get married?

MAGGIE: The Chancellor of the Exchequer?

TOM: No. I was looking it up yesterday. This may surprise you. (*He picks up a reference book.*) Income Tax was invented by William Pitt.

MAGGIE: Dear old William.

TOM: Invented by William Pitt to pay for the wars with Napoleon.

MAGGIE: Dear old Napoleon.

TOM: If we're still paying Income Tax because of Napoleon, we ought to get cut rates on the French railways. "After Waterloo Income Tax was done away with but it was revived by Sir Robert Peel." Dear old Sir Robert, who not only brought back Income Tax but invented policemen to arrest you if you couldn't pay it.

[*Clarissa enters.*]

CLARISSA: Uncle Tom! Maggie! I've got some news for you. While I was away I met the most *wonderful* young man. I don't mean a handsome, glamorous Prince Charming or anything of that sort. Just as well. After all, I'm not exactly Cinderella. His name is Edward Kinnerton, and he's perfect.

TOM: Where did you meet him?

CLARISSA: In Rome. Then when I went on to

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Stockholm, he took a plane and suddenly appeared there.

TOM (*frowning*): Chasing you around? That doesn't sound . . . Clarissa! There wasn't anything . . . I mean, you haven't. . . .

MAGGIE (*laughs*): There you are. Nasty old Cromwell in a black hat.

TOM: I must remind you that I'm not only Clarissa's uncle, but also her guardian. . . .

CLARISSA: Oh darling, you don't understand. Edward's everything one could wish. As correct as he can be. But not too correct. He can be very gay and dashing.

MAGGIE: What does he do?

CLARISSA: Something to do with finance.

TOM (*quickly*): Finance? Is he a banker?

CLARISSA: Well, no. He's . . . we didn't go into it deeply . . . he's an accountant.

TOM: An accountant!

MAGGIE: That is interesting.

TOM: He sounds . . . all right.

MAGGIE: He sounds . . . very nice.

CLARISSA: Do be kind to him. (*To Maggie.*) He *isn't* staggering looking—at least I think he is but I see other people mightn't—but I do love him and I do want to marry him. So may I?

TOM: Well, we'll have to see him first.

CLARISSA: He'll be here any minute. He's got a room in Ebury Street—I dropped him there, and went in just to have a look—that's why the taxi was so much—and I told him to give me five minutes to explain.

[*The doorbell rings.*]

This'll be him.

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MAGGIE (*quickly, trying to stop her*): No, no. It might be Mr. Wilson.

CLARISSA (*in the doorway*): Well?

MAGGIE: Well . . . Tom doesn't want to see Mr. Wilson again.

CLARISSA: I'll look at the legs through the letter-box.

[*Clarissa has gone.*]

MAGGIE (*quietly*): An accountant.

TOM: Mm!

MAGGIE: In the family! Not to be sneezed at.

TOM: No, indeed. Very useful.

[*Clarissa re-enters.*]

CLARISSA: Uncle Tom. Maggie. (*She calls.*)

[*Edward enters.*]

This is Edward.

TOM: How d'you do?

MAGGIE: Hullo.

EDWARD: I hope I'm not a nuisance, arriving like this. It was Clarissa's idea. I felt it was a bit much.

TOM: Not at all. Delighted. (*Indicating a chair.*)

EDWARD: I expect it's a surprise, about Clarissa and me. (*He smiles.*) I hope it isn't a shock.

TOM: No, of course not.

CLARISSA (*to Maggie—sniffing*): Something delicious cooking. . . .

MAGGIE: Oh, I'd forgotten it. (*To Edward.*) Will you excuse me?

EDWARD: Oh, are you going?

MAGGIE: Only to the kitchen.

TOM: Maggie sometimes comes down and cooks for me. . . .

MAGGIE: Sometimes?

BOTH ENDS MEET

TOM (*quickly*): She has a flat on the first floor. (*Definitely.*) A small self-contained flat—with its own front door.

EDWARD: Oh?

TOM: We're engaged. We're going to be married.

EDWARD: Oh really? When?

TOM: Er . . . we haven't *quite* fixed the date.

MAGGIE (*in the doorway*): We just hope when we do we won't be too old to get to the church.

[*Maggie goes.*]

EDWARD: Well, I expect you'd like to know something about me.

TOM: Oh . . . no hurry.

[*The telephone rings.*]

Excuse me. Hullo? (*With a rather false laugh.*) Oh, bullo! (*To Edward.*) It's *my* accountant. (*Tom is a little flustered.*) Clarissa, wouldn't you like to show Edward the garden?

CLARISSA: What for?

TOM: Not *for* anything. I just thought he might like to see the garden.

CLARISSA (*to Edward*): There's not very much of it, but what there is is charming.

[*Tom gives Edward a bright social smile as he goes.*]

TOM (*into telephone*): I haven't what? (*Innocently.*) Oh, haven't I? Some oversight. I'll see about it. (*He listens.*) I know. Three hundred. No, not five hundred. Three hundred. (*Aghast.*) Five hundred? On top of the three hundred? Super-tax? What d'you mean, super? Super what? Nothing super's

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happened to me for the last four years. Did I? When? Two years ago! And that was super! *Was* it? (*Infuriated.*) But you can't expect me to remember things that happened two years ago. You know the trouble with those Inland Revenue boys? They live too much in the past. (*Blackly depressed.*) Oh yes, I've noted it. Thank you. Good-bye.

[*As he replaces the receiver, Edward and Clarissa re-enter.*]

EDWARD: Your tomatoes are doing well.

TOM: I'm glad to hear something's doing well. Income Tax! Super tax! What I'd like to do to those tax collectors. How I hate them! I'd like to take one of them by the throat, and very, very slowly. . . .

MAGGIE (*re-appearing in the doorway*): Tom, could you come and have a look at the sink? I think it's choked.

TOM: Of course it's choked. The whole of Britain's choked with rage, frustration and Income Tax.

MAGGIE: As you can do nothing about the whole of Britain, perhaps you'll come into the kitchen and do something about the sink?

TOM: I'll be delighted to come into the kitchen—where you and I, my love—can put our heads slowly but firmly into the oven.

[*Tom goes.*]

MAGGIE: Don't worry. It's an electric oven.

[*Maggie goes.*]

CLARISSA: You mustn't think this household's always like this, Uncle Tom's usually quite calm. It's just that, any mention of Income Tax sends him off into a frenzy.

BOTH ENDS MEET

EDWARD: Clarissa, dear, I hope you'll understand this. Those ten days in Rome and that week in Stockholm were the most wonderful time of my life.

[*She puts her arms round him.*]

So I didn't want anything to spoil it.

CLARISSA: Nothing did.

EDWARD: I told you a good deal about myself. But now we're back. . . . (*He stops.*)

CLARISSA (*frozen*): You're going to tell me you're already married.

[*Edward laughs.*]

EDWARD: Of course. With nine children.

CLARISSA: Oh darling—my heart stopped. It stopped. I've gone ice-cold.

EDWARD: It's nothing like that. It's just—about the office. I told you what I do. . . .

CLARISSA: Yes, darling. You have an office in Westminster, and you're an accountant, and you have a secretary called. . . .

EDWARD: I didn't say I was an accountant.

CLARISSA: Yes, you did. We'd had that wonderful lunch in the Piazza Navona, and I was in. . . .

EDWARD: You were obviously in a haze of Chianti, because I certainly said nothing about being an accountant. I work in an office of the Commissioners of Inland Revenue.

[*There is a slight pause.*]

CLARISSA: Oh, glory! (*She dashes to the door and shuts it.*) Oh, darling! This is worse than the nine children. Oh, heavens! What *are* we going to do?

EDWARD: Look here! It's a perfectly respectable job. I earn quite a good salary.

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CLARISSA: Oh, I know, I know. But that's not the point. (*Distraught. She pats him as she passes.*) Oh dear, oh dear! How are we going to tell Uncle Tom?

EDWARD: Well, couldn't we just . . . drop it in casually?

CLARISSA: Drop it in casually? You mean like saying, Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you, Edward is the Public Executioner.

EDWARD: I did try to tell you in Rome.

CLARISSA: Well, you weren't very explicit.

EDWARD: I suppose I really didn't mean to be.

CLARISSA: Why not?

EDWARD (*miserably*): Well . . . because of spoiling everything. I do a perfectly good job of work—very interesting work. I got interested in it, then I became fascinated, and it wasn't until I was in it up to my neck and doing pretty well that I realised what I represent to the world at large. The Public Executioner.

CLARISSA: Oh, nonsense.

EDWARD: You've just said it.

CLARISSA: I didn't mean *I* thought you were.

EDWARD: But . . . but people *do*. It's awful. I . . . I've seen people move away from me in bars. Fellows I was at school with. They move away, look at me and mutter. Sometimes I wake in the night and think, This is terrible. I'm a social pariah. . . .

CLARISSA (*laughing*): Oh, Edward. Darling, don't be silly. (*She kisses him.*) Now, about Uncle Tom. We obviously can't tell him now.

EDWARD (*alarmed*): Oh no! He'd throw me out of the place.

CLARISSA: You and I will talk it over later, and think up something. . . .

[*Tom re-enters.*]

BOTH ENDS MEET

TOM: Now, Edward—can I give you a drink?

EDWARD: Thanks. Could I have a pink gin?

TOM (*at drink table*): Pink gin. Fine. (*He picks up a bottle.*) So you're an accountant?

EDWARD (*faintly*): What?

TOM (*occupied*): Must be a very interesting job. Do you enjoy it?

EDWARD: Er. . . .

CLARISSA: He's very fond of it.

TOM: Good! (*Handing him the drink.*) How I envy you.

EDWARD (*with a nervous smile*): Oh—really?

TOM: Thwarting those horrible buff envelope boys. (*Lost in a dream.*) How I'd like to go to an office every day, and spend all my time thinking up new ways of doing them in the eye.

CLARISSA (*quickly*): Well! Perhaps I'd better go and unpack.

EDWARD (*eagerly*): Can I help you?

CLARISSA: Well. . . .

[*Maggie re-enters.*]

TOM: You'll be pleased to hear, Clarissa, that Maggie thinks Edward is absolutely gorgeous.

MAGGIE (*furiously*): I *didn't* say gorgeous. (*To Edward.*) I simply said that you looked very nice. Which you do.

CLARISSA (*to Maggie*): I'm going to unpack.

EDWARD: Can I. . . ?

CLARISSA: No, no. You stay. I shan't be long.

[*Clarissa goes quickly.*]

MAGGIE: Edward, how did you two first meet?

EDWARD: In Rome. In the Forum. Clarissa asked me for a light.

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TOM: I wonder how people became acquainted before the invention of matches.

EDWARD: Then she said could I tell her which was the Temple of the Vestal Virgins.

MAGGIE: Oh, I do see it was all bound to happen.

TOM: I'm delighted it has. So is Maggie.

MAGGIE: You know she's training to be a nurse? We've always been rather scared she might marry a doctor. Not that one's got anything against doctors. The reverse. But it's the life——

[*Edward is centre, with Tom and Maggie on each side of him.*]

TOM: Well, there are compensations. (*To Edward.*) I should think a doctor can make quite a bit on the side, wouldn't you?

EDWARD: How d'you mean?

MAGGIE: Asking for cash down, so he doesn't have to show it in his returns.

EDWARD: Oh, no.

TOM (*smiling*): It has been done, you know.

EDWARD: But doctors are men of integrity.

TOM: Doctors are men. And men, even men of integrity, are being driven by impossible demands to do dark deeds.

MAGGIE: You must know all about that, in your line of business.

EDWARD: Well—not really.

TOM: Oh, now. You're just being tactful. We all three know that the most honest of men. . . . Well, take me for example.

[*Edward smiles uncomfortably.*]

No, I mean it. I've always been completely honest.

BOTH ENDS MEET

Declared every penny I've earned, and every expense I've claimed has been legitimate. What's the result? (*Lying back with a glass in his hand.*) I'm in the gutter.

EDWARD: Of course, I know everybody has a difficult time. . . .

TOM: Difficult? In my profession, it's practically impossible. I can't say to Mr. Sylvester . . . Sylvester's the big boss. Owns the theatres, puts on the shows. . . . I can't say, Well, Mr. Sylvester, there are your revue sketches. Now perhaps you'd just like to leave a little something in cash on the desk. I can't do that.

MAGGIE: Edward. I was talking to Tom in the kitchen, and telling him he ought to ask your advice.

EDWARD (*apprehensive*): What about?

MAGGIE: Well—how to do it.

EDWARD: Do what?

MAGGIE: Cheat.

[*Edward looks at her.*]

Swindle. You must know all sorts of good, artful, *legal* ways of getting out of paying.

EDWARD: If I may say so, I don't see how a swindle could be legal.

MAGGIE: Don't you? If I were to tell you a few things about Mr. Sylvester, that great theatre boss, you might change your mind. (*About to continue.*)

EDWARD (*quickly*): Perhaps you'd better not tell me.

MAGGIE: Mind you, the theatrical side's all above board. It's his other ventures. . . .

EDWARD (*again breaking in quickly*): Whatever he does, it can't be legal. There's the law, and there's breaking the law. Don't you agree?

MAGGIE: No. Life's always on the move, the law's always rigid. Nowadays, trying to conform to the

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law is much the same as trying to walk about in Tudor corsets.

TOM (*after a fraction of a pause, straight to Edward*): Edward, what do you think's the best way of getting out of paying Income Tax?

[*There is another slight pause.*]

Yes, do think about it carefully before you answer. (*Frowning.*) I have been told something about buying up bankrupt hat-shops, but I don't know. . .

MAGGIE: I do. You're not buying any bankrupt hat-shops. A., you've nothing to buy them with. B., the whole thing would go wrong, and I'd finish up wearing all the bankrupt hats.

TOM (*to Edward*): Just simple swindling, I suppose, isn't a good idea?

[*Edward looks at him and hurriedly looks elsewhere.*]

I mean, frankly altering figures.

EDWARD: A very bad idea, I should say.

TOM: Pity. Maggie's very neat with her fingers.

MAGGIE (*to Tom*): You know, I don't see why Sylvester shouldn't pay you in cash. He's up to every trick in the business. Why shouldn't you benefit?

TOM: I have asked him for better terms.

MAGGIE: Are you going to get them?

TOM (*uncomfortably*): He's thinking it over.

MAGGIE (*angrily*): We know what *that* means! Really, it's monstrous. (*To Edward.*) There's that man, Sylvester, getting away with murder. Do you know I've been told he's got a chain of fish and chip shops all over Britain? Oh, very carefully in another name, of course. His name and the profits carefully concealed. . . .

EDWARD (*uncomfortable*): I don't think. . . .

BOTH ENDS MEET

MAGGIE: For two pins I'd denounce him to the Inland Revenue, but of course they'd never catch him, he being so smart, and they such half-wits. And it's not only fish and chip shops. The elegant Mr. Sylvester, who is to be seen dining in the smartest restaurants, controls a fleet of barrow boys.

TOM: You don't *know* that.

MAGGIE: I *do* know it. A hundred barrows, he controls, with no cash records kept. How do you suppose he manages to have a Rolls Royce, a Bentley, two other cars, houses in London and the country, a villa in France. I ask you. And I'll tell you another thing. That secretary of his. The elderly woman with grey hair. (*To Edward.*) That, if you please, is his mother.

EDWARD (*startled*): His mother?

MAGGIE: Every Friday she draws her salary of twenty pounds a week—off the Income Tax it comes—every Saturday in she pops, closes the door carefully, and hands back to her darling boy twenty pounds in cash. Well, there's a thousand a year free of Income Tax, to begin with.

EDWARD: Oh, not as much as that. . . .

MAGGIE: Well, whatever it is. And you can be sure he's got a hundred other little devices equally charming and simple.

TOM (*excited*): But that's a wonderful idea. Why didn't you tell me before? (*To Maggie.*) You're my secretary. I pay you five hundred a year. (*To Edward.*) I give her ten pounds a week and she gives it back. What could be better than that?

EDWARD: I . . . I don't think I'm a very good person to ask.

TOM: Well, you must admit it's simple?

EDWARD: Not really. She'd have to pay tax on that five hundred.

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MAGGIE: Typical, to pay tax on five hundred pounds I don't even get.

TOM: Edward. (*Appealing.*) Come on. Give me some helpful advice.

EDWARD: You really want me to?

TOM: Yes.

[*Tom and Maggie lean toward Edward, in rapt attention.*]

EDWARD: Well, here it is. Pay up and smile.

[*Tom and Maggie exchange a rather dumbfounded look.*]

TOM: Is that the advice you give your clients?

EDWARD: Oh yes. Definitely!

MAGGIE: Are you doing well?

EDWARD: Yes.

TOM: Fancy.

EDWARD (*cheerfully*): After all, it's in a good cause. Putting the country on its feet.

TOM: My dear Edward, in the last twenty years I have put on its feet—possibly not the entire country—but certainly the whole of Wiltshire and part of Dorset.

EDWARD: We live in difficult financial times. And we're not out of the wood yet.

TOM: Why come out? Personally, I'd like to stay in it.

MAGGIE: Nice shady wood.

TOM: Full of nice shady people. . . .

EDWARD: Oh, you don't mean that. On the whole, people are pretty honest, you know. Of course, this man Sylvester, if what you say is true, he ought to be looked into.

[*Clarissa re-enters.*]

BOTH ENDS MEET

CLARISSA (*putting her arm through Edward's*): I thought we might be married at the church round the corner. I'd have a white wedding dress . . . and two pages. . . .

MAGGIE: Oh, I wouldn't. Pages are always disaster. They either stand on the bride's train, or lift it so high, the guests think they're at the Folies Bergères. (*Going to Tom.*) Tom, we won't have pages, will we?

TOM: We won't even have guests.

MAGGIE: What?

TOM: You know perfectly well we couldn't be married publicly.

MAGGIE: What do you mean?

TOM (*to Edward*): Maggie and I are both wage-earners. If we marry, our incomes are added together and we're taxed even higher. Well, you know about that.

EDWARD: Yes. Oh, yes.

TOM: But I've had an idea. (*To Maggie.*) I was going to tell you. I ran into a man I know the other day—he's now in the Merchant Navy, in a little coaling ship that sails all round Britain. But that isn't all. He's the Captain. The Captain of the ship. He could marry us without anyone knowing. Now, here's my idea. We embark at night at Tilbury. We sail for Newcastle-on-Tyne. Somewhere in the North Sea, between Tilbury and Newcastle, we are married. Nobody knows. You can move in and live here, and though the world may think what it will, we four will secretly know we're a respectable married couple. Of course, nobody must ever be told. If you're ever questioned, you must *swear* the relationship is an immoral one.

[*The other three are definitely dazed.*]

MAGGIE (*suddenly bursting out, with passion and vehemence.*)

ACT ONE

Oh, no! (*She strides about the room.*) Oh, no, no, no! Now you've reached the peaks of madness.

TOM: The laws are mad, not me. To evade mad laws, one must do mad things.

MAGGIE: I am a woman. I want to be married in church, wearing white. You say "No," because of the laws, that's to be given up. You are not going to wait in a morning coat for me to come down the aisle in white satin. No! In a coaling ship, somewhere off Clacton-on-Sea, you and I are to be brought before the Captain on stretchers. . . .

TOM: Why on stretchers?

MAGGIE: Because we're in the North Sea and are both, if you remember, very poor sailors. There, in front of the Captain, we two—miserable, sea-sick, and presumably covered in coal-dust—are to be united forever in a furtive secrecy unmatched since the marriage of Mary Queen of Scots and Lord Darnley.

[*Tom is about to speak.*]

No! You can forget that. (*With an emphatic gesture.*) No!

TOM: Well, I was only trying to. . . .

[*The front doorbell rings. Maggie goes.*]

Be careful! It might be Mr. Wilson. Oh well, what does it matter?

CLARISSA: You've put her in a rage.

TOM (*laughing*): Not really. (*To Edward.*) She's a wonderful person, Maggie. But isn't it extraordinary how conservative women are about weddings? What's the difference whether you're married wearing orange blossom or a life-belt?

[*Maggie has re-entered, followed by Jimmy Scott-Kennedy.*]

JIMMY: Hullo, Tom.

TOM: Jimmy! I didn't mean you to come all this way. . . .

JIMMY: It's all right. I was in the Knightsbridge area anyway. Fixing up a nice lucrative divorce. I telephoned the office, and they told me you'd telephoned.

TOM: Mr. Kinnerton, a friend of Clarissa's. Mr. Scott-Kennedy.

JIMMY: How d'you do? Hullo, Clarissa, my dear.

MAGGIE (*coming forward, to Tom*): Now! Now that we've got off that old coaling ship. . . .

JIMMY: What?

MAGGIE: Sit down, Jimmy. I would like to make a practical suggestion. (*To Jimmy.*) This is all to do with finance, which is the reason Tom wanted to see you! (*To Edward.*) Edward, what's your room in Ebury Street like?

EDWARD: Well—it's a room.

CLARISSA: Maggie means, is it nice. (*To Maggie.*) Not very. Rather on the dingy side.

MAGGIE: Well, here's my suggestion. Tom has this house on a long lease. I have the first floor flat, Clarissa has two rooms on the second. Now, unfortunately, Tom's terrible old stick-in-the-mud accountant insisted on including the modest rent I pay as part of Tom's income. . . .

EDWARD: Yes. Well, that's perfectly correct. . . .

MAGGIE: Correct it may be, perfect it is not.

JIMMY: Oh no, indeed. (*To Edward.*) I'm a solicitor, so I do know what I'm talking about. (*Relaxing with his drink.*) The thing to do nowadays with a house like this is to let off every bit of it you don't want to friends. Friends who just quietly pay in

ACT ONE

cash and no questions asked. Mary and I have been doing it for years.

TOM: Have you?

JIMMY: Oh—years. It's all right to talk, isn't it?

TOM: Yes, of course. We're all friends. Edward's an accountant.

EDWARD: Er. . . .

JIMMY (*to Edward*): Oh well then, I'm not telling you anything you don't know. Yes, that's the thing to do. I mean, how d'you think we manage to run a Bentley?

MAGGIE (*to Edward*): How much do you pay for your room?

EDWARD: Four guineas.

MAGGIE: Fine! (*To Tom*). We convert the attic floor. . . . (*To Edward*.) Edward gets a charming little flat and Tom gets four guineas a week free of Income Tax.

TOM: We're saved! Edward, you'd better move in at once.

EDWARD: I'm afraid it wouldn't be possible. It's very kind of you, but I think I'd better stay where I am.

MAGGIE (*astonished*): But you'll have a proper flat. A nice one.

EDWARD: Yes. I really am most grateful, but . . . well, I couldn't.

JIMMY: Look, if it's the legal side that's bothering you, do let me assure you that's perfectly all right. Scott-Kennedy and Phillips are a most upright and old-established firm of solicitors. We wouldn't go in for anything in which—er—in which there was a chance of—

EDWARD: Being found out?

JIMMY: Exactly. And I assure you, my partner, old Phillips, is doing much better than I am at this letting

BOTH ENDS MEET

racket. He's got a huge house just near here—absolutely packed with friends.

CLARISSA: Well, let's think about it.

TOM: But what's there to think about?

JIMMY: Obviously you agree there's nothing wrong in diddling the tax people?

EDWARD: I don't agree at all.

CLARISSA: Edward, let's talk about it later. . . .

TOM: You mean you think I'm wrong in offering you the flat?

EDWARD: Since you ask. . . .

CLARISSA: Edward!

EDWARD: Since you ask, yes I do. You'd get into most serious trouble if you were found out.

JIMMY: But it couldn't *be* found out. *If* by any chance any questions are asked, you're just a friend. But in point of fact, that'll never come up, because the tax people will never know, believe me.

EDWARD: I don't believe you.

JIMMY: I beg your pardon?

EDWARD: I said, I don't believe you.

CLARISSA: Edward!

TOM: Not very polite, Mr. Kinnerton, is he? I offer him a flat, free of Income Tax. . . .

JIMMY: Look here! You say you don't believe me. . . .

EDWARD: I don't.

CLARISSA: Let's go for a walk. . . .

JIMMY: You don't believe me, in spite of the fact that I've been successfully operating this racket for years. Making very nearly six hundred a year out of it.

EDWARD: How much?

JIMMY: Six hundred. And the poor old Tax Collector hasn't the least idea. Not a clue. (*To Maggie.*) Doesn't believe me.

ACT ONE

MAGGIE (*calmly*): I expect Edward thinks we're trying to palm off something rather nasty. Attic doesn't sound very attractive. But I know, when you see it. . . .

EDWARD: It isn't that at all. I'm sure it's very nice. But I can't have anything to do with an illegal arrangement.

TOM: Can't you?

EDWARD: No.

TOM: I don't know about you, Clarissa, but I'm beginning to have grave doubts about Mr. Kinner-ton.

CLARISSA (*taking Edward's arm*): I have no doubts whatever.

EDWARD (*hotly*): You have grave doubts about me, just because I won't break the law? Well, let me tell you. . . .

TOM: Let me tell you I do not like being shouted at. . . .

EDWARD (*shouting*): I am not shouting. I am simply trying to tell you. . . .

TOM (*topping him*): Grave doubts, is what I said. You want to marry Clarissa. I am her guardian, and I want her to marry a man who's likely to *get* somewhere. It seems to me that an accountant, in the modern financial world. . . .

EDWARD: But I'm not an accountant.

TOM (*after a fraction's pause*): Then why did you say you were?

CLARISSA: He didn't. I did. I misunderstood.

TOM (*to Edward*): Well, what *do* you do?

CLARISSA: Please don't let's go into that now.

EDWARD: I'm sorry, but I'd rather get things straight. . . .

CLARISSA: No!

BOTH ENDS MEET

JIMMY: What's the mystery? Are you something disreputable?

EDWARD: Not in the least. Quite the reverse.

CLARISSA: Edward—dear—listen to me. . . .

EDWARD (*very firmly*): Be quiet, Clarissa.

CLARISSA (*stunned*): *What?*

EDWARD: Be quiet.

MAGGIE: Charming!

[*Clarissa stares at him, gasps in dismay, and moves away from him.*]

TOM: Really! You arrive in my house for the first time, you shout at me, you insult my niece. I hope this will be a lesson to you, Clarissa, to think twice before picking up strange young men when you're abroad, because I can assure you I'd think a great many times before agreeing to your engagement to Mr. Kinnerton.

CLARISSA: That's unfair.

TOM: I don't like his manners, and I wish he would now go away.

[*Edward stands irresolute for a second, then swings round and is gone.*]

CLARISSA: Edward! (*She moves towards the door.*)
Edward!

TOM: I should just let him go, darling. He's a very ill-bred young man.

CLARISSA: He isn't. It's not his fault. You put him in a terrible position.

TOM: *I* put him in a terrible position? What are you talking about?

CLARISSA: Well, it was so embarrassing for him.

MAGGIE: What was?

CLARISSA (*tearful*): It's not his fault I thought he was an accountant.

ACT ONE

MAGGIE: Nobody said it was, darling. But you must agree. . . .

CLARISSA: I *don't* agree. It's . . . it's his work. . . .

TOM: Look—perhaps you would explain?

JIMMY: What *is* his work?

TOM: What *does* he do?

CLARISSA (*blowing her nose*): He works. . . .

TOM: Yes.

CLARISSA: In an office . . . of the Commissioners of Inland Revenue.

[*There is a silence.*]

TOM: What?

CLARISSA: The Commissioners of Inland Revenue.

TOM: You mean he's one of them?

CLARISSA: Yes.

[*There is a silence.*]

JIMMY: I told him about my six hundred a year.

TOM: I tried to let him a flat on the side.

MAGGIE: I told him about Sylvester. The fish and chip shops—

TOM: The barrows!

MAGGIE: His mother!

TOM (*springing at Clarissa*): You've got to get him back.

CLARISSA: Edward?

TOM: You've got to get him back!

CLARISSA (*who has dashed to the door*): If I do get him back, can I marry him?

TOM: What d'you mean, *can* you marry him? You've got to marry him.

[*Clarissa goes. Tom, Maggie and Jimmy stare at one another, then collapse into their chairs, and remain staring into space.*]

Curtain

ACT TWO

Scene I

The same day. Afternoon.

Tom stands looking out of the window. Maggie is sitting in one chair and Jimmy in another. They are all deep in thought.

TOM: What time is it?

MAGGIE: Nearly four.

TOM (*suddenly*): D'you think Clarissa's *found* Edward, but he won't come back? Why should he come back? We all insulted him. . . .

MAGGIE: *You* insulted him.

TOM: Well, I didn't mean to. . . . I was only . . . I mean, I don't see why he should take it seriously. So foolish, to go through life taking everything to heart.

MAGGIE: You ordered him out of the house. Did you expect him to treat that as a merry prank?

TOM: You keep saying, *I* did this and *I* did that.

MAGGIE: Well, you did.

TOM: I still say that he's foolish. . . .

MAGGIE: You know, you're going to work yourself into such a frenzy of nerves that the minute he appears you'll start the whole thing all over again by telling him he's a fool.

TOM: The sun's shining. Perhaps it's a sign from above—everything's going to be all right.

MAGGIE: You and your signs from above.

TOM (*putting out a cigarette*): These cigarettes taste like shredded wheat.

MAGGIE: I'm not surprised. You've smoked at least forty since lunchtime.

TOM (*intensely nervous*): You do realise, don't you,

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

we still haven't worked out any proper plan of campaign?

MAGGIE: I'm going to make some tea.

[*She goes.*]

JIMMY: We shall have to emigrate. America, that's the place.

TOM: Is it?

JIMMY: The land of the free.

TOM: Is it?

JIMMY: Well, isn't it? What's the first thing you see on arrival? The Statue of Liberty.

TOM: Yes. The next thing you see is Ellis Island. (*He thinks.*) I might become a Trappist monk. A friend of mine did it very successfully. When his creditors finally found him, somewhere near Rouen, there he was sitting at the gate, and when they asked him when he was going to pay up, he just shook his head, smiled sweetly and put his fingers to his lips. He'd taken a vow of silence. (*He frowns.*) Jimmy! What *are* we going to say to him?

JIMMY: Say to who?

TOM: To Edward.

JIMMY: I'm still worrying about what I'm going to say to old Phillips.

TOM: Old Phillips doesn't matter. . . .

JIMMY: Doesn't matter? I told your chum everything about old Phillips—about his house—and the friends—I practically gave him the address. And you say it doesn't matter?

TOM: I mean it doesn't matter *now*.

JIMMY: Have you ever seen old Phillips? Silver hair—skin like parchment—always wears a stock. The most respectable old man in the City.

TOM (*irritated*): Well, as it turns out, he's not all that

BOTH ENDS MEET

respectable, is he? A spell on Dartmoor'll do him good. Put some roses in those parchment cheeks.

JIMMY (*hurt*): Don't joke about it, old chap. I keep getting the most horrible picture. I'm looking up at him, and he's there, very frail and old, in the dock.

TOM: Where are you? Lying on the floor?

JIMMY: What?

TOM: As you'll presumably be standing next to him in the dock. . . .

JIMMY: Oh, don't.

TOM: I don't see why you should be looking up at him. I really wouldn't worry too much. He'll engage the best counsel in Britain. . . .

JIMMY: Well, that's what's worrying me. The best counsel, the only man for the job, wouldn't touch it.

TOM: Why not?

JIMMY: Because I've good reason to suppose he's operating the same racket himself.

TOM: Letting rooms?

JIMMY: Yes.

TOM: You know, from a nation of shopkeepers, we seem to have turned into a hive of landladies.

JIMMY (*suddenly*): I'm sure I ought to telephone old Phillips and warn him.

MAGGIE (*who has re-entered with a pot of tea*): You'll do nothing of the sort. Really, for sheer panic I've never known anything like you two. Now! We must, as you said, make a plan of campaign. To begin with, I think we've let ourselves get flustered and we're exaggerating the things we said in front of Edward.

JIMMY: I know I told him about my six hundred a year. I think I told him twice. Heaven knows how I'm going to explain to Mary that life's really much nicer *without* a Bentley. Later on, we'd planned to sell it and send young Jimmy to Cambridge. He was

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

going to read law. Fat chance he'll have of reading law now.

TOM: Probably just as well. You wouldn't like to think of young Jimmy turning to Chapter Five and reading all about Dad.

MAGGIE: Tom, you can't have incriminated yourself, because after all, you've never done anything wrong. . . .

TOM: I stated definitely that I intended to do wrong in the future.

JIMMY: Couldn't get you on that.

TOM: I also asked him point-blank what he considered to be the best way of getting out of paying Income Tax. You can imagine what that's going to do. I've spent at least the last ten years running breathlessly through life with the Commissioners after me like a pack of wolves. From now on, I'm going to have them all around me. Snarling and baring their teeth, until eventually they drag me to the ground and devour me.

MAGGIE: They'd never eat you *raw*. You'd have to be done overnight in a casserole—

TOM: This is no time for gruesome flights of fancy.

MAGGIE: Exactly. So perhaps you'd kindly return to the ground.

TOM: I can't think why you're so calm. You're in it up to your neck. It was you, as I remember, who asked his advice on how to cheat or swindle. And it was you who told him about Sylvester. . . .

MAGGIE: He probably didn't even take that in. To us, Sylvester is the Universe. He runs our particular world. But I doubt if Edward's ever heard of him. Look at my grandmother. She still doesn't quite know who Hitler was.

TOM: That proves nothing, except that your grandmother's dotty.

BOTH ENDS MEET

MAGGIE: Not at all. She only takes in essentials, and look how right she's been proved.

TOM: You can't get out of it like that. To a tax man, news of someone evading tax on a monumental scale *is* an essential. Well, I remember—he said something like, “if what you've said is true, Sylvester ought to be looked into”.

MAGGIE: So he ought. Terrible old crook.

TOM: Please be a little more careful what you say. We're in enough trouble. We don't want a libel action.

MAGGIE: It drives me mad, the way he gets away with everything.

TOM: You always talk as if Sylvester's a sort of cat burglar. In point of fact, he comes from quite a good family.

MAGGIE: I can see him being born, with somebody else's silver spoons in his mouth.

TOM: He's going to be delighted when he hears it was us who gave him away, isn't he? I don't see him putting our names up in red neon. I see him putting them in scarlet, at the head of a black list. (*Looking, with horror, into his teacup.*) A pair of handcuffs!

JIMMY: Where?

TOM: In my cup.

[*The telephone rings.*]

MAGGIE: Hullo? (*Into telephone.*) What? Yes. Yes, he is. (*She swings round excitedly.*) Tom! Long distance. From Geneva.

TOM: Geneva! (*He dashes towards her, then stops suddenly.*)

MAGGIE: Aunt Sophie's left you everything. I told you so.

TOM (*not moving*): Suppose it's the opposite.

MAGGIE: What?

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

TOM: I was her nearest relative.

MAGGIE (*into telephone*): Hold on a minute. (*To Tom.*) What are you talking about?

TOM: Suppose she's left debts? Suppose she left a lot of debts?

MAGGIE: Don't be ridiculous! (*She slams the receiver into his hand.*)

TOM (*distraught*): It's just the sort of thing that would happen to me. It's more than likely.

MAGGIE: Why should she have left debts? Didn't she, only last Christmas, send you six bottles of champagne?

TOM: Yes. Now she's probably died and left me the bill. (*Into telephone.*) Hullo? *Allo? J'écoute. Je ne quitte pas.* (*To Maggie.*) Suppose I'm responsible for everything. How do I know? I'm not going to risk. . . . (*Into telephone.*) *Allo? Non! Monsieur Davenport n'est pas là. Il est parti.*

MAGGIE (*to Jimmy*): What did he say?

JIMMY: He's gone out.

MAGGIE: But I want to know what it's about.

TOM: I don't *want* to know. Once they get hold of me. . . .

JIMMY: Tell them to get on to the office, they can deal with it.

TOM: Good idea. (*Into telephone.*) *Ecoutez. Voulez vous téléphoner—er—numéro—*

JIMMY: City double one, double one.

TOM: *Cité—Un, Un, Un, Un. . . . Was?* (*To Maggie.*) She's talking German—(*Into telephone.*) *Haben sie gut. . . ?* Oh, are you English—I beg your pardon. Will you put this call through to City double one, double one?

JIMMY: Ask for Mr. Phillips.

TOM: Ask for Mr. Phillips. Thank you. (*He replaces the receiver.*)

BOTH ENDS MEET

MAGGIE (*infuriated*): How ridiculous!

[*Tom and Maggie speak together.*]

I've never heard anything so cowardly and idiotic. There really are times when I think you're not quite right in the head. . . . (*etc.*)

TOM (*with Maggie*): It isn't ridiculous. If you'd just stop and think you'd realise I'm right. Once they've got hold of me. . . . (*etc.*)

[*Jimmy laughs.*]

TOM: What are you laughing at?

JIMMY: You two. Maggie thinks it's good news—you don't. In point of fact, you're both wrong.

TOM: How do you know?

JIMMY: It's my business to know these things. Sorry to disappoint you, Maggie, but if it were anything important, Tom would have heard days ago. (*Indicating the telephone.*) That was probably to tell you about some small bequest.

MAGGIE: You can't *know* that.

JIMMY: Pardon me, but I can. You'll find she's left you—possibly a few books—or some linen . . . or perhaps some small piece of china. (*Seriously.*) Of course it is just possible there may be funeral expenses.

MAGGIE: Jimmy, couldn't it *possibly* be something exciting?

JIMMY: I'm afraid not.

MAGGIE (*dashed*): Oh! (*She sighs.*) Oh well!

[*The bell rings.*]

JIMMY: I'll go.

TOM: If it's a man called Wilson, I'm out.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

MAGGIE (*musings*): It'd be rather nice if she had left you some linen. Very useful.

TOM: You may be sure it's the funeral expenses.

JIMMY (*off stage*): Oh hullo, my dear fellow. Come in.

TOM (*to Maggie*): Who is it?

EDWARD (*off*): No, I won't come in, thank you.

TOM: }
MAGGIE: } It's Edward!

[*They leap into activity.*]

MAGGIE: Well, go on. Go and get him.

TOM (*in a hoarse whisper*): No, *you* go. Much better,

[*Maggie is irritated by Tom but decides there is no time to lose, and goes to the door.*]

MAGGIE: Edward! How lovely. Do come in.

EDWARD (*off*): No, I won't do that.

MAGGIE: But of course you must.

[*She disappears, but is heard off.*]

I never heard of such a thing. Standing at the front door.

[*Jimmy, who has re-appeared in the doorway, enters.*]

JIMMY: It's your chum. What are you doing?

TOM: Looking at the "Good Thoughts" calendar for guidance.

JIMMY: What does it say?

TOM (*reading*): "Pray to Heaven in the storm, but keep on rowing."

JIMMY: Trouble is, I can't row.

[*Maggie sweeps in, with Edward.*]

BOTH ENDS MEET

TOM: Hullo, Edward.

[*Maggie, Tom and Jimmy are inclined to be a little over-effusive.*]

MAGGIE (*to Edward*): We were just talking about you.

EDWARD: Really?

MAGGIE: Weren't we, Tom?

TOM (*with a nervous laugh*): Yes.

MAGGIE: Well, this *is* nice.

EDWARD (*stiffly*): I only came to see if Clarissa was here. I didn't mean to intrude. . . .

TOM: Good heavens, you're not intruding. As far as I'm concerned, this is your house. (*He stops; he thinks, and is embarrassed*). Er . . . I'm not referring to any of that silly nonsense about the attic floor, of course.

MAGGIE: That was just *my* foolish chatter. There's never really been any question of making the attics into a flat. As a matter of fact, one *couldn't*. Sit down and have some tea.

TOM: Come along. Put your feet up. Relax.

EDWARD (*who hasn't moved*): Er. . . .

TOM: What's the matter?

EDWARD: Well, the last time I was here you told me to leave. Now you're asking me to come in, put my feet up and relax. . . .

TOM (*improvising gaily*): That's life, isn't it? The mood changes—

MAGGIE: It's his profession, Edward. They're all half mad.

TOM (*annoyed*): There's no need to go *too* far, Maggie. We don't want Edward going round talking about his half-mad uncle.

[*Edward has come into the room. Tom hands him the cup*]

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

of tea which Maggie has poured, and Jimmy holds out a sugar basin.]

JIMMY: Sugar?

TOM (*to Edward*): Have a scone. Maggie made them.

EDWARD: Real ones.

MAGGIE: I was born in Edinburgh.

EDWARD: Really? I had a Scots Nannie.

MAGGIE: {Oh how interesting.

JIMMY: {Oh really?

EDWARD: My first five years were all oat cakes and Old Testament. That's probably why. . . . (*He stops.*)

TOM: Why what?

EDWARD: Oh, nothing really. Well . . . Clarissa told me in Stockholm that I sometimes seem rather hide-bound. A sort of John Knox.

JIMMY: John Knox?

TOM: Wasn't he always . . . (*he looks at Maggie*) . . . denouncing everyone?

MAGGIE (*smoothly*): That's right.

TOM (*to Edward*): But I'm sure you don't go around . . . denouncing people?

EDWARD: I don't think so.

TOM (*relieved*): Of course you don't.

EDWARD: But then, one never knows about oneself, does one?

JIMMY (*immensely uncomfortable*): Look! I wanted to have a word with you . . . er . . . Well, it's really about that ridiculous over-statement I made. I don't know whether you remember?

EDWARD: What about?

JIMMY: Well, I think I said something about making three hundred a year out of letting. . . .

EDWARD: Six hundred.

JIMMY: What?

BOTH ENDS MEET

EDWARD: You said six hundred.

JIMMY: Oh, you . . . do remember?

EDWARD: Yes.

JIMMY: Well, I just thought I ought to explain what a terrible old romancer I am. I mean, these two know me. Don't you?

TOM (*to Edward*): Jimmy is, to put it mildly, the bald-faced liar of all time.

JIMMY (*eagerly*): Oh, thank you, Tom—thank you. Yes, I am. I really am. You see, I had an Italian grandfather. That's where I get this tendency to exaggerate. To look at me, I don't expect you'd think I had Latin blood, but if you were to meet me in Rome, you wouldn't know me.

MAGGIE: As I remember, we met you in Venice and you didn't know us.

[*Jimmy frowns at her.*]

Was that your Latin blood? Or the fact that neither of the ladies at whom you were throwing flowers happened to be your wife?

JIMMY: There you are! Throwing flowers at ladies. I'd never do that in St. James' Street.

TOM: I should hope not. What would old Phillips say?

JIMMY (*to Edward*): The point I'm trying to make is this. I've got this streak in me, and I get carried away and tell the most fantastic stories. . . . Well, Mary would tell you. Mary's my wife. You must come and dine with us one night soon—we've got a magnificent French cook, and I really have got a good cellar. You'll love Mary and she'll adore you. Wonderful girl, Mary. When she wants to, she can charm the birds from the trees. Twist you round her little finger. . . . (*He stops suddenly.*) I mean, not

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

that I want her to twist *you* round her little finger.
. . . Er. . . . Why should I? Er. . . .

MAGGIE: Some more tea, Edward?

EDWARD: Thank you.

[*As Edward goes, Tom gives Jimmy a warning look.*]

TOM: Do you ever row, Edward?

EDWARD: Row? No, I don't.

TOM: Jimmy's very fond of rowing, aren't you?

JIMMY: Er—yes.

[*Edward is occupied at the tea-table.*]

TOM (*smoothly*): But do you know something? I think you row too fast.

JIMMY (*with a glance at Edward's back*): Oh—really?

TOM: A slower, smoother stroke might achieve rather more, I think.

JIMMY: I'll bear it in mind.

EDWARD (*turning back*): Where do you row?

JIMMY: On the Serpentine.

TOM: Every morning he goes skimming past.

EDWARD: I've always wanted to learn.

TOM: Get Jimmy to teach you.

[*Jimmy gives Tom a black look, and turns to Edward.*]

JIMMY: Well, you see—I—er . . . to be frank, I *don't* row all that well. There I go again. Exaggerating. The trouble is—I *want* to do something, my imagination runs away with me, and in five minutes I think I've done it. I mean, it's like my saying I make an income out of letting part of my house.

[*Jimmy laughs jovially, but getting no response from Edward, the laugh dies away.*]

BOTH ENDS MEET

TOM (*lightly*): Well, we're all inclined to exaggerate. Take Maggie, for instance, saying all those things about Sylvester. (*To Edward.*) I don't suppose you took in what she said. . . .

EDWARD: Oh, yes I did.

TOM (*dashed*): Oh! But the name Sylvester wouldn't mean anything to you. . . .

EDWARD: Oh yes. Our department handles Sylvester's assessments.

TOM: Oh!

MAGGIE (*fanning herself*): Warm, isn't it?

[*There is a slight pause.*]

EDWARD: Is Clarissa shopping, or. . . .

MAGGIE: No. She went round to Ebury Street to see if she could find you.

EDWARD: Oh, I see. I haven't been back there. I went for a walk, to think things over—and then I went straight to the office.

[*There is a pause.*]

MAGGIE (*faintly*): The office?

EDWARD: Yes.

MAGGIE: But . . . Clarissa said you didn't have to go back for a couple of days.

EDWARD: I don't. I just looked in to see if there was any mail. And to make a few notes.

[*There is a pause.*]

MAGGIE (*faintly*): Notes?

EDWARD: Yes.

MAGGIE (*forcing a smile*): A shopping list—or something of that sort?

EDWARD: No. (*Uncomfortably.*) Notes about the

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

things I'd been thinking over . . . when I went for a walk.

JIMMY (*apprehensive, but smiling*): Some personal problem?

EDWARD: In a way, yes.

TOM: Anything . . . we three could help you with?

EDWARD: Well . . . it concerns you.

MAGGIE: Us?

EDWARD (*bursting out*): I'm in the most awful fix, you know. I've heard a lot of things I shouldn't have heard. Oh, I know I should have spoken up, and told you about myself, but. . . .

TOM: My dear Edward, we absolutely understand why you didn't. Just forget it all happened.

JIMMY: Absolutely.

MAGGIE: That's the solution, Edward. Forget it all—and let's start again.

JIMMY: Of course.

MAGGIE (*delighted*): Now—it's all forgotten. . . .

EDWARD: But it isn't.

MAGGIE (*stopping*): What?

EDWARD: I want to marry Clarissa. . . .

TOM: But of course you do. You want to marry Clarissa, and she wants to marry you—we're delighted.

MAGGIE: } Delighted!
JIMMY: }

TOM: And everything's forgotten.

EDWARD: Oh, now wait a minute. (*With a slight smile, gently.*) I'm not an absolute ass.

TOM: Of course you're not.

EDWARD: I couldn't marry Clarissa on condition I forgot what I'd heard. . . .

MAGGIE: But that was just gossip. Airy gossip.

EDWARD: Then you wouldn't mind some investigation?

BOTH ENDS MEET

MAGGIE: No! (*Suddenly flustered.*) What?

EDWARD: Sylvester, for instance?

MAGGIE (*hotly*): I think it'd be most unfair. And rather sly. Just because you overhear something.

. . .

EDWARD (*worried*): Yes, I know. That's what I was trying to puzzle out, on my walk.

MAGGIE: Well, you'd better go for another walk, and puzzle some more.

JIMMY: }
TOM: } Maggie!

EDWARD: No, no. You're perfectly right to be annoyed. Let me say here and now, I sympathise with all your problems. I mean, the financial ones. But you see, I'm like a man being torn in half. (*Abashed by this statement, he looks at Maggie.*) Clarissa says I'm neurotic.

TOM: Oh, are you? I *am* glad.

EDWARD: I don't want to make any trouble for any of you, but if I just wash the whole thing out and pretend to forget, I *am* neglecting my duty. (*He thinks.*) There is such a thing as the letter of the law. (*Worried and perplexed.*) You know, for two pins I'd give the whole job up.

TOM { (*leaping on this*): Do you know, that might be an excellent solution. . . .

JIMMY: { Very good idea.

MAGGIE: { Wonderful.

EDWARD: But then I couldn't marry Clarissa. I'd be out of work. And I haven't any capital.

TOM: Capital. What a pretty word. I don't think it's ever been used in this house before.

MAGGIE: Edward, d'you know what I think? I think it's your *duty* to forget anything you may have heard.

EDWARD: My duty?

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

MAGGIE: Definitely. It's never wise to follow the letter of the law, because the law, as we know, is an ass.

JIMMY: I say! Just a minute. . . .

MAGGIE (*to Jimmy*): I'll prove it to you. If I go out and throw a brick through a window, I've broken the law.

EDWARD: Yes.

MAGGIE: I've broken a rule which has been made by men of the law?

EDWARD: Yes.

MAGGIE (*to Edward*): This morning, if you remember, Jimmy arrived saying he'd been in Knightsbridge arranging a nice lucrative divorce.

JIMMY: Well?

MAGGIE: So you see, Edward, there's the situation. The law will be angry if you break the rules it has made here on earth. *But* . . . the law will happily accept a large fee to assist at the breaking of a marriage, which—we are told—has been made in heaven.

EDWARD: Yes.

MAGGIE: Surely, one's duty shouldn't be dictated by such an earthly and dubious authority?

JIMMY: Now, just a minute. . . .

[*Tom pulls him quickly back.*]

TOM: Maggie's absolutely right. Admit it.

JIMMY: But if I do, I'm calling myself a. . . .

TOM: Never mind what you're calling yourself. Pretend there's no one listening. That you and I are out together rowing—*rowing*, Jimmy, on the Serpentine—wouldn't you admit that the law is an ass?

JIMMY (*having got the idea*): Oh, *yes*. Absolutely.

TOM (*to Edward*): There you are. Straight from the ass's mouth.

BOTH ENDS MEET

EDWARD (*to Maggie*): I suppose I seem silly to have worried about it all, but. . . .

MAGGIE: Not at all. You're a conscientious young man. Nothing wrong with that.

EDWARD: There are arguments both ways, of course, but I think you're probably right.

TOM (*happily*): Well, that's settled. Now all you have to do is tear up your notes.

EDWARD: My what?

TOM: You said you made some notes. (*Gaily.*) Don't want them lying around, making unnecessary trouble.

EDWARD: Oh, yes. (*He has put his hand in his pocket.*) Oh!

TOM: What?

EDWARD: I must have left them on my desk.

JIMMY (*alarmed*): In your office?

EDWARD: It's all right. They're in a personal file. Nobody would look at them.

TOM: Oh well, that's a relief.

JIMMY: You're sure it'll be all right?

EDWARD: Oh yes, perfectly.

MAGGIE: Well, I'll make us all some fresh tea.

[*Clarissa enters.*]

CLARISSA: There you are! I've been sitting waiting.

. . .

EDWARD: I'm sorry. I had no idea. . . .

CLARISSA: Well, you're here, anyway. That's something.

MAGGIE: Everything's cleared up, finished and forgotten, and we're all the best of friends.

TOM: The best of friends.

CLARISSA (*with edge*): Oh! are we? (*Ignoring Tom.*) Edward, I have something I've been wanting to ask you. What did you mean this morning when you said, "Be quiet."

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

EDWARD: Obviously, I was asking you to stop talking.

CLARISSA: Are you liable to be addressing me in that sort of tone very much? Because if so, I don't see our future together being very happy, do you?

[*Maggie and Tom have exchanged a sharp look.*]

MAGGIE: Clarissa!

JIMMY: She's tired.

CLARISSA: I'm not in the least tired.

TOM (*quickly, taking Edward's arm and walking him away*): Edward, I don't know what time your office closes, but d'you think it's wise to leave those notes lying around? You never know—just suppose someone saw Sylvester's name. . . .

CLARISSA: What notes?

TOM (*ignoring her*): As you say your office does his assessments. . . .

CLARISSA (*at Edward*): D'you mean you actually made notes about what you heard here?

EDWARD (*angry*): Yes, I did.

CLARISSA: Well, that's the limit! That's the absolute limit! And you expect me to marry a man who. . . .

EDWARD: You don't have to marry me if you don't want to.

JIMMY: Of course she'll marry you.

TOM: Of course.

MAGGIE (*seeing Clarissa about to speak*): Have a scone?

CLARISSA: Of all the dirty tricks. (*To Edward.*) I think you'd better go.

[*She goes into the garden.*]

EDWARD: Thanks very much!

[*Edward moves to the door.*]

BOTH ENDS MEET

TOM (*bringing him back*): She doesn't mean it. She really is a very sweet girl.

[*Tom directs Edward into the garden.*]

I could kill her.

[*The telephone rings.*]

MAGGIE (*answering—distraught*): Hullo? (*To Jimmy.*) It's for you.

[*Jimmy goes to the telephone.*]

TOM: We get the whole thing settled and she has to come in and be disagreeable. He'll be walking out on us again if we're not careful.

JIMMY (*into telephone*): What? *What?* (*Turning.*) It's old Phillips. But . . . but . . . *what?*

TOM (*apprehensive*): What is it?

JIMMY (*into telephone*): Are you sure?

MAGGIE: Jimmy—what is it?

JIMMY: Before I tell him, are you dead sure? Positive.

TOM: Jimmy, will you please tell me.

JIMMY: It's your Aunt Sophie.

TOM: Yes?

JIMMY: She's left you everything.

TOM (*exasperated*): Well, what *is* everything? Is it linen, or an old china dog?

JIMMY: It's a hundred and twenty thousand pounds.

TOM (*faintly*): What?

JIMMY: She has left you a hundred and twenty thousand pounds.

TOM: You're sure?

JIMMY: Yes.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

TOM: *Quite* sure?

JIMMY: The Geneva call was from her solicitors. There's no doubt whatever.

TOM: Maggie!

MAGGIE: Darling!

TOM: We're rich!

MAGGIE: We're rich!

TOM: Think of a thousand pounds, think of it a hundred and twenty times.

MAGGIE: I feel faint.

TOM: So do I.

[*Maggie and Tom stand transfixed, hand in hand, looking at each other.*]

JIMMY: There'll be death duties.

TOM (*entranced*): There'll be parties. There'll be magnums for Maggie, and satin and tiaras to put on her head. Cars for Clarissa, cigars for Edward . . . and cheques for the Commissioners of Inland Revenue. We don't have to worry. We don't ever have to worry again.

[*Maggie, who has been getting more and more tearful, suddenly bursts into tears.*]

What's the matter?

MAGGIE: I don't know. (*In floods of tears.*) I can't think why I'm being so silly.

TOM: We can be married, Maggie. We can *all* be married. You can marry me, Edward can marry Clarissa, Jimmy can marry Mary. . . .

JIMMY: I've married her once. . . .

TOM: Well, marry her again. (*Kneeling beside Maggie.*) Darling, are you all right?

MAGGIE: Yes. It's just that. . . .

BOTH ENDS MEET

TOM (*looking at his watch*): Listen! It's just four o'clock. We can do something we've always wanted to do. Go on a shopping expedition to end shopping expeditions. (*Suddenly.*) Jimmy, you are sure?

JIMMY: Positive.

TOM: It couldn't be a mistake? You said we'd have heard.

JIMMY: I was wrong. You, Tom Davenport, have been left one hundred and twenty thousand pounds.

TOM (*to Maggie*): Jimmy will drive us. You'll drive us, won't you? We can buy anything. Nothing is barred. Anyone can have anything they want.

JIMMY: Can I have a new Bentley?

TOM: You can have two.

CLARISSA (*re-entering from the gardens*): You make me want to scream.

[*She goes straight to the door and goes.*]

EDWARD: And you make me want to scream.

[*Tom, Maggie and Jimmy let out a yell. Edward gives them one stunned look—and makes a hasty exit.*]

TOM: I'm going to put on a jacket. I'll be one minute. Jimmy, start up the car.

[*Jimmy goes.*]

What d'you want first?

MAGGIE: Something simple.

TOM: Mink?

[*She shakes her head.*]

Sables?

[*She shakes her head.*]

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

I know. We were looking at it last week. You said, "What I like about it is that, in spite of everything, it's simple". In Bond Street.

MAGGIE: Oh, *darling!* The ring! You don't mean . . . the *ring*?

TOM: "And I said, If I were rich, I'd buy it for you".

MAGGIE: But I couldn't. I've got nothing to wear *with* it.

TOM: You will have, darling. (*He kisses her lightly.*) You will have. Silks, satins, laces, furs, diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, rubies, foie gras, caviare, champagne. . . .

MAGGIE: All the simple things of life.

TOM (*suddenly*): It can't be true, can it? There'll be some horrible snag.

MAGGIE: Why should there be?

TOM: You know how it is with me and money. There's bound to be trouble. There always is.

MAGGIE: Tom, *darling*.

TOM: There'll be something. The telephone will ring. The telephone will ring and there'll be *something*.

[*There is a slight pause.*]

MAGGIE: There you are. The telephone hasn't rung. Let that be a sign from above that everything's going to be perfect.

TOM: Oh, Maggie, darling, you're right. Of course you're right. Everything's wonderful, everything's rosy. Not the smallest cloud in the sky.

JIMMY (*off*): Come on, you two.

TOM (*to Maggie*): Forward—to Bond Street.

MAGGIE: To Bond Street.

[*They go in high spirits. There is a door slam. The telephone begins to ring.*]

Curtain.

Scene 2

The same. About six-thirty the same evening.

Clarissa is in Edward's arms.

CLARISSA (*after a second, drawing away and contemplating him*): You know—you're not really at all pompous—or for that matter, reserved.

[*They smile at each other, and he puts his arm around her again.*]

The real person is the gay, charming Edward I met in Rome. So what's this strange creature that's suddenly appeared in London?

EDWARD: My official self. You can blame that on my job.

CLARISSA: You can't let a job turn you into something you're not. I'd give it up, if I were you. Any way, you don't like it. You said so.

EDWARD: Mm!

[*He kisses her.*]

I've had a row with my boss. Murgatroyd.

CLARISSA: When?

EDWARD: After I left here. I went back to the office—I found a file missing—the one I'd put the notes in about Sylvester. I went into Murgatroyd's office about something else and there was my private and personal file lying open on his desk. So I spoke out!

CLARISSA (*fascinated*): What did you say?

EDWARD: Oh, that he had no right to snoop about in my personal papers.

CLARISSA: D'you think he'll do anything?

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

EDWARD: He can't. The things I'd jotted down couldn't mean anything unless you knew the rest of it. That's what annoyed him. He felt I knew something I wasn't telling him.

CLARISSA: You won't, will you?

EDWARD: Darling, I've racked my brains, and they're fairly simple brains, with rather cut and dried ideas about right and wrong.

CLARISSA: That's all right.

EDWARD: If I stayed on there, I'd have to say something.

CLARISSA: But you're not going to stay on? Oh, Edward, please don't. You haven't got the temperament for a job like that. Start again, in something you like.

EDWARD: But what about us? We want to get married, and I don't want to have to wait till I'm about thirty—and half unable to get around.

CLARISSA: Well, now that Uncle Tom's as rich as Croesus. . . .

EDWARD: Oh no, none of that. Was that him and Maggie thumping about upstairs?

CLARISSA: Yes. They came back from a wild bout of shopping . . . (*indicates piles of parcels*) . . . all this . . . (*picking up a painting*) . . . and a Dufy . . . and rushed upstairs like a couple of mad children.

EDWARD (*confidentially*): His generation is, rather. don't you think?

CLARISSA: Rather what?

EDWARD: Childish.

CLARISSA (*agreeing*): Mm!

TOM (*off-stage*): Clarissa! Clarissa!

CLARISSA: Here I am.

TOM (*entering*): Ah! (*Brandishing a mink tie.*) Your present.

CLARISSA: Oh, Uncle Tom!

TOM (*seeing Edward*): Oh, hullo! You're back.

CLARISSA: Back for good.

TOM: I'm glad to hear that. (*Picking up the painting, and looking for a place to hang it.*) Maggie and I had a serious conversation about you, and came to the conclusion that you were both rather childish.

CLARISSA (*having looked at Edward*): We'll try not to be in future. Darling, this is lovely.

TOM: Edward, we bought you a suitcase.

EDWARD (*startled*): Oh! How very nice.

TOM: I don't quite know why we bought you a suitcase. Possibly because you keep going away and coming back.

EDWARD (*overcome*): It's wonderful.

TOM: The rule was that everyone had to have something, and it had to be expensive. I have no intention of celebrating in a simple and austere manner. Flashy vulgarity is to be the keynote of the next few days.

EDWARD: This is wonderful—it's got all sorts of bottles and brushes. I shall have to go and stay at some very grand, stately home.

TOM: It has a strong lock. You might leave with the fittings intact. Maggie!

MAGGIE (*off-stage*): Just a second.

TOM: I practically had to force things on Maggie. There we were, in one of the most famous jeweller's shops in the world, and this diamond necklace was too big and that was too clumsy—Maggie!

MAGGIE (*entering*): Here I am. (*She is in evening dress.*)

CLARISSA: Oh! I thought you were going to be from head to foot in sequins.

MAGGIE: No, no. It's so silly to waste money on non-essentials. I keep telling Tom, we must retain

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

our basic simplicity. (*As she speaks, she brings her left hand round, and poises it lightly on her shoulder. She is wearing a magnificent diamond ring.*)

CLARISSA (*gasping*): Maggie! Is that real?

MAGGIE: Just something Tom wanted me to have. Foolish boy.

CLARISSA: But it's—it's magnificent.

MAGGIE: Isn't it? And it's going back tomorrow.

TOM: Now, Maggie. . . .

MAGGIE: Tom dear, it's sweet and wonderful of you to want me to have it, but I really couldn't. Really. I thought I'd have it just for this evening. It's like the tiaras. (*To Edward and Clarissa.*) He seriously wanted me to have a tiara.

TOM: Why not?

MAGGIE: When on earth would I wear it?

TOM: You looked wonderful *in* it. What's the matter with looking wonderful round the home?

MAGGIE: In a tiara? Doing the washing up?

TOM: You keep forgetting, you won't have to do the washing up. There will be servants.

MAGGIE: If you think that means I won't still have to do the washing up, you're very out of touch.

CLARISSA: Uncle Tom, I've had an idea about Edward.

EDWARD: What?

CLARISSA (*to Tom*): He wants to give up his job. . . .

EDWARD: Well, now. . . .

CLARISSA: He wants to, but then of course he'll be out of work. (*To Edward.*) You said you'd like to be an accountant.

EDWARD: But that takes ages. . . .

CLARISSA: But it is what you'd really like. So Uncle Tom, would you finance Edward during whatever period. . . . ?

EDWARD: I say, just a minute. . . .

BOTH ENDS MEET

TOM: But that's a wonderful idea. Don't you agree, Maggie? Eventually we *would* have a financial adviser in the family—and one who understands the ins and outs of those curious minds.

CLARISSA: Edward?

EDWARD: Well, of course, it'd be wonderful. What I really want.

TOM: That's fine. Everybody is to have what they want. What else is the use of money?

CLARISSA: Had you any idea Great Aunt Sophie was so rich?

TOM: None.

CLARISSA: Did you know her well?

TOM: I only met her once. In the 'twenties. I was still at school. My father took me to see her in Paris.

MAGGIE: What was she like?

TOM: I remember her as a magical sort of person. Very beautiful, very gentle—she had the most graceful manners. I loved her. I didn't understand half she said—she talked about Proust—apparently she knew him well, and there was something about the real Duchesse de Guermantes having been to tea the day before—it all sounded too wonderful for words. (*He laughs.*) And she was surprising.

MAGGIE: In what way?

TOM: She suddenly turned to me and said, "Tell me, Tom. What is your opinion of love?"

MAGGIE: How old were you?

TOM: Seventeen.

MAGGIE: What did you say? Or don't you remember?

TOM: I remember exactly. I said, "I think if we completely understood the nature of love we would understand the whole Universe."

MAGGIE: At seventeen?

TOM: I was very serious. And in love.

MAGGIE: Who with?

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

TOM: My housemaster's wife.

MAGGIE: Tom! Are we in the presence of Old Woodley?

[*The door bell rings.*]

CLARISSA: I'll go.

EDWARD: It's wonderfully generous of you to offer to finance me. I don't know what I can ever do to repay you.

TOM: You can reveal all your office secrets.

EDWARD: I'd better be going. I'm taking Clarissa to dinner.

[*Conversation heard off.*]

MAGGIE: Who is it?

TOM: I don't know.

[*Clarissa re-enters.*]

CLARISSA: Sir George Treherne.

[*Sir George enters.*]

SIR GEORGE: Good evening. I hope you'll forgive this intrusion. You are Mr. Davenport?

TOM: Yes.

SIR GEORGE: I am an old friend of your Aunt Sophie.

TOM: Oh, how very nice.

SIR GEORGE: I'm only in London for a few days, so I took the liberty of calling on you.

TOM: I'm delighted you did. This is Miss Ross.

MAGGIE: How d'you do?

TOM: Mr. Kinnerton.

BOTH ENDS MEET

SIR GEORGE (*to Edward*): I hope I'm not driving you away.

EDWARD: No, no. We were on our way.

[*Edward goes.*]

CLARISSA: Will you excuse me, Sir George?

TOM: Won't you sit down, Sir George?

CLARISSA (*in the hall*): Edward, would you get a taxi. . . ? I shan't be a moment.

[*Clarissa goes upstairs.*]

TOM (*closing the door*): Will you have a drink, Sir George? There's some champagne. It was a present from Aunt Sophie.

SIR GEORGE: Oh! From Sophie. How fascinating.

TOM: We'll drink to Aunt Sophie.

SIR GEORGE: Yes, indeed. To dear Sophie. Radiant—unforgettable—

TOM: And so magnificently and wonderfully generous.

SIR GEORGE: Dear Sophie. I was greatly saddened to hear the news. I had occasion to telephone Geneva. I spoke to her solicitors—what's their name?

TOM: I'm afraid I don't know.

SIR GEORGE: Oh. They haven't been in touch with you?

TOM: Not personally.

SIR GEORGE: Oh. Then you don't know the terms of the will. I telephoned you earlier. . . .

TOM: Is there some trouble?

SIR GEORGE: Oh no. No. Good heavens, no. It's just that dear Sophie has been kind enough to mention me. How does she put it? "I trust my nephew will give to my old friend Sir George

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

Treherne some remembrance of young, happy days.”
TOM (*relieved*): Well, of course! I'll be only too pleased.

MAGGIE: Tom will find you something personal of hers. Some books. . . .

TOM: Or a piece of china.

SIR GEORGE: I don't think that's quite what she meant.

TOM: Well, you must tell us quite frankly exactly what you would like.

SIR GEORGE: Oh, how kind of you. (*He gives Tom a sharp look.*) I have come here on a delicate mission.

MAGGIE: Delicate mission?

SIR GEORGE: Delicate mission, that's what we used to call it. I was in the Diplomatic Service—attaché in Paris and so on—that's where I first met Sophie. She was living in the most unpleasant little flat. . . . Shortly afterwards she moved to a delightful house just off the Champs Elysées.

TOM: What happened between the unpleasant flat and the delightful house?

SIR GEORGE: Sophie and I met on the stairs of the Embassy, at a reception.

TOM: Yes?

SIR GEORGE: That's all.

TOM (*smiling*): It hardly explains the move, does it? One's fortunes don't change, just because you meet someone on a staircase.

SIR GEORGE: Depends who you meet.

TOM: I beg your pardon?

SIR GEORGE: I was an extremely wealthy young man.

TOM: Are you telling me that Aunt Sophie met you on a staircase and because you were a wealthy young man. . . ?

SIR GEORGE: No, no. We fell instantly and completely head over heels in love.

BOTH ENDS MEET

TOM: And you set her up in the delightful house?

SIR GEORGE: Naturally.

TOM: The whole thing was done openly.

SIR GEORGE: The whole thing was done quietly. I was in the Diplomatic.

TOM: I presume your delicate mission is to tell me that the hundred and twenty thousand really belongs to you?

SIR GEORGE: Good heavens, no.

MAGGIE: Well, that's a relief!

SIR GEORGE: I wish it did. No, I only once gave Sophie . . . a little something. I can't conceal from you that it *would* be nice if—it's a delicate matter—if you could see your way—how shall I put it. . . ?

TOM: To return the little something.

[*Sir George closes his eyes, and bows slightly.*]

TOM: How much was it?

SIR GEORGE: Ten thousand pounds.

[*Clarissa opens the door.*]

CLARISSA: Well, darlings. Have a jolly evening.

TOM: What?

CLARISSA (*taking her handbag*): I said, have a jolly evening.

TOM: Yes, dear!

CLARISSA: Don't spend all your money.

TOM: No dear!

[*Clarissa exits.*]

I don't understand. If you only gave Aunt Sophie ten thousand, where did the other hundred and ten come from?

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

SIR GEORGE: Well, I think it's plain that she did invest her money wisely. She had a great friend on the Paris Bourse, another who was a banker, another in the champagne business. They would have given her excellent advice.

TOM: Nothing more?

SIR GEORGE: Mm?

TOM: No more ten thousands?

SIR GEORGE: Good heavens, no! I was the only man your aunt ever cared tuppence for.

[*Clarissa re-enters.*]

CLARISSA: Another old friend of Aunt Sophie's. Lord Minster.

[*Lord Minster enters.*]

LORD MINSTER: I do hope I'm not intruding, but I felt as I was dining nearby I must look in for one second and say. . . . (*Sees Sir George.*) George!

SIR GEORGE: Dickie.

LORD MINSTER: I had no idea you were in London. What a very pleasant surprise. Of course, you would be here, wouldn't you? Such sad news about Sophie. (*To Tom.*) We all knew one another in Paris, at the Embassy. Good old George. A few years older, but still able to get about, eh?

SIR GEORGE (*irritably*): Really, Dickie. That juvenile manner ill becomes a man well over sixty.

LORD MINSTER: I'm sorry, George, but I just grow younger every year.

SIR GEORGE: You're going to be most embarrassing at eighty.

LORD MINSTER: As grumpy as ever. You must

BOTH ENDS MEET

come and dine—I'm on my way to Vickie Hol-
lander's. . . .

SIR GEORGE: Oh lord. Are you going there too?

LORD MINSTER: Oh, good. I'll give you a lift. I've
got the car outside. Just felt I had to stop and say
how d'you do to Sophie's nephew. (*To Tom.*) I
say, I had no idea she had so much money. Where
did she get it?

TOM: Early in life, she made a very good investment.

LORD MINSTER: On the Market?

TOM: On a staircase.

SIR GEORGE: Dickie, you go along. I'll follow.

LORD MINSTER: No, no. I'll take you.

SIR GEORGE (*irritably*): But I don't want to be taken.

LORD MINSTER (*laughing*): You can be tetchy, but not
half as tetchy as Vickie will be if we're a minute late.
Now, come along.

SIR GEORGE (*to Tom*): I shall have to telephone you
in the morning. Perhaps in the meantime you will
give the matter some thought? I wish you a very
good evening. Come along, Dickie.

[*Sir George goes.*]

LORD MINSTER (*to Tom*): So very nice to have met
you. Do forgive my arriving unannounced, but I
read the news in the evening papers, and there was
your address—(*Looks quickly over his shoulder towards
the door.*) Wonder if I could see you tomorrow? I
didn't expect to find *him* here. It's just a . . . very
small financial matter. A little gift I once made
Sophie.

TOM (*stony*): How much?

LORD MINSTER: Five thousand.

SIR GEORGE (*re-appearing in the doorway*): Well,
really! You bustle me out of the place. . . .

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

LORD MINSTER: Just coming, my dear fellow.

[*Going, as Sir George again disappears.*]

(*He turns and whispers.*) Tomorrow morning.

[*Lord Minster exits.*]

[*Tom and Maggie look at one another.*]

TOM: Ten thousand. Five thousand. (*He shrugs.*) Presumably she met Lord Minster during the sales.

MAGGIE: Now, Tom, whatever happens, don't let it worry you.

TOM: Worry me? Fifteen thousand gone in ten minutes. And what about the rest? All the other gentlemen?

MAGGIE: We don't know there were any others.,

TOM: A hundred and five thousand left. That could mean at least another twenty applicants on their way.

MAGGIE: Sir George said he was the only man in her life. . . .

TOM: He said, the only man she cared tuppence for. There are a lot of tuppences in a hundred and twenty thousand. A friend on the Bourse, another who was a banker—another in the champagne business. And that's only Paris. There are plenty more cities in Europe, and Aunt Sophie was a great traveller.

MAGGIE: Tom! You must keep calm. . . .

TOM: Calm? How can I keep calm? D'you think it's nice to be told your gracious, charming aunt was in point of fact a sort of old Madame Zaza?

[*Tom puts out his hand and Maggie comes to him.*]

BOTH ENDS MEET

I said there'd be trouble, but I didn't imagine anything like this.

MAGGIE: Well, it's not all that bad. Obviously, with all that money, there was bound to be some bother. What does it matter? We're together, and we'll fight the lot of them.

TOM: What a shame—about your ring.

MAGGIE: What?

TOM: How right you were, about just having it for this evening.

MAGGIE: If you think I meant that seriously, you're very much mistaken.

TOM: But you said. . . .

MAGGIE: This is my engagement ring. I've waited a long time for it, and I intend to keep it.

TOM: But until I know. . . .

MAGGIE: I don't care how many of Aunt Sophie's admirers turn up. I don't care if they're taking off from all parts of the globe—planes full of elderly gentlemen. They're not going to have my engagement ring.

[*Door bell rings.*]

TOM: There's another.

MAGGIE: It might be Clarissa.

TOM: She has a key.

[*The door bell rings.*]

MAGGIE: Could it be Jimmy?

TOM: Dining in Hampstead.

[*The door bell rings.*]

It's another, all right.

BOTH ENDS MEET

MAGGIE: Don't answer.

TOM: What?

MAGGIE: Just don't answer.

TOM: That's cowardly.

MAGGIE: Yes.

TOM: Right.

[*Tom sits beside Maggie. Door bell rings.*]

(*Suddenly.*) D'you know something? Aunt Sophie lived for two years in Russia.

[*The door bell rings.*]

Curtain

ACT THREE

The same, the following morning.

Maggie is pouring out coffee. Tom enters, putting on his jacket.

JIMMY: D'you always get up this late?

TOM: The daily woman normally wakes me. She hasn't arrived—as usual.

JIMMY: Buy an alarm clock.

TOM: What with?

[Maggie gives him a sharp look.]

JIMMY: Your fortune, dear fellow, your fortune. You forget . . . *(picking up a newspaper and reading)* “. . . when we telephoned Mr. Tom Davenport, he said he was astonished and delighted. . . .”

TOM: Oh—stop.

JIMMY: And there's a photograph of you. . . .

MAGGIE: Let me see.

JIMMY: They must have taken it out of a very old passport.

MAGGIE *(looking)*: If you had that in a passport, you'd never get out of the country.

TOM *(looking)*: It was taken twenty years ago.

JIMMY: What's that on top of your head?

TOM: Hair.

JIMMY: For somebody whose life is going to be a bed of roses, you don't seem very jovial this morning.

TOM: I couldn't sleep. I kept thinking, going round in circles, and always coming back to the same conclusion.

[Maggie, who is inspecting the “ Good Thoughts ” calendar, again looks at him sharply, and he catches her eye.]

ACT THREE

What's the thought for today?

MAGGIE: "Experience always comes in useful."

TOM: Who said that? Aunt Sophie?

JIMMY (*offering a gold case*): Tom, this really was a wonderful present. I don't know how to thank you.

TOM: Lovely, isn't it? Pity it'll have to go back.

[*Jimmy drops the case. Maggie puts down the coffee pot abruptly.*]

JIMMY (*picking up the case*): What?

TOM: It'll have to go back. I don't think I can accept Aunt Sophie's legacy.

[*Jimmy is dumbfounded.*]

MAGGIE: So that's the conclusion to which you kept coming back? I thought so.

JIMMY: What on earth are you talking about?

TOM: It's not easy to explain. . . .

MAGGIE: It's perfectly easy. Tom, having the moral outlook of a Victorian father, disapproves of the source or sources of Aunt Sophie's money. (*To Tom.*) I think I've expressed the situation in a nutshell?

TOM: Life's much too complicated to express in oversimplified phrases. What, after all, can be put in a nutshell?

MAGGIE: Nuts.

TOM: I don't disapprove. . . .

MAGGIE: Oh yes, you do. You built up a sentimental picture of a gracious woman, sitting around in her salon like a sort of Whistler's Aunt, with her silver, her porcelain, her objets de vertu. . . .

TOM: Objets de easy vertu.

MAGGIE: . . . and you're furious to find that far from being anything like your picture, Aunt Sophie was in fact infinitely more interesting and exciting.

BOTH ENDS MEET

TOM: I don't criticise her or the source of her money. One would expect a lady who was no better than she should be, to die better off than most. I merely say I cannot spend the rest of *my* life living on the proceeds of hers.

JIMMY: Why not?

TOM: Would you?

JIMMY: Like a shot.

MAGGIE: And what about Sir George and Lord Minster? Have you given them a thought?

TOM: Yes, they'll be looked after.

JIMMY: For heaven's sake, old boy. You're not going to send them away with fifteen thousand in their pockets?

MAGGIE: He won't have fifteen thousand to give them, if he's refused the money.

JIMMY: I simply don't get it, Tom. Why should you give these fellows a farthing?

TOM: If they want it, there's a moral obligation. Isn't there? It was theirs. It is theirs. Surely you can see in the situation, it's only right and proper?

MAGGIE: I can imagine no situation in which it's right and proper for dissatisfied customers to return thirty years later and ask for their money back.

[*Tom thinks this over, and is impressed.*]

TOM: You know . . . I think you're right.

JIMMY: Of course she's right.

TOM: Why should they get anything?

JIMMY: You can't be under a moral obligation to men like that.

TOM: You are right, you're absolutely right. They shan't have a penny—not a penny.

MAGGIE: And you're going to accept the money, aren't you?

TOM: Well. . . .

ACT THREE

MAGGIE: Don't forget, apart from anything else, you owe eight hundred pounds. . . .

TOM: That's not enough reason. I want. . . .

MAGGIE: A sign from above?

TOM: Yes. A sign from above.

[*The door opens. . . . Edward and Clarissa enter in a state of some excitement.*]

CLARISSA: Well! He's done it.

MAGGIE: Done what?

EDWARD: I've thrown up my job. Pension and all.

TOM: Oh! Er. . . .

EDWARD (*to Tom*): I've burned my boats, and insulted my boss. It was wonderful.

CLARISSA: Dear Uncle Tom! I can't tell you how grateful I am. (*Taking Edward's arm.*) He's a different person.

EDWARD: I feel terrific. Free!

CLARISSA: He just wasn't right in the job. Now he's my own dear Edward again. (*She puts her arm round his neck and kisses him.*)

EDWARD (*to Tom*): I'm tremendously grateful to you, sir, for making it possible. Without your financial backing I know I'd never have had the courage.

TOM: Have you . . . er . . . completely. . . ?

EDWARD: Oh—completely.

TOM: Oh!

EDWARD: I marched into Murgatroyd's office—didn't knock—and told him I wouldn't be coming back. When it finally all sank in, he said, "But you can't do that! This hasty decision. . . ."

TOM: It is rather hasty, isn't it?

EDWARD: There seemed to be no point in waiting.

TOM: But I didn't know you were going to. . . .

BOTH ENDS MEET

EDWARD: "*And*," he said, "if you think of nothing else, think of your lost emoluments."

CLARISSA: Lost what?

EDWARD: Emoluments. It's a word they use for money. Think of your pension. "Fiddle-de-dee to that," I said. He nearly fainted. To them, the pension is Mecca. Something far off and beautiful, to be thought of during the magic hours of sunrise, sunset and morning coffee.

TOM: I think you have been rather hasty. If I were you, I'd go back there and. . . .

EDWARD: Oh, I couldn't do that. To begin with, I wouldn't. Apart from which, I've completely given them the chuck. Written and posted the official letter—and I feel *fine*.

MAGGIE (*to Tom*): How do *you* feel?

TOM: I feel I've had the sign from above. I've got to accept the money.

MAGGIE: That's right.

[*The door bell rings.*]

JIMMY: Tom—if this is Sir George or Lord Minster, you will be adamant, won't you?

TOM: Yes. But if there's any argument, you'll back me up, won't you?

[*Jimmy nods.*]

JIMMY: Not a penny.

TOM: Not a penny.

[*Maggie re-enters.*]

MAGGIE: Lord Minster.

[*Lord Minster enters.*]

LORD MINSTER (*breezily*): Good morning. I just

ACT THREE

thought I'd look in and. . . . (*He sees the others.*)
Oh!

TOM: Now! You said five thousand?

LORD MINSTER: Well—this is rather. . . .

TOM: The whole thing has been discussed quite openly, so I assure you there's nothing to be embarrassed about.

LORD MINSTER: Oh! Well, in that case. . . . You're quite right, of course. There is nothing to be embarrassed about. The only real embarrassment was walking in here last night and finding George. (*He laughs.*) After all these years, it'd be a shame if he found out about myself and Sophie.

JIMMY: Lord Minster, I am Mr. Davenport's solicitor. Have you any proof—about this five thousand pounds?

LORD MINSTER: My dear fellow, you're not going to drag this into Court?

JIMMY: Anybody could arrive and tell the same story.

LORD MINSTER: Anybody?

JIMMY: We might get half the Athenaeum Club marching in.

LORD MINSTER: They can't walk, let alone march. (*To Tom.*) I'm only sorry to have to spoil a charming memory by mentioning the sum involved.

JIMMY: Yes, but have you any proof?

[*Sir George Treberne appears in the doorway.*]

LORD MINSTER: Funnily enough I kept a letter from her. . . . (*Reading it.*) My dear Toto—Five thousand thanks—you see, five thousand pounds was the sum I gave her—for the enchanting gift. I shall remain for ever in your debt, Sophie.

SIR GEORGE: What five thousand that you gave her?

BOTH ENDS MEET

(*To Tom.*) A middle-aged person was admitting herself at the front door. . . .

TOM: Oh, the daily woman. She's arrived. That's good.

SIR GEORGE (*to Lord Minster*): You gave Sophie five thousand pounds? May I ask why?

LORD MINSTER: But surely you remember?

SIR GEORGE: Most surely I do not.

LORD MINSTER: I told you all about it at the time.

SIR GEORGE: Had you told me about it at the time, you would not be here to tell me about it now.

LORD MINSTER: Now, George. . . .

SIR GEORGE: I would have knocked your silly head off.

LORD MINSTER: Don't be ridiculous. It was all perfectly innocent.

SIR GEORGE (*suddenly*): You were the man in the cupboard.

LORD MINSTER: Man in the cupboard?

SIR GEORGE: In nineteen sixteen. I came back to Paris on leave, unexpectedly. I called upon Sophie, was kept waiting, and then shown into her bedroom, where she was lying on a chaise-longue, in an elaborate toilette, with noticeably heightened colour.

LORD MINSTER: Well?

SIR GEORGE: She told me that since my departure her life had been a desert. Her mornings a wilderness—and nothing to look forward to in the evenings.

LORD MINSTER: I'm sure that was true.

SIR GEORGE (*to Maggie*): I ask you! Do ladies with nothing to look forward to in the evenings put on evening dress?

MAGGIE: If anything, they take them off.

SIR GEORGE (*to Lord Minster*): On the floor, pushed out of sight but perfectly visible to my eye, was a British Staff Officer's cap.

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LORD MINSTER: That might have been anybody's.

SIR GEORGE: That occurred to me at the time. Sophie knew so many distinguished persons. One did not wish to fling open the door of a cupboard and disclose one's commanding general.

MAGGIE (*fascinated*): How did you know there was anyone in the cupboard?

SIR GEORGE (*deathly serious*): Somebody sneezed.

MAGGIE (*enthralled*): In the cupboard?

SIR GEORGE: Quite definitely.

MAGGIE (*delighted*): But I've been *in* this, scores of times!

SIR GEORGE: *In* it?

MAGGIE: In repertory companies. It's traditional. The maid dashes in and says, "Your lover has returned unexpectedly!"—so you push your new lover into the cupboard. (*To Lord Minster.*) Was there anyone else in the cupboard?

LORD MINSTER: No.

SIR GEORGE (*to Lord Minster*): So there was nobody else in the cupboard?

LORD MINSTER: What?

SIR GEORGE: Just yourself.

[*Lord Minster is about to speak.*]

You've admitted it. (*To the others.*) He's admitted it.

LORD MINSTER: Well, I. . . . (*He laughs.*) At this stage in our lives, what's the point of denying it? Yes, I was in the cupboard. (*To Tom.*) I should explain it was a huge, built-in affair. Room for six or seven. It was just a joke.

SIR GEORGE: A joke! I said nothing to Sophie at the time, because I couldn't bear to see her humiliated.

. . .

LORD MINSTER: You said nothing to Sophie because

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about a minute after I sneezed there was an air-raid warning and you said, "My hat! Zeppelins!"—and rushed back to H.Q. H.Q. being, of course, the downstairs bar at the Crillon.

SIR GEORGE: You—of all people! And how many more were there like you? I ask myself.

MAGGIE: We all ask ourselves.

SIR GEORGE (*to the air*): Perhaps you will inform me when this person has left the premises? I shall wait out here in the . . . (*surveying it*) yard.

[*He goes into the garden.*]

MAGGIE: } Yard!!
JIMMY: }

LORD MINSTER (*amused*): I'll calm him down. Sorry. I'm afraid I never can resist pulling his leg. (*Going*) George, don't be such an old chump. . . .

[*He follows Sir George into the garden.*]

JIMMY: You're going to have a tough time shaking them off.

TOM: I don't see why. I'll simply tell them. . . .

JIMMY: Telling them won't get you anywhere. They're the sort who'll hang on like grim death. Before you know where you are, they'll be saying you tacitly admitted their claims, and with a couple like that you'll be in a lawsuit before you can say "knife".

MAGGIE: I think we could get rid of them both, for good—if it worked.

JIMMY: If what worked?

MAGGIE (*looking at the calendar*): "Experience always comes in useful."

TOM: What experience?

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MAGGIE: Ours—here—yesterday, with Edward. We were all in a fine panic, discovering we'd given away secrets right and left in front of an Income Tax official.

EDWARD: But I'm not one any more.

MAGGIE: They don't know that, do they?

TOM (*musings*): I'm sure they both have a lot of secrets.

MAGGIE: Lots and lots.

TOM (*thoughtfully*): What we'd have to do is lead the conversation round to the subject of taxation.

JIMMY: Maggie, I think you've got something. (*To Tom.*) If we get away with it, we shan't see them for dust. I mean, look at the flap *I* was in. I was practically on a boat for New Zealand.

TOM: We shall need lots of champagne. Clarissa, would you mind?—it's in the kitchen.

[*Clarissa goes.*]

[*Sir George re-enters, followed by Lord Minster.*]

SIR GEORGE: Go away! I do not wish to bandy words with the type of man who hides in cupboards.

LORD MINSTER: Good thing it wasn't your family cupboard. I'd never have been able to get in for skeletons.

SIR GEORGE: At least we have a family cupboard, which is more than can be said of some.

LORD MINISTER: Twit me as much as you like about being the first Lord Minster, dear old chap. Doesn't worry me at all. I'm not ashamed of having been made a peer.

SIR GEORGE: No labourer should be ashamed of the fruits of his toil.

LORD MINISTER: I beg your pardon?

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SIR GEORGE: I remember it happening so well. I was sitting in the Club, and someone said, "I see they've made Dickie Minster a peer. I *am* glad. He's worked so hard for it. The only sad thing is, now he's become a peer, there'll be nothing left for him to work for." "Oh, I don't know," I replied. "He might work even harder and become a gentleman."

LORD MINSTER: In your Club, were you? I wonder you heard one another above the noise of bouncing cheques.

TOM: Er . . . wouldn't you both like a drink?

SIR GEORGE: Not for. . . .

MAGGIE: Oh yes—do. It's—er—it can be such a help.

[*Clarissa re-enters with champagne.*]

TOM: Champagne?

LORD MINSTER: Personally, there's only one thing I'd like more than a glass of champagne—

JIMMY: What's that?

LORD MINSTER: Two glasses. (*He laughs.*)

MAGGIE (*with a look at Tom*): I'm sure we can arrange that.

LORD MINSTER: Can't afford much of it nowadays.

[*Maggie looks at Tom, and takes a breath.*]

MAGGIE: The taxation, I suppose?

LORD MINSTER: You've hit the nail bang on the head. What I couldn't say about the Income Tax!

EDWARD: Oh, really?

LORD MINSTER: Eh, George?

[*Sir George grunts.*]

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Bet you could say a bit, if you chose.

SIR GEORGE: It is not a subject about which I wish even to think.

MAGGIE: Pity.

LORD MINSTER: Not in public. But you do quite a bit of thinking in private, don't you? Or so I'm told. (*To the others.*) And you can be sure he doesn't think to no purpose.

SIR GEORGE: Perhaps you would be kind enough.

. . .
LORD MINSTER: George, stop being so crusty. I'm paying you a compliment. Everyone I know is filled with admiration for the way you diddle the Tax Collector.

MAGGIE (*wide-eyed*): What *do* you mean?

LORD MINSTER: You know. Tax evasion.

SIR GEORGE: Really, Dickie. . . !

LORD MINSTER: Now don't deny it. Who bought Marie Antoinette's desk, and got away with charging it as office furniture?

[*Sir George, in spite of himself, begins to chuckle.*]

And not only her desk, but two armchairs and a magnificent mirror.

SIR GEORGE (*amused*): Well, one has to have a desk in one's office, and a chair to sit on, and a glass for the wretched typist to look at herself in.

LORD MINSTER: Yes, but one doesn't then have to get in touch with the authorities at Versailles, and have them over here buying everything back, at an enormous capital gain to yourself.

SIR GEORGE (*smiling*): Oh, nonsense, nonsense. These things become grossly exaggerated.

LORD MINSTER: How you ever swung that one, I can't imagine. Sheer impudence, I suppose?

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SIR GEORGE: Like your brandy smuggling.

MAGGIE: What?

SIR GEORGE: Brandy smuggling.

LORD MINSTER: I don't know what you mean.

SIR GEORGE: Got you on the raw there, eh Dickie?
(*To the rest.*) He has a country house looking over Romney Marsh—famous smuggling country, of course. . . .

LORD MINSTER (*fussed*): George, there are certain things one doesn't say in public. . . .

SIR GEORGE: You started it.

LORD MINSTER: I merely repeated something everybody knows. . . .

SIR GEORGE: And you, I suppose, think that all your chicanery is a dark secret?

LORD MINSTER: Nothing illegal can be laid at my front door.

SIR GEORGE: It's laid, so I believe, at your back door.

LORD MINSTER: What is?

SIR GEORGE: The brandy.

LORD MINSTER: Really, George! I don't know what. . . . (*Accepting a glass of champagne.*) Thank you.

SIR GEORGE: You had a butler called Trimmingham. For the last two years he has been with me. (*He laughs.*) We have most interesting talks about you.

LORD MINSTER: Discussing me with a former servant. It amounts to spying.

SIR GEORGE: Like hiding in cupboards?

CLARISSA: Do have a glass of champagne, Sir George.

MAGGIE: Tell us about the smuggling.

CLARISSA: There's something so glamorous about smuggling.

LORD MINSTER (*taking them in, not for the first time*): To charming young women like yourselves, how could an old fellow like me ever do anything glamorous?

MAGGIE (*wide-eyed*): But men of your age—I mean,

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attractive men—are the most glamorous of all.
(*She sits looking up into his eyes.*) D'you think that's silly?

LORD MINSTER (*blossoming*): Not at all.

CLARISSA: Do tell us about your dark secrets.

LORD MINSTER (*smiling*): Well, I oughtn't to.

MAGGIE: I love doing things I oughtn't to, don't you?

LORD MINSTER: Yes, indeed.

EDWARD: Do tell us, how you manage the smuggling.

LORD MINSTER: Well, it's not really smuggling. I have some very good friends in Brittany—in the wine trade, and I have a small yacht, which occasionally goes out and gets lost and has to put in at St. Malo or somewhere round there. Then it sets out again, with a few bottles of brandy. . . .

SIR GEORGE: About a hundred dozen.

LORD MINSTER: And finds its way home. . . .

SIR GEORGE: At dead of night.

LORD MINSTER: And that's all there is to it.

SIR GEORGE: Apart from a handsome profit.

MAGGIE: How romantic.

LORD MINSTER: Mark you, it's just a bit of fun. One likes to feel one's still got some dash. . . .

CLARISSA: Of course.

LORD MINSTER: So one amuses oneself—once in a while.

SIR GEORGE: Trimmingham said once a month.

LORD MINSTER: Trimmingham had better. . . .
(*Suddenly.*) You stopped the night at the Marsh, about four years ago on your way to France. I suppose that's when you got hold of him, bribed him. . . .

SIR GEORGE: Bribed him?

LORD MINSTER: With tales about what he could make

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out of those expensive teas you serve on the days you open your stately home to the public.

[*Sir George is about to speak.*]

Yes, and I'm told he takes at least four times more in gate money than is ever revealed to the Tax Inspector.

SIR GEORGE: That could be checked. There are admission tickets.

LORD MINSTER: But only one visitor in every four seems to get one.

SIR GEORGE: Who told you that?

LORD MINSTER: Freddie Bradford.

SIR GEORGE: Who?

LORD MINSTER: The Duke of Bradford.

SIR GEORGE: The Duke of Bradford? But he's been invited to stay as a guest. Why should he pay five-shillings and be herded round with the trippers?

LORD MINSTER: Because, he said, it's less boring that way—and you get a better tea.

SIR GEORGE: Really? If a few of the facts about the Duke of Bradford were known, he wouldn't be at liberty to go snooping round other people's houses.

LORD MINSTER: Quite true. (*To Jimmy.*) He lets his shooting to wealthy Americans, gets dollars on the sly, and then asks them for fifty per cent of the bag—which he sells on the quiet to a London hotel.

SIR GEORGE (*to Tom*): That's true.

LORD MINSTER: Oh, I know it is, because he told me himself—and that you'd put him up to it.

SIR GEORGE: I put him up to it? Of all the. . .

LORD MINSTER: Oh, come off it, George. Everyone knows about your shoot. It's famous.

SIR GEORGE: Where on earth do you hear these things?

LORD MINSTER: Just gossip.

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SIR GEORGE: It's high time they abolished the House of Lords.

LORD MINSTER: We won't mention the workmen's cottages on your estate. The tenants only pay ten shillings a week—on paper—but they all seem to have Rolls Royces.

SIR GEORGE: Might we just pause and consider the East Wing of your country house, let to a Canadian family. . . .

LORD MINSTER: They are my guests.

SIR GEORGE: And have been your guests for the last seven years. Rather a long visit—unless of course, they're paying guests. Now, I wonder if there's an account in a bank in Montreal, not of course in the name of Lord Minster. . . .

LORD MINSTER: I've never been to Canada. . . .

SIR GEORGE: But you have been to New York, where Canadian dollars are so useful. Trimmingham did so enjoy the trip with you. He said the Chase National Bank. . . .

LORD MINSTER: George, you're going much too far. I think the champagne must have gone to your head.

. . .

SIR GEORGE: It always does.

LORD MINSTER: You've said quite enough.

JIMMY: He has.

MAGGIE (*suddenly*): Edward! I'd forgotten all about you. We shouldn't. . . . You oughtn't to have. . . . Oh dear!

TOM: What's the matter?

MAGGIE: Edward! He's heard everything Sir George and Lord Minster have been saying.

SIR GEORGE (*alarmed*): What?

TOM: Of course! I didn't realise.

JIMMY: Edward, you will treat everything you've heard as confidential, won't you?

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LORD MINSTER: } I should hope so.

SIR GEORGE: } Why shouldn't he?

JIMMY (*to Sir George*): Don't panic, it'll be all right.

SIR GEORGE (*infuriated*): What d'you mean, don't panic?

LORD MINSTER (*through this*): What's going on?

CLARISSA: Edward, if only you'd *say* something.

TOM (*to Sir George*): Jimmy's right. You must keep calm.

SIR GEORGE (*maddened*): I *am* calm.

TOM: No. You're shouting. You're getting worked up. We must keep our heads.

SIR GEORGE: Will you kindly explain yourself. (*To Edward.*) What is he?

LORD MINSTER: A policeman?

MAGGIE (*to Lord Minster*): It'll be all right.

CLARISSA: Edward wouldn't do anything underhand, would you, Edward?

MAGGIE: He's really reliable, and conscientious. . . .

LORD MINSTER (*taking Edward's arm*): I don't know who or what you are, but I'm sure you'll respect a private conversation. (*Easily.*) You and I are gentlemen, and we don't eavesdrop. . . .

[*Edward gives him a sharp look. Lord Minster is confused.*]

LORD MINSTER: You know, I stupidly didn't catch your name. . . .

[*Edward silently produces a card, and hands it to him.*]

Oh, thanks so much. Kinnerton, of course. (*Glancing.*) Well, now—as I said. . . .

[*He trails off, aghast at what he has seen written on the card. He looks at Edward whose face is immovable. Edward turns, and goes into the garden.*]

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SIR GEORGE: What's the matter?

[*Lord Minster silently hands him the card.*]

The Commissioners of Inland. . . . (*He sits.*)

LORD MINSTER: I wonder if I might . . . have a little brandy? (*He sits.*)

TOM: Brandy? Of course.

SIR GEORGE (*furiously. At Lord Minster*): This is all *your* fault.

LORD MINSTER (*at Sir George*): It was you who brought the subject up.

SIR GEORGE (*fuming*): My office furniture . . . the workmen's cottages. . . .

LORD MINSTER: My Canadians.

MAGGIE (*calmly, between them*): You mustn't blame yourselves. Whichever one of you it was who started to talk about Income Tax. . . . The harm's done.

LORD MINSTER: Harm? Announcing that I import hundreds of dozens of cases of brandy.

TOM (*handing a glass of brandy*): Brandy.

LORD MINSTER (*moving to Sir George*): George, we've stirred up a hornet's nest.

SIR GEORGE: You mean you have.

LORD MINSTER: We've got to think quickly, or we'll have the tax people down on us. Of course, I know your financial skies are rosy. . . .

SIR GEORGE: Not so rosy now you've filled them with vultures.

LORD MINSTER (*agitated*): I don't know what I'd do if a lot of officials started prying about in my affairs. I think I'd shoot myself. What would you do?

SIR GEORGE: I'd shoot the officials.

JIMMY: Happily, I think I can get you out of all this trouble.

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LORD MINSTER: Oh, really?

JIMMY: If, in return, you'll do something for me.

LORD MINSTER: Of course, of course. Anything you like.

JIMMY: That young man's going to marry Mr. Davenport's niece and if he feels morally obliged to remember the unfortunate things you've both—quite accidentally—revealed, Mr. Davenport might feel morally obliged to support his future nephew. So don't you agree you'd be wiser to forget your claims.

SIR GEORGE: I am perfectly prepared to waive any claim. If you can assure me that matters . . . (*indicating the garden*) . . . out there, can be arranged satisfactorily.

JIMMY: D'you feel the same way, Lord Minster?

LORD MINSTER: Yes, yes, of course.

JIMMY: Then may I have the letter?

[*Sir George and Lord Minster hand him identical letters.*]

(*Surprised.*) Thank you. Thank you. Well, gentlemen, I think I can assure you that everything will be all right. (*To Tom.*) Tom, I'm rowing better today, aren't I?

[*Jimmy goes into the garden.*]

MAGGIE: Gentlemen, I have an idea. I don't pretend to be half as intelligent as either of you, but I think the best thing would be for you both just to disappear.

SIR GEORGE: You mean—now?

MAGGIE: Yes. You go—and we don't know where you are, or how to get in touch with you—and we never see you again, ever.

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SIR GEORGE (*rising*): You're right. You're absolutely right.

LORD MINSTER: But look here, are you absolutely sure you can persuade him. . . . One doesn't want to spend the rest of one's life in fear and trembling.

. . .

MAGGIE: You'll just both have to be very, very careful in the future, won't you?

SIR GEORGE: } Definitely!

LORD MINSTER: } Of course!

[*The door bell rings.*]

SIR GEORGE: We'd better make ourselves scarce.

LORD MINSTER (*shaking Tom's hand*): Well, it's extremely good of you.

SIR GEORGE: Yes, indeed.

TOM (*opening door and calling*): It's all right, Mrs. Small.

[*Tom goes.*]

SIR GEORGE (*to Lord Minster*): Well, no more little night trips in the Channel for you—eh? Pity. I was going to ask you to get some brandy for me.

LORD MINSTER (*quietly*): As a matter of fact, I'm pretty well stocked, and just in case anyone should come snooping, I might like to get rid of it.

SIR GEORGE: I'll give you twenty shillings a bottle.

LORD MINSTER (*outraged*): Twenty shillings? In a shop, you won't get it under forty-five.

SIR GEORGE: In prison, you won't get it at all.

[*Sir George goes.*]

LORD MINSTER (*to Maggie*): I'm sorry our acquaintance has been so brief. Thank you for being so kind. You've been most helpful. Most helpful.

MAGGIE: It was a pleasure.

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LORD MINSTER: Tell me. I don't know whether you'd ever fancy a quiet little dinner with a lonely old bachelor. . . ?

MAGGIE: I'd love it.

[*Lord Minster beams at her.*]

So would Tom.

LORD MINSTER: Tom?

MAGGIE: My fiancé!

LORD MINSTER (*dashed*): Oh! Is he? I didn't realise . . . er—(*Depressed.*) Yes. Well, we must think about it.

[*He turns to Tom, who has re-entered with Mr. Wilson. He looks closely at Mr. Wilson.*]

I know your face. I've met you at my nephew's. Reggie Cartwright.

WILSON (*diffidently*): Oh. Yes.

LORD MINSTER (*to Tom*): He's an old Army friend of my nephew's.

TOM: Oh, really? Mr. Wilson's an old Army friend of mine, too.

LORD MINSTER: Quite a coincidence.

TOM: Mr. Wilson has lots of old Army friends.

LORD MINSTER (*to Mr. Wilson*): Have you seen Reggie lately?

WILSON: Not this quarter . . . er . . . not for some time.

LORD MINSTER: Well, I'll tell him I ran into you. Do look him up. He'll be delighted.

[*Lord Minster has gone.*]

WILSON: I'm so sorry having to come back like this . . . it's just that you made a little mistake. . . .

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MAGGIE: With the date. (*She smiles.*) I know.

WILSON: I did come back last evening—about half-past six. I rang and rang, but I couldn't get an answer.

MAGGIE: Oh! It was you. (*She looks at Tom.*)

WILSON: It wasn't really a business call. (*To Tom.*) I thought it'd be a nice occasion to congratulate you on this wonderful news in the paper—about all this money you've inherited, and to get the cheque put right. I suppose you two are going to get married now?

MAGGIE: Yes.

TOM: Well, I don't know.

WILSON: Why not?

TOM: Well, Mr. Wilson—isn't it true?—with a joint income and all this extra money, it's almost impossible. . . .

MAGGIE: You mean yesterday you were too poor to get married, today you're too rich?

TOM: Yes.

MAGGIE: Now listen. If you think. . . .

TOM: { Darling, don't get over-excited. Just think about it calmly and clearly. . . .

MAGGIE: { If you think I'm going to go on cooking and sewing and doing most of the housework. . . .

TOM: Maggie, *please!* I'm only trying to be wise.

MAGGIE: Let's stop being wise. We are going to be married. I don't care how rich you are. I don't care how much wiser it'd be to wait until you're poorer, we're going to be married. Unless, of course, you've gone off the whole idea of marrying me?

TOM: Darling—it's just a question of having a little patience. . . .

MAGGIE: So what do we do? Do we go on, as we've gone on for the last. . . .

BOTH ENDS MEET

TOM: We've got along very well. . . .

MAGGIE: You mean, you've got along very well. Very well indeed. Simply fine! But it might have been more honest, when you asked me to be your wife, if you'd explained that what you really wanted was an unpaid cook-housekeeper.

TOM: Now, Maggie. . . .

MAGGIE: Always ready, when called upon. . . .

TOM: Have you lost your head?

MAGGIE: I've lost my head, my patience, and my temper.

[*Jimmy re-enters.*]

Go away! I am tired of running up and down those stairs, morning, noon, and all times of the night.

TOM (*to Wilson*): You'd better go too.

MAGGIE: No. You stay.

WILSON: Well, I must stay. There's my cheque.

TOM: Maggie. Darling.

MAGGIE: Go away.

TOM: Maggie, you don't understand. . . .

MAGGIE: I understand perfectly. You've no intention of marrying me. I'd better start looking for someone else.

TOM: What?

MAGGIE: Lord Minster. That's who I'll marry.

TOM: Lord Minster!

MAGGIE: Plenty of money, and he knows how to cope with it.

TOM (*furious*): All right! Marry Lord Minster. Marry anyone you like.

WILSON: Now, now, now. You don't mean that. You may seem to be worse off when you work it out on paper, but there's a lot more to money than mathematics. You go ahead and get married. You'll

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find there's ways and means of getting along. Oh yes, I could tell you lots of little ways and means of getting along. I wouldn't invest the money, not these days. I'd use it as capital. You just occupy the ground floor here, don't you? But, for instance, you might take over the whole house. No, I wouldn't invest it. You could buy a country cottage, then you could probably claim all this house as an office. Might get away with that easily. Then there's a Rolls Royce. They're terrible snobs, the tax people. Won't hear of a cheap car being charged as expenses, but the minute you mention a Rolls Royce, it's "Oh yes, of course. Naturally". You might buy a farm. Wonderful allowances for running a farm—even better if you make a mess of it. You could form yourself into a company. That's always good. Or a series of companies, that's even better. Then there's deeds of covenant—quite legal and very useful. And there's maintenance . . . and office stationery and wear and tear. . . . Oh, but there's a hundred and one lovely little dodges I could put you up to.

TOM: But, Mr. Wilson. . . .

WILSON: What?

TOM: Mr. Wilson, you're the man I've been looking for. My accountant's no good, my solicitor's no good. You are the brain I need.

WILSON: Twenty years serving writs for Income Tax, and you get to know a thing or two.

MAGGIE: You wanted a financial genius?

TOM: Yes.

MAGGIE: You've found him.

TOM: Yes.

MAGGIE: So now we can get married?

[*Tom looks for advice at Mr. Wilson.*]

WILSON: Yes.

BOTH ENDS MEET

TOM: *Yes.*

[*Tom and Maggie embrace.*]

WILSON (*through the embrace*): Tying the knot has its advantages. The marriage allowances are excellent. (*He takes his hat.*)

TOM: You're not going?

WILSON: More business.

TOM: But I need your advice.

WILSON: My advice?

TOM: You've been wonderful. I only wish there was something we could do for you in return.

WILSON (*with a smile*): Well, there's really nothing I want. The only thing I really want's a flat, and no one can find that.

MAGGIE (*suddenly*): A flat? Tom! Mr. Wilson wants a flat.

TOM: The attic floor!

MAGGIE: The attic floor. Here. They're just junk rooms at the moment. . . .

TOM: But they could be quite nice. . . .

MAGGIE: Two rooms, kitchen, and bath. . . .

WILSON (*thrilled*): You don't mean it?

MAGGIE: We'll have them converted.

WILSON: You don't *mean* it?

TOM: We *do* mean it.

WILSON: I couldn't afford much.

MAGGIE: That doesn't matter.

WILSON: But what I could afford. . . .

TOM: Yes?

WILSON: You'd get free of Income Tax.

TOM: It's a deal.

MAGGIE: We'll drink to it.

[*The telephone rings.*]

TOM: Hullo? (*He listens.*) Oh no! It's not possible.

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You can't. It's not possible. (*Calling.*) Jimmy!
Help!

[*Jimmy re-enters, followed by Edward and Clarissa.*]

JIMMY: What is it?

TOM: The Inland Revenue. The Inland Revenue
want to talk to me—about the death duties.

WILSON: I'll deal with them.

TOM: What?

WILSON: I know that department. I'll fix them.

TOM (*into telephone*): Hullo? My financial adviser
will ring you in the morning. (*Replaces receiver.*)
Edward, Clarissa, Jimmy—allow me to present my
new financial adviser—Mr. Wilson.

MAGGIE: We drink to you.

TOM: We drink to everyone. To Edward. . . .

MAGGIE: And Clarissa.

TOM: Sir George. . . .

JIMMY: Lord Minster.

TOM: Aunt Sophie.

WILSON: And of course. . . .

ALL: To the Commissioners of Inland Revenue.

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