THREE COMEDIES

BY J. B. PRIESTLEY

FICTION

THREE MEN IN NEW SUITS
DAYLIGHT ON SATURDAY
BLACK-OUT IN GRETLEY
LET THE PEOPLE SING
THE DOOMSDAY MEN
THEY WALK IN THE CITY
FARAWAY
ANGEL PAVEMENT
THE GOOD COMPANIONS
WONDER HERO
BENIGHTED
ADAM IN MOONSHINE

PLAYS

THREE COMEDIES
THREE PLAYS
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THE BALCONINNY
THE ENGLISH COMIC CHARACTER
MEREDITH (E.M.L.)
PEACOCK (E.M.L.)
THE ENGLISH NOVEL
HUMOUR (E. HERITAGE SERIES)
BRIEF DIVERSIONS

THREE COMEDIES

BY

J. B. PRIESTLEY

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TO JAMES BRIDIE

MY DEAR BRIDIE,

Will you accept this volume—and with it my affectionate good wishes ? I do not say that " We twa ha' pulled the gowans fine " because, like Mr. Micawber (and how pleasant it is to share something with him at last !), I do not understand this pulling of gowans ; but so far as two middle-aged dramatists, enjoying their second World War, can draw near to this height of convivial companionship, then our hands have reached for the gowans; and if we have not paddled in the burn, we have sat up late at night with a decanter of Scotland's noblest liquor and have allowed a little of the burn to paddle in us. In those small hours, we have cursed our enemies, appreciated our friends, and determinedly boasted as only good men of the Theatre can do. And here is my small token of gratitude for many fine plays and much fine talk.

All these three plays have been written, not in the easiest conditions, during wartime; and all three are broad comedies, farcical in places, but not without an idea or two and some touches of character drawing. They were designed in the first place to make audiences laugh, and I can testify that they have made audiences laugh, even when the news was grim, the war work long and hard, and the black-out an infinite bag of soot. Such conditions meant that if there was to be comedy, it must be broad comedy, punching hard for its laughs. But then this is the kind of comedy you and I like. Indeed, the most characteristic comedy of this island, from Gammer Gurton onwards, is this broad comedy, with its farcical situations and some fat droll parts. That other kind, that " light comedy " with its stale Mayfair epigrams, its endless ringing for tea and cocktails, its genteel acting, its inevitable air of being thirty years out-of-date, may have occupied more than half our theatres, and may be regarded in America as our only contribution to the drama, but you and I know that it is in fact unsuited to our island temperament and talent, whether we are writers or players, and has always been better done in Budapest or Paris. The rough stuff, plus an idea or two, is our stuff when it is comedy we want.

Even so, I will make haste to admit that the first of these plays, *Good Night Children*, is a lightweight. I thought it would amuse people, at a time when broadcasting was so important to them, to have some of its antics, especially its notion of entertainment as a branch of the Civil Service, treated farcically. But it did not amuse them as much as I thought it would, particularly in London, where the run of the play at the New Theatre (with Naunton Wayne very funny as Tristan Sprott) was a rather tepid affair. But the play had had a long provincial tour before that, ranging between the South Coast and Inverness, and I am glad to remember that the most appreciative audiences were at Oxford and Cambridge. And here I must add that the fantastic creatures of my play must not be confused with the really admirable and devoted producers and players responsible for one of the B.B.C.'s best features, its *Children's Hour*.

The next play, *The Golden Fleece*, is your old friend *Bull Market*, which was first produced at the Bradford Civic Playhouse and then afterwards, with considerable success, at your own Glasgow Citizens Theatre. I changed the title, somewhat reluctantly, because I was told that *Bull Market* suggested a rural and agricultural background and not a satire on high finance. This play was written in the first months of the war, and the reason why I have held it up so long was chiefly because I could not find the right actress for the all-important part of Molly Cudden. I did not want a clever West End interpretation of a woman of the people and I felt all along that it was not the " legitimate stage " that would supply me with the actress who had the right qualities—the warmth, breadth, and vitality. It was seeing Betty Warren in that excellent film *Champagne Charlie* that gave Peters and me the bright idea of asking her to play Molly, with that fine actor Mervyn Johns playing opposite to her; and we were fortunate enough to be able to bring Basil Dearden out of Ealing Studios to do a careful production of the play for us. (You will notice, I hope, that the play has a new ending.) We opened at Hull in an atmosphere of civic welcome (though I suspect some of the local big-wigs were somewhat put out by the satire), and as I write these words the production is still going strong; although, as you and I know only

too well, by the time you have read what I have written here, it is possible that the whole production may have found its way into the dustbin. Even so, whatever happens, the grand performances of Betty Warren and Mervyn Johns will shine in my memory.

How Are They At Home? was written primarily as a gift for the troops overseas, and ENSA companies have taken it to Italy, Egypt and India. Basil Dean did an excellent production of it for home audiences, and after a short tour this production opened at the Apollo Theatre and played there to happy crowded houses until the flying bombs were at their worst. Finally, after struggling through the noisiest of these weeks, then closing, then re-opening, this production was turned out of the theatre—and all the members of a fairly large company thrown out of work at short notice—to make room for a rather tasteless American farce that only lasted a few days. This comedy has of course something of a charade atmosphere, but it does make audiences laugh, and it does deal, in its own sketchy fashion, not with an England that vanished years ago but with the England of to-day.

Well, for what they are, please accept these three comedies with my good wishes. You have at least the satisfaction of knowing—and of knowing that I know—that you have written better comedies than these. And nobody in your large and grateful audiences enjoys them better than

Yours ever,
J.B.P.

GOOD NIGHT CHILDREN

A Comedy of Broadcasting

THE CHARACTERS
(*In the Order of their Appearance*)

EDNA DARLINGTON, *a secretary*
BRENDA GEE, *a secretary*
JOE COSSART, *engineer*
DOROTHY LIMPLE, *a secretary*
BOB DINTY, *an actor*
HETTY LODORE, *an actress*
FAIRFAX HAYCRAFT, *announcer*
TRISTAN SPROTT, *a producer*
MOYA GRONOVA, *a pianist*
COMMANDER COPLEY, *regional director*
PAULA LEEDS, *a producer*
MARTIN BRADBURN, *a producer*
PERCY KING, *effects boy*
DAISY PUNNET, *Matthew's grand-daughter*
MATTHEW PUNNET, *an ancient musician*
SIR REGINALD RUNTON, D.A.D.G.

ACT I

Morning.

ACT II

Middle of the Afternoon.

ACT III

Evening.

ACT I

The scene is the English Broadcasting Company's regional studio in the remote county of Barset. It is a large square room, handsomely fitted out in the modern style. There is a door downstage right (actors'), which leads to the main entrance to the studio. There is another door on the same side at the back that communicates with the rest of the building, the offices, etc. Also on this side is a desk, used by FAIRFAX HAYCRAFT, *the announcer. Nearer the centre is a similar desk, used by* PAULA LEEDS. *Also in the centre are a small settee and one or two chairs. Further left is a grand piano. Then downstage left are microphones and a space for broadcasting. Behind is a glass-enclosed producers' control room, with a small flight of stairs leading up to it. There are no windows in the studio.*

Before the rise of Curtain the interval signal of the E.B.C. is heard from the piano—on the second E.B.C. the curtain rises—on the fourth E.B.C. the "six pips" are heard, then the telephone signal flickers.

At Rise the studio is in half darkness, interval signal going. JOE, *a middle-aged solemn engineer, enters and goes to the telephone in control cabin.*

JOE (*at telephone*): No, this isn't the South Western Dairy farmers—it's the English Broadcasting Company——

EDNA, *a rather colourless secretary, enters, puts files, etc. on* C. *desk, switches on lights and returns to desk U.S. end. She is followed in by* DOROTHY, *who is a tall, handsome, rather stupid girl.*

—yes, the *English Broadcasting Company*. . . . No, I can't get your sister an audition.

Puts down telephone.

DOROTHY (L. of desk): This is a note from Commander Copley to Miss Leeds, explaining that the workmen will be in her office to-day and to-morrow.

EDNA: Miss Leeds will be very annoyed at being out here.

DOROTHY: Why? It won't kill her.

EDNA: We have two programmes going out from here to-day —the Children's Hour this afternoon and then Mr. Sprott's

Barset programme to-night. Mr. Sprott will probably want to rehearse both this morning and this afternoon. So how can Miss Leeds do any work in here? Why couldn't Commander Copley have put her——

DOROTHY *starts to go U.R.*

—in one of the other two offices?

DOROTHY: Because the workmen are going to be in there, too. There's something wrong with the walls.

EDNA: There's always something wrong with something here.

DOROTHY (*R. of desk*): I don't know why you people are always grumbling. I like it here, and after all I've just had two years in London—at Radio House.

EDNA: Oh—I know why *you* like it here.

DOROTHY (*haughtily*): What do you mean?

Enter BRENDA *hurriedly. She is a lively young girl.*

BRENDA: Have you got a stop watch?

EDNA (*hastily*): Yes, and you're not going to have it. What have you done with yours?

BRENDA (*drifting slowly across stage to sofa*): It's just gone again. I think somebody eats 'em. Oh dear—I wish they'd hurry up and give me that audition—I'm so tired of being a secretary. It isn't the life for me at all.

Re-enter JOE *from Control Room.*

JOE (*coming down*): Rehearsal here this morning, isn't there?

BRENDA: Yes, Mr. Sprott's programme for to-night—"Down here in Barset".

JOE (*who is testing piano, mikes, etc.*): "Down here in Barset"! I read what it said in the *Broadcasting Times*. "Another fascinating medley of folk-lore and song from a fragment corner of old England!" Escapism, that's what I call it. (*At large arm mike.*) Fragrant Corner! (*Turns to* EDNA.) Did you read what the County Medical Officer said? No, of course you didn't. But that's what they ought to be telling the workers—what the Medical Officer said—and never mind their fascinating medleys.

DOROTHY: I don't think that's being very loyal to the E.B.C.

JOE: Now listen, Miss Limple. 'Cos you're working for Commander Copley and he seems to have taken a fancy to you,

that's no reason why you should start talking like him.

DOROTHY (*haughtily*): I don't agree.

Goes out.

BRENDA: I do hate that girl. I wish she'd stayed in London.

JOE (*now sitting on stool down L.*): How are the impersonations coming along, Brenda?

BRENDA (*eagerly*): I'm working on Katherine Hepburn now. I went to see her film again, last night. I think I've got her. Listen! (*Announces herself grandly.*) My next impression is that of the famous stage and film star—Katherine Hepburn—(*does something to her hair, then acts madly at* JOE, *who does not turn a hair.*) "Aw shucks, Larry, don't take it that way—I didn't mean it that way, Larry—all I meant was just the two of us to go right away somewhere—back to your ranch if that's what you want—I want light, I want freedom, Larry I want the great spaces, my dear—yes, the silent music of the great spaces—don't you see, Larry?" Um?

EDNA: I don't think it's quite right yet, Brenda.

JOE (*rising*): Oh—I think it's good.

BRENDA: Thank you, Joe.

JOE: Who is it you're doing?

BRENDA (*surprised*): Katherine Hepburn.

JOE (*seriously*): Never heard of her.

Enter BOB DINTY. *He is a middle-aged actor and an odd mixture of jauntiness and gloom.*

BOB: Morning, girls. Morning, Joe.

They reply cheerfully.

I met a fella in the *Lion* last night who distinctly remembered me in *White Cargo* at Nottingham ten years ago. Knew me at once he said. And stood a round on it. Got my scripts, Brenda?

BRENDA (*crossing to desk*): Yes here it is. I'm working up the Katherine Hepburn now, Mr. Dinty.

BOB: That's right, just keep working them up, Brenda. I believe you have something—(*with a wink at the others*)—if you can only bring it out.

BRENDA (*eagerly*): You wouldn't like to hear——

BOB (*looking at script, crossing to couch*): Not to-day, dear.

It 'ud take my mind off my work. Hetty been in yet?

BRENDA *sits at* HAYCRAFT'S *desk.*

EDNA: I haven't seen her.

BOB: Still shopping, I expect. (*Begins to read script.*)

JOE (*approaching confidentially*): Bob!

BOB: Yes, old boy?

JOE (*confidentially*): Did you say anything to Haycraft about me doing that bit in the Children's Hour?

BOB: Yes, I did, old boy. But he didn't seem to catch on, you know what these chaps are.

JOE (*with great dignity*): They're afraid of the big realities.

Goes up into Control Room.

BOB (*deep in his script*): The way they cut the fat out of these parts—it's terrible. Too much stop-watch, that's the trouble.

BRENDA (*rises and crosses R. of desk*): You haven't seen a stop-watch, have you?

BOB (*gloomily*): Not yet. But it'll be there all right when we start rehearsing.

Enter HETTY, *a middle-aged actress. Her line is all sympathy sweetness and light.*

HETTY (*sweetly*): Good morning, everybody. I hope I'm not late.

EDNA: No, Hetty, Mr. Sprott's not here yet.

HETTY: Thank you, Edna. Now, Brenda, can I have a look at my scripts? Quite a busy day to-day, isn't it? (*As she gets scripts.*) Thank you, Brenda. The woman at the greengrocer's was *so* interested when she knew I was working for the E.B.C. She was almost certain she recognised my voice. Wasn't that nice? (*Crossing to couch.*)

BRENDA: Yes, Miss Lodore.

Moving above piano.

HETTY: She insisted on me giving her my autograph for her niece at Weston-super-Mare. (*Confidentially to* BOB.) I got a lovely duck, but she'll only cook it for lunch.

BOB: I don't want it for lunch, not with two shows ahead of us. The time for roast duck is when we've done our work.

HETTY: Yes, dear, but you see—she's going out this afternoon to see her sister—you know, the one who's——

BOB: Don't tell me. Life's bad enough without knowing what's gone wrong with the landlady's sister. The point is, she won't cook it for to-night, and I won't eat it at lunch-time. So where are we?

Enter FAIRFAX HAYCRAFT, *tall, humourless, and still the golden-voiced announcer.*

HAYCRAFT: Good morning. Anyone asking for me?

BRENDA: No, Mr. Haycraft. But there are two letters on your desk.

HAYCRAFT: Thank you, Brenda. (*Opening letters.*)

BOB: I appeal to you, Fairfax. Would you eat roast duck just before doing two shows?

HAYCRAFT (*horrified*): Good heavens—no, Bob! Certainly not! I've always made it a rule never to eat anything hours before announcing.

HETTY (*sweetly*): Yes, but you're different. Everybody knows *your* voice. You couldn't afford to take any risks, could you?

BOB: I suppose it doesn't matter if I gurk out of a million loudspeakers.

HAYCRAFT (*referring to letters*): Really, I must say some of these listeners are very tiresome—the arrogant way in which they talk about switching you on and off.

BOB: They've been spoilt, that's why. Pay half a guinea—and then expect sixteen hours' a day continuous entertainment for a year—it's been made too cheap, that's the trouble.

HAYCRAFT: You're probably right, Bob. (*Rising.*) Oh—Hetty—while I remember——

HETTY (*crossing to him, all attention*): Yes, Fairfax?

HAYCRAFT: When I say—at the beginning of our Children's Hour programme—"But where's Aunt Hetty this afternoon?" don't reply at once.

HETTY: All right. When do I reply?

HAYCRAFT: I'll call "Aunt Hetty, Aunt Hetty!" Then I'll go on: "I say, children, this is serious. No Aunt Hetty."

HETTY: Oh, I like that, Fairfax. Gives me quite a build-up.

BOB: What's the point of giving *you* a build-up?

HAYCRAFT: Now, Bob! Then you come running in—you can do it across the mike—breathless effect—"Here I am—*so* sorry, Uncle Fairfax. Hello, children!"

HETTY (*giving her best at once*): Oh—lovely! (*Does the breathless effect.*) "Here I am—*so* sorry, Uncle Fairfax! Hello, children!"

BRENDA (*in surprising child voice*): *Hello, Aunt Hetty!*

Rises and sits on "Effects box".

BOB (*disgusted*): Good God!

HETTY (*sweetly*): "Very clever, Brenda"——

HAYCRAFT: And then we'll go straight on, Hetty. I thought of it at breakfast this morning. It just gives a little touch of suspense, doesn't it?

HETTY: Oh—yes—beautiful touch. I'll mark it in my script. (*Does so.*)

Enter hurriedly TRISTAN SPROTT, *a fantistic youngish man, carrying telephone with very long lead and plug. He is followed by* MOYA GRONOVA, *very dark, intense, foreign, with her music MS He stops abruptly.*

TRISTAN (*with great energy and decision*): Good morning, playmates! Edna get me Lovedale 4289.

Gives telephone to EDNA.

They reply "Good morning, *Mr. Sprott,*" *or* "*Tristan.*" *He sits at desk C.*

MOYA: But—Mr. Sprott, please, *please!* I know this music is wrong. There is some mistake in the copying—or something——

TRISTAN: Tell that to Tony Winter.

MOYA (*in despair*): But he's not here—he's gone to London.

TRISTAN: London! That reminds me. Has that effects boy from London arrived yet?

EDNA: No, not yet.

BRENDA: Could I do some effects? (*Slight move down.*)

TRISTAN: The only effect I want from you, Brenda, is that of a dead silence.

MOYA: But I *know* this music is wrong—and Tony Winter is away—and to-night we go on the air with it—so?

TRISTAN: We'll see what it sounds like at rehearsal. Go and

chew it over at the piano—but quietly, quietly, we're very busy. Has an old man with a serpent arrived ?

HETTY : What !

TRISTAN : It isn't that kind of serpent.

HETTY : What kind of a serpent is it then ?

TRISTAN : It's a musical instrument. You blow them. My "Down Here in Barset" programme to-night will be unique, and the talk of all the tap-rooms. It may initiate a great national movement back to the land. Here—(*noticing* PAULA'S *desk*) is this mine ? (*Opens drawer and picks out pair of stockings.*) Oh—no, it's Paula's. Oh dear, oh dear ! Does this mean she's going to sit here all day watching us rehearse ? That'll be too delicious.

EDNA (*at telephone*) : Lovedale 4289.

TRISTAN : Thank you very much. (*As he goes to telephone.*) I knew when I woke this morning and remembered *who* I was and *where* I was that this was going to be a most peculiar day. (*He has said the last words into the telephone.*) No, peculiar day's not the name. Tristan Sprott's the name—yes, E.B.C. Now what about that old man who plays the serpent—yes, Matthew Punnet—old Matt ? . . . No, not yet—and I'll have to rehearse him for *hours*. . . . Oh, his grand-daughter's bringing him, is she? Daisy Punnet. Oh yes, of course, she's in my cast too. . . . You're sure they've left ?

Enter DOROTHY.

DOROTHY (*proudly*) : Commander Copley wants to speak to you all.

TRISTAN : What did you say ?

DOROTHY : Commander Copley's coming in to talk to you all.

TRISTAN : Don't be silly. (*Back at telephone.*) No, not you—one of the girls here. Now what about the other three rustics ? . . . Can't leave before five ? Coming in by car, are they ? Well, tell them to come straight here and ask for me. I'll have to rehearse them like fury. We're on the air at eight-fifteen. All right, I'm depending on you to get 'em off clean and sober—and of course I'm desperately obliged. Good-bye.

Rises crosses U.L. *drops reciver on to* BOB'S *lap.*

Enter JOE U.R. *to control cabin.*

MOYA (*at piano*): Now, Mr. Sprott, listen—*please*—and you will see what I mean——

She plays a rather discordant phrase or two.

TRISTAN *D.S. end of piano.*

TRISTAN: No, that can't be right. I rather like that.

Picks up glass with rose in it and takes it to sofa and sits.

MOYA: But can it possibly be music for this so sweet rural programme "Down Here In Barset"?

TRISTAN: No, Moya. Someone has blundered. Just put back the sugar into it, will you.

BOB *replaces receiver and sits box again.*

JOE (*suddenly turning, loudly*): Pure escapism, that's what I call it.

TRISTAN: Now, Joe, not so rugged, please. Besides you've not seen Matthew Punnet yet and heard his serpent.

COMMANDER COPLEY *enters. He is a solemn but professionally "hearty" type.*

ALL: Good morning, Commander.

TRISTAN: Now let's have it straight from the shoulder.

COPLEY: You're all here, aren't you?

DOROTHY: Miss Leeds isn't here yet.

COPLEY: Oh—isn't she? Well—er—that doesn't matter, really——

TRISTAN: And no effects boy yet either.

Picks pencil off C. desk.

COPLEY: They've definitely sent one down. He'll be here any minute now. (*Looks round importantly.*) Look here, I've had a memo from Radio House—it's a circular thing, asking all us regional directors to give you all a bit of a jaw——

TRISTAN (*solemnly*): Not *really* a straight-from-the-shoulder.

COPLEY: That's about it, Tristan. Now I don't mind telling you all that I'm going to say to them at Radio House that, so far as this Barset regional station's concerned, no such talk from me or anybody else is necessary. I know you're all trying to pull together. We've got our jobs to do, and a pretty important job it is too when you think of the number of decent people who are regular listeners these days——

HAYCRAFT (*seriously*): Hear, hear!

TRISTAN: Hear hear!

COPLEY: There's been a tendency lately at Radio House to regard this particular regional studio of ours—perhaps because it's one of the smallest and furthest from London—to regard it, I say, as a kind of . . . (*hesitates.*)

TRISTAN: Chain gang for the hard cases.

COPLEY: Well, not quite that—Tristan exaggerates, as usual—but perhaps rather on those lines. And what seems to some of us here in Barset a pretty bad show——

HAYCRAFT: Definitely. It's all wrong.

TRISTAN: Oh—rotten bad show, chaps!

COPLEY: But as for making any appeals for your loyal co-operation and—er—asking you to play the game, I'm not going to do it—for the simple reason that I know jolly well that here in Barset it simply isn't necessary. We all know how to work together—and to play together. As I've said before—(*leaning on desk.*)

But the entrance of PAULA LEEDS *suddenly dries him up. She is an attractive, carelessly dressed girl, with a sardonic manner.*

PAULA (*going U.R.*): Good morning. (*She notices her desk—and stops.*) Sorry to interrupt the prize-giving—but isn't this my desk?

COPLEY: The workmen are in your office for a day or two.

PAULA (*sitting down*): So I'm practically out in the street.

TRISTAN: And shortly you'll be in the middle of my rehearsal.

PAULA (*sitting C. desk*): I thought of that too.

COPLEY (*to* PAULA *and* TRISTAN): By the way, I forgot to say that another producer is arriving from London this morning.

PAULA (*staggered*): What—*another* producer?

TRISTAN: Perhaps he's going to relieve you or me, Paula. Who is it?

COPLEY: I don't know—and—between ourselves—I think the whole thing rather preposterous. I've had a chit saying this fella—whoever he is—arrives to-day. He's written—*Demanding a Quiet Office.*

TRISTAN: He's got a hope!

PAULA: He'll be lucky if he gets a chair.

COPLEY: Also, he wants a full-time secretary, preferably Dorothy Limple——

DOROTHY (*interested*): You didn't tell me that.

COPLEY: Oh, he isn't going to claim you—don't worry. And then he asks for specially recorded rehearsals with playbacks——

PAULA: Local auditions, I'll bet.

BOB: And a full symphony orchestra.

COPLEY: All that sort of thing. Really, it's pretty steep. We're quite capable of producing anything that's required of us here, without all this nonsense.

TRISTAN (*with mock solemnity*): Of course we are.

COPLEY: I shall send him a stiff note—a rouser.

TRISTAN: Who, Rudolph?

COPLEY: Yes, Rudolph. Well—that's all—everybody and thank you.

TRISTAN: He's going to send Rudolph a rude one, a rouser.

COPLEY *goes out, followed by* DOROTHY.

PAULA (*with irony*): Rudolph—Rudolph? Now where have I heard that name before?

TRISTAN (*in the same vein*): Rudolph Persimmon, dear. He's the director of our Drama Department—your director—my director—have you forgotten—is it all so long ago, dear?

PAULA (*in faint, faraway tone*): I've been so long here in Barset. And he never comes here, does he?

TRISTAN: Great heaven's, girl, no! He once borrowed a fur coat and an interpreter and spent half a day in Manchester. (*Sits sofa.*) By the way, I've discovered the most fabulous ancient—straight out of Hardy—who plays the serpent. I'm practically building to-night's programme round that serpent.

PAULA: And rehearsing him first here?

TRISTAN: Of course.

PAULA: Tristan, no good'll come of this.

TRISTAN: Why not?

PAULA: You're too enthusiastic. Every time you're enthusiastic something happens.

TRISTAN: But if I'm not enthusiastic, then nothing happens. And we're not quite Civil Servants, even yet.

HAYCRAFT: Tristan, there are several questions I'd like to ask——

MOYA (*suddenly starting up from piano*): Mr. Sprott—what shall I *do* about this music—I——

TRISTAN (*with decision*): Now listen—Bob—Hetty—all of you—get your scripts. I'll want you too, Brenda. Just as yourself, y'know—no impersonations.

BOB: But where are we going, old boy?

TRISTAN: Along to the little talks studio.

BRENDA: The workmen are in there too, Mr. Sprott.

TRISTAN: Then they must clear out for half an hour.

MOYA: But there's no piano in there.

TRISTAN: You can mark your cues, and we'll have a proper run through in here later this morning. Come on, chaps—play the game for old Barset——

As he shepherds them through the door PAULA *calls him back.*

PAULA: Tristan, just a minute.

TRISTAN: Yes, blossom?

PAULA: There isn't room here for another producer. So they must be relieving one of us. Um?

TRISTAN: If one of us can go back to London—then it has to be you. I've always known that.

PAULA: I *was* going to say it could be you.

TRISTAN: You'd let me go? But why, duckie? You know you loathe it here.

PAULA: Yes, but you still believe in broadcasting. I don't think I do.. So I might as well be here as anywhere else. Besides——

DOROTHY *enters with memos.*

TRISTAN: Sh! Admiralty Intelligence approaching.

DOROTHY *gives one memo to* TRISTAN, *then puts another on* PAULA'S *desk.* TRISTAN *begins reading his, while* PAULA *ignores hers and looks across at* JOE.

PAULA: Good morning, Joe. I didn't notice you.

JOE: Morning, Miss Leeds. Sorry I couldn't manage a desk 'phone for you, but it 'ud be more bother than it would be worth.

PAULA: It doesn't matter, thanks, Joe. I'm hardly ever rung up. I don't think anybody except my mother and the administration department knows I'm here.

TRISTAN (*picks up memo from desk*): Joe, very interesting internal memo here. Just pay attention. (*Reads.*) "In future, acting assistant directors bracket unpaid bracket will be differentiated from acting assistant directors by being designed as quotation mark A stroke A quotation mark, the A stroke A without quotation marks being reserved for acting assistant directors." See?

JOE (*cautiously*): No, I don't quite follow that, Mr. Sprott.

TRISTAN (*going*): Never mind, it gives one a lift so to speak—helps one through the morning, doesn't it?

Exit TRISTAN.

JOE *crosses to* PAULA *at desk.*

JOE (*with great solemnity*): If you want *my* opinion, Miss Leeds—it's this. Just as there's too much escapism about a lot of our programmes, there's a bit too much red tape in the administration.

PAULA: I think you've got something there, Joe. I'd work on it.

Nods, smiles, to dismiss him.

He goes out. EDNA *now picks up the bulky MS.*

EDNA: What about this? You said you'd send it back this morning.

PAULA (*looking at it with distaste*): Oh—dear—yes. *The Fall of Jerusalem*, a radio play by the Reverend A. S. Humphrey Harborough. I know his niece. This is what you get for knowing clergymen's nieces. (*Moving to sofa.*) All right.

EDNA *rises.*

(*Dictating.*) "Dear Mr. Harborough——" or is it Dr. Harborough?—"Thank you for letting me see your *Fall of Jerusalem*. I am afraid I must return it as unfortunately it would take about two hours and a half to perform, needs about fifty actors, a full chorus and orchestra, and would cost several thousand pounds to produce, and therefore it is rather too ambitious for our present scale of production. You could, of course, send it to our director of drama at Radio House, Mr. Rudolph Persimmon, but I'm afraid he has not recovered yet from the Fall of Old Vienna as you may have noticed from his programmes——"

EDNA *giggles.*

" No, you'd better leave that out. Stop after Persimmon. " I hope Eileen is well. It's a long time since I heard from her. Yours sincerely." And make a nice parcel of it, Edna.

EDNA : I'll be awfully glad to see the last of it.

PAULA : And ask about the copyright on those four items.

As she hands over the paper, DOROTHY *enters and without speaking or smiling, rather haughtily, deposits a memo on the desk. Exit.*

Well, what's the latest from the quarter-deck? (*Reads.*) " It has been recently brought to my notice that certain members of the senior staff have lately neglected to leave telephone numbers, which would find them when off duty and away from their normal base. I should also like to remind them that office hours must be more strictly observed." My God, what cheek! I thought it was some little wreath of poison ivy by the way that girl handed it out. I'm sorry—but I don't like our Commander's new secretary. I hope she's not a bosom friend of yours by this time, Edna?

EDNA : No, I think she's too jolly conceited. I wouldn't mind if it were just because she's so attractive to look at—and she is, you know——

PAULA : Oh yes, a terrific charmer.

EDNA : Well, I wouldn't mind that, but she's so pleased with herself because she's had two years in Radio House.

PAULA : I've had ten years of it in London, and I—but—perhaps I'm as bad. Oh dear!

EDNA : Oh—no—it's different for you.

PAULA (*crossing to desk*) : Thank you, Edna. Always a comforting phrase that—different for us. I don't believe it, but I like it. (*Sits desk.*)

EDNA (*rises*) : I'll get these things done upstairs—shall I?

PAULA : Do.

EDNA *goes out.* PAULA *works quietly for a few moments.*

The next time she looks up it is because MARTIN BRADBURN *has entered. He is an attractive, serious, enthusiastic, untidy fellow in his early thirties. He marches in, then stops short as he notices* PAULA.

MARTIN (*obviously dismayed*) : Good lord!

PAULA (*with hint of rebuke*) : Good morning!

MARTIN (*with suggestion of apology*): Oh—good morning!

PAULA (*laughing*): Oh—good lord! (*Swings round.*)

MARTIN: I didn't know *you* were here.

PAULA: They ought to have warned you.

MARTIN: Why ought they to have warned me?

PAULA: I don't know, but you seemed pretty taken aback. As if there'd once been something rather desperate between us. If there was, it simply escaped my memory, that's all. Perhaps it's living in the country.

MARTIN (*rather confusedly*): No, of course not. Stupid of me to give you that impression. The fact is, I never went to bed last night—what with one thing and another.

PAULA: I see. Well, we did have rather a row about that series we did together—when was it—two years ago? I gathered then you weren't exactly mad on me.

MARTIN: Well, you gave me to understand very plainly that *I* wasn't exactly your favourite colleague either. You ended by calling me a conceited ape.

PAULA: But that was after you'd called me a viperous virgin.

MARTIN: Did I? We did have a stinking row, didn't we? (*Sits and looks pleasantly at her.*) But—you know—there was something about you that brought out the worst in me.

PAULA: I know what you mean. It's practically hate at first sight. You seem rather more human down here, but I expect that'll soon wear off. You're not, by any chance, the producer we're expecting—a quiet office, full-time secretary, recorded rehearsals, symphony orchestras——?

MARTIN: All right, all right, I catch the note of sarcasm. But naturally I asked for a few reasonable conditions when I said I wanted to come down here——

PAULA: Wait a minute! You *asked* to come down here?

MARTIN: Yes, of course. They didn't want to let me go—Rudolph was piling the programmes on me in town—but I insisted——

PAULA: You're not wearing a hair shirt as well, are you?

MARTIN: You've got it all wrong. (*Rises, obviously embarrassed.*) Actually this is all the wildest piece of self-indulgence.

PAULA: Are you sure you've come to the right region? This is Barset, you know—B for boring, A for awful, R for rural, S for stupid——

MARTIN (*breaking in*): I wish you wouldn't be facetious all the time. I remember how it annoyed me before. Must be a complex or something.

PAULA (*quietly*): It happens to be shyness.

MARTIN (*surprised*): Good lord!

PAULA: We're not going to begin that again, are we?

MARTIN: Sorry! I was genuinely surprised.

PAULA (*rises and crosses to front of desk*): I hate to say it, but—you've been doing some lovely work, you know. I thought that liner programme was beautifully produced.

MARTIN: Oh—you heard that one, did you? But you see producing—in the theatre—is really my job.

PAULA: I know. But what made you insist upon doing a programme down here?

MARTIN: Because I'm mad—I—(*checks himself.*)

PAULA: Well?

MARTIN: Dorothy Limple *is* here, isn't she?

PAULA: Yes. Oh!—I see.

MARTIN: Yes, I'm as mad as that. (*Rises and crosses to door and back to* PAULA.) What's she doing here?

PAULA: She's secretary to our director, Commander Copley.

MARTIN: Don't know him. What's he like?

PAULA: Oh—just a strong silent man from the blue water. No interest in drama, music, entertainment, talks—and probably hates broadcasting.

MARTIN (*grinning*): I'll bet he hates *you*.

PAULA: He does. And wonders why I was wished on him.

MARTIN: Why were you?

PAULA: I was too impertinent. At the programme meetings, when we discussed everything, but always got back to the last waltz in Old Wien, our romantic Rudolph never quite liked the look in my eye. So they said "Barset for you, my girl." And wait until you've had a few weeks down here. Love may find a way—and all that—but——

MARTIN : I'm not sure I'd call it love exactly——

PAULA : Well, you'll have plenty of time to settle all that, Bradburn. Hadn't you better report to the quarter-deck ? (*Moving to desk and pushing him.*)

MARTIN (*gloomily*) : Suppose I had. Where is the Admiral, Leeds ?

PAULA : Through that door. (*Sits.*)

As he turns towards door DOROTHY *comes through, and then stops in surprise at seeing him.*

MARTIN : Dorothy !

DOROTHY : Martin ! (*Stops by* HAYCRAFT'S *desk.*) Oh—this is ridiculous. I wondered if it was going to be you.

MARTIN (*going to her*) : I want to explain——

DOROTHY : There's nothing to explain.

MARTIN : Of course there is.

DOROTHY : There *isn't*. And you'd no *right* to come here—it makes me—Oh—it's so stupid. *Please.*

Brushes past him. He follows her.

MARTIN : But, Dorothy !——

She goes out and he follows her. PAULA *with a shrug, turns to her work again.* PERCY *enters and collides with* MARTIN. *He is an imperturbable Cockney youth, and talks American slang with a London accent. He taps* PAULA *on shoulder.* PAULA *looks up and recognises him.*

PERCY : Remember me, Miss Leeds ?

PAULA : Of course I do, Percy. How are you ?

PERCY : Fine and dandy.

PAULA : I'm fine but I'm not dandy.

PERCY : Remember the bother we 'ad with them French revolution noises ?

PAULA : Yes, Percy, I don't know how I'd have made the French Revolution without you.

PERCY : What's it like 'ere, Miss Leeds ?

PAULA : I don't think you'll enjoy it much.

PERCY : No. Country isn't it ?

PAULA : Yes, there's quite a lot of country round here, Percy, you know, fields and cows and sheep and so on.

PERCY : I thought so. Worse than Bristol.

PAULA : Oh, much worse than Bristol.

PERCY : Too slow for me, I like to step out and go places. (*Sees the piano.*) 'Ere, would you mind if I played a bit of dirt ?

PAULA : No, go ahead Percy, and express yourself.

He dashes over to the piano and plays some swing music in a fine slapdash style. He is interrupted by GRONOVA, *who rushes in.*

GRONOVA : No, no, please, please !

PERCY : Please what ?

GRONOVA : Please stop this horrible playing——

PERCY : Don't you like swing ?

GRONOVA : No, it is terrible !——

PERCY : Oh, classical pianist, eh ?

GRONOVA : Yes, a musician—and to-day is very difficult—we are in all kinds of trouble with the programme.

PERCY : Listen, sister, you can't tell *me* anything about trouble with programmes——

GRONOVA : Then you will understand—and excuse me——

PERCY : Sure, I'll excuse you—— 'Ere, can you play Bach ? (*He pronounces it—Batch.*)

GRONOVA (*all smiles*) : Bach ! Yes, for years I have played Bach, you like him, eh ?

PERCY : I think he's a piece of cheese !

TRISTAN *enters D.R hastily. He has his coat off now, and looks very wild.*

TRISTAN (*right up to* PERCY) : Where is that effects boy ? (*Sees* PERCY.) Ah—(*and peers at* PERCY)—there you are! I couldn't be more relieved. I suddenly thought I must have imagined you, after you just popped in and out like that.

PERCY : You wouldn't need a bit of good swing in this programme of yours, would you, Mr. Sprott ?

TRISTAN : *I* would, but the programme wouldn't. It's all rural, y'know. Dainty old world. Dear old rustic Barsetshire. What I do want is a reaper, and cider gurgling down, and the sound of darts and shove ha'penny at the old *Brown Cow.*

PERCY (*complacently*) : I've done plenty of them.

TRISTAN : I'll show you a script. Come on.

He goes out.

PERCY (*as he goes, to* PAULA): Looks like he's out on a limb, Mr. Sprott. I like your style better, Miss Leeds. You've a poker face.

Goes out.

PAULA: And bless his little heart, I say. (*Looks at* GRONOVA, *who has sat down, and plays a few notes—distressed.*) What's the matter, Moya?

GRONOVA: Everything. (*Rises.*) It is one of those days, my dear. When life is altogether too much. Not large and simple and beautiful—it is then we are happy. But small, petty and yet—terrible. (*Sits.*) Like that awful *sweeng.* (*Rises, crosses to her.*) Yes, this sweeng—it expresses this small but terrible life we live. Yet life could so easily be large and simple and beautiful——

PAULA: No Chekhov, Moya, please! I don't like Chekhov in the morning.

GRONOVA (*back to her and leans over desk*): You pretend to be hard, Paula my darling, just to protect your real self—your lovely tender inner self.

PAULA: There might be something in that, but don't start working on it.

GRONOVA: If I were a man, my dear, I would make love to you —just to be able to pull aside that mask. I think I must take an aspirin. Have you one, please?

Crosses and sits settee R.

PAULA: Not here. (*Rises.*) Edna will have some. She lives on them in a quiet, ladylike way.

PAULA *goes to telephone.*

Miss Darlington, please! . . . Oh Edna, have you any aspirin? . . . Well, pop one in water and bring it here for Moya. Perhaps you'd better make it two.

As she turns away from the telephone, DOROTHY *enters a pace or two in front of* MARTIN, *who is still arguing with her.* DOROTHY *makes straight for the other door.*

MARTIN (*pursuing*): What's the good of telling me it's undignified? It's more than that—it's damned fatuous. But we've got to have it out—we can't go on like this.

She has gone now, and he has followed.

GRONOVA *has risen and moved a little up.*

GRONOVA (*all eyes and ears*): Did you hear him? (*Turns to* PAULA.)

PAULA (*rather grimly*): I did. (*Sits on sofa.*)

GRONOVA: He must be crrr-azy about her. That's how I like to see a man behave. (*Sits L. of* PAULA.)

PAULA: Well, I don't. I take his word for it—it's not only undignified but damned fatuous. And even if it wasn't, she isn't worth it. She's been making great eyes at Copley ever since she arrived here.

GRONOVA: He is attractive to some types. To me—no.

PAULA: To me—no, too.

Enter EDNA *with glass, and memos, etc., she gives the glass to* GRONOVA, *then gives memo to* PAULA.

GRONOVA: Thank you very much, my dear. (*Begins to drink.*)

EDNA *sits at her desk.*

PAULA (*looking at memos*): Here's news. (*Reads.*) "In succession to Brigadier Townson, Sir Reginald Runtun, formerly assistant secretary to the Board of Fisheries, has now been appointed deputy-assistant director-general of the English Broadcasting Company." Isn't that nice? I don't think we've had anybody from the Fisheries before. I wonder if he'll notice any difference. (*Looks at* GRONOVA *who is staring at her.*) What's the matter? Do you know Sir Thingumty Thing—Sir Reginald Runtun?

GRONOVA (*with dramatic air*): That is what I am asking myself.

PAULA: And what are you going to reply to yourself?

GRONOVA (*to* EDNA): This Runtun—it is not a common name, is it?

EDNA: No, it isn't.

GRONOVA (*to* PAULA): How strange it would be if it were him—my first delicious romance. I think I've told you something of it before.

PAULA: I only remember the one who locked you up in his castle in the Dolomites. He couldn't have ended up at the Board of Fisheries, could he?

GRONOVA: No, of course not. He was Austrian, of course.

But this first one of all—when I was a girl at the Brussels Conservatoire—he was a young Englishman—and we were madly in love and ran away to the Ardennes—it was in June—a lovely June——

EDNA: But was his name Runtun?

GRONOVA (*rises and crosses to* EDNA): Yes—and he had enchanting blue eyes—and a melting voice. . . .

PAULA: It must have been a lovely June that year. But was he Reginald? Did you call him your Reggie?

GRONOVA: That I can't remember. You see—he asked me to call him by the name he was known by at school and college—Topsy.

PAULA: Good lord!

GRONOVA (*dreamily*): He had beautiful fair curling hair . . . but he was jealous of my music. There was a terrible scene—oh terrrr-ible! No, no, it couldn't possibly be the same one. I'm stupid to-day. Why am I so stupid to-day? Why is life like that? (*Sits settee* R.)

PAULA: Finish your aspirin, Moya, and never mind about life. (*Looks at a letter.*) Edna—(*round to desk and sits*)—tell London I never had those sea-shanty recordings here. Tell them I never touch a sea-shanty—or a negro spiritual—or any of that gorgeous maddening Tzigane stuff—either.

EDNA (*taking* GRONOVA'S *glass*): All right. (*Rises.*) Will you sign the letter returning the script?

PAULA *does.* HAYCRAFT *enters mopping his brow delicately.*

EDNA *goes out* U.R. GRONOVA *gets up.*

HAYCRAFT (*going to his desk*): I don't see how Tristan can do anything about his programme until all those local people turn up.

GRONOVA (*tragically*): I have a feeling they will not turn up.

HAYCRAFT: Why shouldn't they? They always do.

GRONOVA (*moving down to door* D.R.): I don't know. But I have a feeling they won't. (*To door.*) So everything will be absolutely chaos.

Goes out.

HAYCRAFT (*solemnly*): It's chaos at the moment all right. And I'm afraid out Children's Hour programme isn't very much better.

It's absurd when we only get it once a fortnight that we can't organise the thing better than this. You know—(*down to* PAULA)—Paula, I *like* doing the Children's Hour.

PAULA (*turns to him*): I know you do, Fairfax.

HAYCRAFT: It's all very well for some of you people to scoff——

PAULA (*who isn't*): I'm not scoffing.

HAYCRAFT (*very much himself*): But it's the only thing I really enjoy doing nowadays. Do you remember that little series I did—*Friends in Twilight?* Just a few records and readings of selected passages suitable for a friendly twilit hour. They were an enormous success. A wealthy widow in Torquay wrote asking me to name my own terms——

PAULA: What to do?

HAYCRAFT: Oh just to go and do some more *Friends in Twilight* readings for her. I had to refuse, of course.

PAULA: Why?

HAYCRAFT: Oh—well—(*sits at his desk laughing.*)

Enter COPLEY *and* MARTIN. *They cross to downstage L.*

COPLEY (*confidentially*): Now look here, Bradburn, I don't quite understand why you've been sent down here, but of course I'll do what I can to give you everything you want. But you must understand, my dear chap, that Miss Limple's now my secretary—a very responsible job—and so you can't possibly commandeer her services. So why go on worrying her?

They stop on their return walk.

MARTIN: I'm not after her services.

COPLEY: I understood you were.

MARTIN: I'm not worrying her, as you call it, about that, but about some personal matter. You see, I saw a great deal of her in London.

COPLEY: Oh—did you? She didn't tell me that.

MARTIN: There are probably a lot of things she doesn't tell you.

COPLEY (*after pause, coldly*): Well?

MARTIN (*irritably*): Well what?

COPLEY: Is that all you've got to say?

MARTIN: What do you want—the story of my life?

COPLEY: I think I'm right in saying—you're not engaged to Miss Limple—or anything of that kind?

MARTIN: What's anything of that kind? But if you must know I was infatuated with the girl for months—still am, apparently, or I shouldn't be here—and God knows why I *am* here——

Moves up and sits on piano stool.

Enter DAISY PUNNET, *a girl about twenty, with round red cheeks, round staring eyes, and a startlingly loud voice, which she never modulates, and a Barsetshire accent. She comes plump in, then stands and looks about her. The others stare at her in surprise.*

DAISY: Is my grand-dad here?

COPLEY: Oh—I say—what is this?

DAISY: I brought 'im to the door an' said, 'Look grand-dad, you stay 'ere a minute while I go across to that shop for a meat pasty for your lunch,' an' now I can't find 'im anywhere.

COPLEY: But—look here—this is an E.B.C. studio, y'know, missie——

DAISY: I know it is, mister. That's why we're 'ere.

HAYCRAFT (*rises and comes down to her* R.): Oh—you're in Mr. Sprott's programme, are you?

DAISY (*going closer*): That's it. Oh—I say—I know *your* voice.

HAYCRAFT (*pleased*): Do you?

DAISY: Course I do. 'Eard it ever since I can remember. Aren't you the announcer, Farfax Haycraft?

HAYCRAFT: Well—yes—I am.

Gives bag to COPLEY.

DAISY (*producing autograph book*): Give me your autograph, please. It's not for us, but for my cousin Ethel—but I know she'd like yours. (*As he signs the book.*) I'll bet my grand-dad's wandering round 'ere somewhere. (*Takes bag from* COPLEY.) He's getting a bit—y'know——

MARTIN *moves down to arm of settee.*

—soft, though he'll be a good turn in your programme if you all keep right side of 'im. But y'ave to watch him.

HAYCRAFT (*the charmer*): Let's see if we can find him, shall we?

He escorts her through door.

COPLEY (*moving down L. confidentially to* MARTIN): You were saying?

MARTIN (*down to* R. *of* COPLEY): Oh lord!—I don't know what I was saying. Can't you see the idiotic state I'm in? And been in it for weeks—ever since we had that row. And the girl isn't even intelligent!

COPLEY (*stiffly*): I've found Dorothy an extremely intelligent girl. But we're not here to discuss her.

MARTIN: We're not here to discuss anything.

They pace across and up to door then down again.

COPLEY: Yes, we are, Bradburn. Now look here, my dear chap, I can see you're a bit nervy and all that—know how you fellas get—with all this theatrical stuff you have to deal with. I'm not going to lecture you. Not my style. And your personal affairs have nothing to do with me, of course. But I'm here to run this studio—

COPLEY *stops near desk*—MARTIN *is* L. *of him.*

to see that everybody pulls their weight and is happy about it and all that, and I simply can't have anybody barging in and upsetting everybody——

Enter BRENDA *D.R.*

BRENDA (*loudly and cheerfully*): Anybody seen a stop-watch?

COPLEY (*turning*): Never mind about the stop-watch for the moment, Brenda. This is Mr. Martin Bradburn. Until Hilda comes back from her holidays or they send us somebody else, you'd better act as Mr. Bradburn's secretary.

BRENDA: What! With Mr. Sprott and Mr. Haycraft on my hands already!

COPLEY: You'll find Brenda very quick and clever, Bradburn. She's good at—er impersonations too, aren't you, Brenda? There now!

Hurries out leaving MARTIN *and* BRENDA *staring at each other, and* PAULA *watching, amused.*

BRENDA (*wistfully*): You wouldn't like to hear one of my impersonations, would you, Mr. Bradburn?

MARTIN: Good God! He really meant it then.

Moves up to HAYCRAFT'S *desk.*

BRENDA (*in front of settee, firmly*): Beatrice Lillie.

MARTIN *sits on desk and stares at her in horror.* BRENDA *begins*

a quite unconvincing imitation of Beatrice Lillie. PAULA, *taking a stop-watch from her drawer, now takes charge.*

PAULA (*below desk to* BRENDA): That'll do, Brenda. We're just not receptive this morning. But here's the stop-watch. I'll never see it again but it's probably worth it. Now run.

BRENDA *takes it and hurries out.* PAULA *sits L. of sofa. Looks at him.*

MARTIN (*groaning, sits edge of desk*): I think I'm going mad. Beatrice Lillie and grand-dad and that man Copley—*my dear chap!* And I can't get a glimmer of sense out of Dorothy and until I do I don't know where I am. Why did I come here?

PAULA: Don't ask me, Bradburn.

MARTIN: All right, Leeds. If you wanted your revenge, take a good look at me now.

PAULA: I'm not the vindictive kind, strange as it may seem.

MARTIN: Is Copley like that all the time?

PAULA: Practically all the time.

MARTIN: Good lord!

PAULA: Also, he's considered rather a charmer round here.

MARTIN: Brenda?

PAULA: I don't know about poor Brenda. But there are—others.

MARTIN (*sits on settee*): No, I don't believe it. And don't tell me you aren't vindictive, Leeds.

PAULA: I'm not. Before, I always thought you clever—but insufferable. Now I see you're not so clever—but almost sufferable.

Enter DOROTHY. PAULA *sees her.* MARTIN *rises.*

And this is where I go up to my own office, even if I have to fight my way in through workmen. And—Dorothy——

DOROTHY: Well?

PAULA (*as she goes out*): Have a heart.

Goes.

MARTIN (*moving across*): Listen, Dorothy, if you won't come out——

DOROTHY: How can I? I'm the studio director's secretary and I've lots to do and——

MARTIN: All right, if you can't, you can't. But then, for God's sake, let's talk here for a minute.

DOROTHY: Can't you *wait?*

MARTIN: No, I can't. And if you were anything like the same state of mind that I'm in, you couldn't either. Now listen—you remember what you said the last time we saw each other in London?

DOROTHY (*comes to front of desk and puts memo there*): I said a lot of things. And so did you. And some of them were pretty silly too.

MARTIN (*savagely*): All right then, let's stop being pretty silly—as you call it. Let's be tough about it, if that's what you want. Though God knows what you *do* want——

Behind settee to mike down L.

JOE *enters and goes towards mikes, etc.* MARTIN *sees him.*

Oh—for the love of Pete!

DOROTHY: Sh!

MARTIN (*in tense whisper*): Sometimes I think I simply don't see you as a real person at all.

DOROTHY (*also in tense whisper*): I shouldn't be surprised at that either.

MARTIN: It might be just a kind of image I fell in love with. I tell myself——

JOE (*shouting at mike*): How's this Fred? Give me two buzzes if it's okay.

Only one buzz comes.

MARTIN (*trying again*): I say, I tell myself it's just a beautiful image, planted in my imagination and not a real girl, a person——

JOE (*as before*): Well, give me some more juice, Fred. Now listen—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Wednesday, Thursday—the boy stood on the burning deck—is that better?

Two buzzes.

Okay, Fred, I'm coming up.

On his way out passes the other two below him and smiles at them cheerfully not noticing their tenseness at all.

JOE: We have to take advantage of these quiet spells, haven't we?

Goes out.

DOROTHY : If you want to know who's not been real in all this I can tell you—it isn't me, it's you.

MARTIN : What do you mean by that ?

DOROTHY : I mean, I got sick and tired of being pulled this way and that way, never allowed to be just myself, with you always arguing and analysing and theorising, until I didn't know where I was.

Sits settee.

MARTIN : I'll bet you know where you are down here all right.

DOROTHY (*defiantly*) : Yes, I do. But just as I'm beginning to settle down again, you come here and want to start all over again——

MARTIN : It isn't a question of starting all over again. You left me in a hellishly disturbed state of mind—I've not been able to work properly or think straight—so I came down——

DOROTHY : To start all over again, only worse than before.

MARTIN (*tensely*) : I came to discover if I had any meaning for you—and if I had any meaning for you——

LOUD VOICE (*from Speaker*) : What are you saying, Joe ?

MARTIN (*trying to ignore this*) : Look what happened. I was crazy about you. I couldn't——

VOICE (*from Speaker*) : I thought you said you were coming up, Joe.

MARTIN (*losing his temper*) : Oh—shut up !

DOROTHY *has now turned away and is making muffled sounds with her shoulders shaking.*

(*Turns back to her.*) Well, there's no need to cry.

DOROTHY (*turning*) : I'm not crying. I'm laughing.

MARTIN (*angrily*) : I used to have a sense of humour too.

DOROTHY : I never thought you had much.

MARTIN (*horror-struck*) : What—*me !* And *you* can say that ! I suppose this old sea-dog Copley supplies just about your brand of fun.

DOROTHY (*demurely*) : Commander Copley says some very amusing things.

MARTIN (*groaning*) : Oh !—God help us ! But it serves me right, it serves me right. (*Sits beside* DOROTHY. *Collects himself, solemnly.*)

Now listen, Dorothy. One last serious word——

And this is the cue for the entrance of MATTHEW PUNNET, *a very ancient be-whiskered rustic who arrives carrying a serpent of great size and blackness. His speech is almost unintelligible. At first he just comes a step inside.*

PUNNET : 'Marnin', marnin'. (*Chuckles horribly.*)

MARTIN *stares at him in horror. But there is no escape. Now the Ancient comes right in.*

Be he, the E.B.C.?

MARTIN : What do you say ? (*Rises and crosses to* PUNNET.)

PUNNET : Be he E.B.C. ?

MARTIN *moves up a little between desk and piano, then comes back.*

DOROTHY : Yes, this is the E.B.C. studio ? (*Rises.*)

PUNNET (*crossing and sits on settee, chuckling*): If he be E.B.C. I be sitting roight ahere awaitin' my tarn to play ould sarpent.

Chuckles, produces one deep note, and then waits for their applause.

DOROTHY : I think he's one of the local people for Tristan Sprott's programme.

MARTIN (*crosses to* HAYCRAFT'S *desk* R.) : And I think I m going to have a nervous breakdown.

DAISY *rushes in D.R. followed by* HAYCRAFT.

DAISY (*crossing to* PUNNET *and sits* R. *of him: shouting*) : He's here. Where you been, grand-dad ?

HAYCRAFT : How d'you do, Mr. Punnet ?

Stands R. *of settee.*

PUNNET (*pointing to* HAYCRAFT, *but to* DAISY) : He be mortal image o' Farmer Bates' cowman.

HAYCRAFT : What does he say ?

DAISY (*shouting*) : He says you're the image of Bates' cowman.

HAYCRAFT (*making the best of it*) : And am I ?

DAISY : No, he's younger than you.

PAULA *enters U.R. and goes to her desk, but notices the* PUNNETS, *etc., with amusement.*

JOE'S VOICE (*from Speaker*) : Mr. Sprott down there yet ?

PUNNET (*rising in alarm*) : Be it my tarn to play sarpent already ?

DAISY : No, sit down and be quiet, grand-dad.

HAYCRAFT (*into mike, with great charm*) : No, Joe, he's not here.

I've been looking for him myself. Two of his cast have arrived.

JOE'S VOICE: Okay, I'll wait.

PUNNET (*indicating* HAYCRAFT): What's 'e mutterin' about?

DAISY (*humorously*): He's tellin' 'um you're going to 'ave some cider with your dinner.

MARTIN (*to* DOROTHY): This is Bedlam. Let's go out and have an early lunch.

HAYCRAFT *sits on* R. *arm of settee.*

DOROTHY (*coldly*): No, thanks.

MARTIN: But we *must* talk.

DOROTHY: You mean, you must make a scene. Besides, I'm busy. And I happen to be working for somebody I respect. (*Turns and goes towards door.*)

MARTIN (*following*): It's our last chance, Dorothy. I mean it.

But she goes out, and he stays this side of door. The others are grouped round old PUNNET *looking at his serpent.*

PAULA *looks at* MARTIN.

Enter TRISTAN, PERCY (*to effects box*) *with scripts, etc.*, GRONOVA (*to piano*), BOB (*right of piano*), HETTY (*to chair* L.), BRENDA (*to* HAYCRAFT'S *desk*), HAYCRAFT (*to behind settee*).

TRISTAN *sees* MARTIN *as he crosses him to door.*

TRISTAN: Hello, old man.

MARTIN: Hello, Tristan.

TRISTAN: Excuse me a moment. Now just spread yourselves, playmates. What sort of a rehearsal this'll be, with three of the local cast still missing, God knows, but we'll have some sort of a run-through. (*As the others get into their places, he turns to* PAULA *and* MARTIN.) Paula, for the love of Pete, take him away, and then I'll be rid of you both. It's not fair, it's really not fair, you two being here. It simply isn't *done.*

MARTIN: I think I'll go and drink myself to death.

PAULA: No, you won't. You'll come out and have an early lunch with me. Only don't try and eat yourself to death. (*Rising, to door.*)

TRISTAN: That's the spirit. Off you go.

MARTIN: Nice of you. Though I'll be rotten bad company.

PAULA (*as she moves down with him*): Oh—we'll work up a cheerful little quarrel.

They go out.

TRISTAN: Are you all ready? I want to try and get some sort of timing on the whole thing—and even though those three aren't here—Miss Punnet and Grand-dad can get into it a bit—and we can work in the music and effects. I won't go up into the box yet. But remember next time it'll be light cues. First light for the record, Percy. Second light for you, Fairfax, for the announcement. Third light for you, Moya.

DAISY (*loudly*): What about me and grand-dad?

TRISTAN: I'll send up rockets for you two. No, that'll be all right, duckie. Watch your script with one eye and keep the other on grand-dad. Now then——

PERCY *starts record. Fades in.*

Are you timing it, Brenda?

BRENDA: Yes, Mr. Sprott.

Fades out.

TRISTAN: Fairfax—announcement.

HAYCRAFT (*in his best manner*): "Down Here in Barset"—we present another half-hour of Barsetshire humour, melody, and folklore, in a programme written and produced by Tristan Sprott. It's a beautiful summer night—the men have returned from the hayfields—the door of that friendly old pub The Brown Cow—stands wide open—Down Here in Barset.

TRISTAN: All right, Moya—Percy—give!

MOYA *begins playing a country tune.* PERCY *makes noise suggesting bottles and glasses, etc.*

TRISTAN: Atmosphere, chaps.

HETTY, BOB, HAYCRAFT, TRISTAN *himself and even* PERCY *and* BRENDA, *laugh and chatter in a rather stagey style. In the middle of this, there is a queer deep note from* PUNNET'S *serpent. Music stops.*

(*Shrieking.*) No, no, no. No serpent yet. The old boy's not made his entrance yet.

DAISY (*loudly*): Y'aven't to start playin' yet, grand-dad. I'll tell you when.

PUNNET (*unintelligibly*): Ef Oi come 'ere to play sarpent, Oi wants to play sarpent.

TRISTAN: What does he say?

DAISY: He says if he comes 'ere to play his serpent he want to play his serpent.

TRISTAN (*shouting*): Quite right, grand-dad—you've got temperament—but wait until the proper time and then you can blow your head off. Start, again everybody.

More laughter and chatter, as before.

BOB (*in Barset style*): 'Nother point o' coider, Rose. Oi saw your young man over boi Jenkins' twenty-acre.

ROSE (*same style*): He's no young man o' moine, Charley Bragg isn't—not since Michaelmas Fair.

BOB: Didn't buy ee a praper fairing, oi'll be bound, Rose.

DAISY (*in loud, wooden tone, rise and step down*): Good evenin' all! Is moi grand-dad 'ere?

TRISTAN: No, no, no, duckie. You're much too soon.

PUNNET (*intelligible*): But oi be 'ere, girl.

DAISY: No, grand-dad. It's what I say in the piece we're doing.

TRISTAN: But you were much too early. And don't say it like that either. Do it more like this. (*Very rural but also very bright.*) "Good evenin' all! Is moi grand-dad 'ere?"

DAISY (*exactly as before*): Good evenin' all! Is moi grand-dad 'ere?

TRISTAN: Yes, a bit better, duckie. But I'll have to rehearse you later. (DAISY *sits.*) Now then, Bob, back to your fairing line.

BOB: Didn't buy ee a praper fairing, oi'll be bound, Rose.

HAYCRAFT (*surprisingly*): Oi 'eard tell on that tew, Garge.

HETTY: What yew tew 'eard tell on 'at isn't trew would fill the Barsetshire News onny Friday. What's for yew, Muster Caxton.

BOB (*in different voice, very deep*): Pint of old an' mild, Miss Nancy.

HETTY: Yes, Muster Caxton. (*Pour.*) Would yew be giving us a song to-noight, Muster Caxton.

HAYCRAFT: We do be expectin' your old 'ay-makin' song to-noight, Muster Caxton

BOB (*as* GARGE *again*): Oi'll never forget the first toime oi ever 'eard that 'ay-makin' song—dang my buttons! (*Much laughter.*) Woi, look oo's 'ere! Young Cherry Gooseman.

DAISY (*rise*): Good evenin' all. Is moi grand-dad 'ere?

Collapse of TRISTAN.

BOB (*as* GARGE): Naow, yer grand-dad's not 'ere.

HETTY (*as* ROSE): An' that's where yew be wrong, again, Garge. Ol' Gooseman's 'ere. He's asleep in the corner there.

HAYCRAFT: Woi so 'e be. An' only man in all Barset as can still play the ould sarpent.

DAISY: Moi grand-dad was the foinest sarpent player in the whole o' Barset——

TRISTAN (*rises to knees*): Not quite so loud, duckie—but a bit brighter. You see, you're frightfully proud of the fact that your grand dad was the finest serpent player in the whole of Barset. It's kept your family going for the last sixty years.

DAISY: Me mother won't let 'im play it. (*To old* PUNNET.) 'Ere, grand dad, wake up! Y'ave to play in a minute.

TRISTAN: Let's have it again, duckie. Moi grand-dad——

PUNNET (*loudly and angrily*): Oi be woide awake naow, girl. Oi'll gi'ee a beltin' ef oi've any more o' your sauce——

DAISY: No, that's what it says in the piece, grand-dad.

PUNNET *starts playing, to the sound of cheers and noises of glasses, etc. from* PERCY. TRISTAN *is beating time with one hand and wiping his brow with the other. The curtain comes swiftly down on the collapse of* TRISTAN.

ACT II

As before. It is now the middle of the afternoon.

At rise, PERCY KING *is playing some dashing swing, and* BRENDA *is standing near, admiring it and him and dancing. They have the studio to themselves. This performance is continued until the audience has stopped banging down the seats. It is then brought to a*

fine slapdash conclusion. PERCY *breaks the music with a little dance.*

BRENDA (*coming down C.*): I think you're marvellous.

PERCY (*who does too*): Well, it's a gift reelly—(*Rises*)—only you gotta practise as well see? I nearly got into a programme—jus' before last Christmas it was—only they were frightened of over-runnin' so they cut me out.

BRENDA: I'll bet you get your chance soon, Percy.

PERCY: I'll bet I do. (*Condescending a little.*) An' I'll bet you do too, Alice.

BRENDA (*like lightning*): Brenda.

PERCY (*unembarrassed*): Brenda—that's right.

BRENDA: You an' your Alices!

PERCY: 'Ere, hand out one of your impersonations.

BRENDA: All right. Who shall I do?

PERCY: Don't tell me. Let me guess—see?

BRENDA (*doubtfully, coming to front of settee*): I've never done 'em that way before. They never do 'em that way on the stage. They always *tell* you first who it is.

PERCY (*comes down and leans on desk*): Never mind—let's try it this way. Go on.

BRENDA (*changing into somebody not* BRENDA, *but God knows who*): "Good evening, my darling. You *are* my darling still, aren't you—my darling? Tired? No, I could dance the night away. I feel inspired, darling. No, it isn't champagne—I only had the tiniest sip—it's love and life—life and love——"

PERCY: It's swell. Honestly, I wouldn't have known it was you. If I'd come in at the door when you was doing it, I wouldn't 'ave known it was you.

BRENDA: Yes, but who was it?

PERCY: Jessie Matthews?

BRENDA (*scornfully*): No, not a bit like her. (*Sits settee.*)

PERCY: Gertrude Lawrence?

BRENDA: No, I never seen her.

PERCY: Ginger Rogers?

BRENDA (*showing signs of distress now*): No — don't be silly. How *could* it be Ginger Rogers?

Telephone. She has to answer it.

Yes, this is the E.B.C. Who? . . . *What* emperor? . . .

She listens bewildered, but at that moment COMMANDER COPLEY *enters DR, followed by* DOROTHY.

COPLEY: What's this? Anything for me?

BRENDA (*putting hand over receiver*): Yes. It's somebody complaining about something. (*Up to piano.*)

COPLEY (*he goes and takes telephone from her*): Commander Copley here—regional director. . . . Oh yes. . . . Certainly, we're only too glad to be corrected . . . yes, I'll pass it on with pleasure, sir. . . . I see. . . . Now let me get this straight, sir—Maximilian did not assume the title of Emperor Elect until 1508, and *not* in 1506—as our speaker suggested. . . Thank you. . . . No, I'm much obliged . . . and I'll forward the correction to the proper quarter at once. . . . *Good* afternoon.

Puts down telephone, and gives DOROTHY *a whimsical smile.* Make a note of that, Dorothy, and send it along to Talks at Radio House. I haven't the foggiest what it's all about.

DOROTHY (*admiringly*): I don't know how you've the patience.

COPLEY (*smiling*): That's one of the things you learn in the Service. These things come in jolly useful. And that's where these chaps who've had no proper training—these temperamental Johnnies—fall down.

They go out.

PERCY: Gracie Fields?

BRENDA (*suddenly furious*): No, you fathead—and I believe you're doing it on purpose.

PERCY (*staggered*): What me? Why, I only——

BRENDA (*angrily*): Oh shut up!

She hurries out and collides with BOB DINTY.

Mind where you're going—clumsy. (*She bangs out.*)

PERCY: Boy!

BOB (*who is gloomy*): What have you been doing to her?

PERCY: Nothing. She suddenly flares up——

BOB (*gloomily*): That's women, my lad. You're just beginning to get a glimpse of it. They get worse as they get older. (*He sits down heavily in settee.*)

PERCY: I've seen plenty of it. My Sis——

BOB (*cutting in*): You've seen nothing yet, my lad. Take it from me. They get worse as they get older. And it isn't their insides. They've got insides like horses.

PERCY: My Sis——

BOB (*cutting in*): Yes, like horses. Eat and drink anything.

PERCY: Horses can't eat and drink anything.

BOB: Don't argue, my lad. I'm in no mood for an argument.

Enter FAIRFAX HAYCRAFT, *who goes to his desk.*

PERCY: What about that Children's Hour stuff—Mr. Haycraft?

HAYCRAFT: Have a look in the basement. Joe Cossart might remember.

PERCY *goes out.* HAYCRAFT *now notices* BOB'S *gloom.* What's the matter, Bob? Worrying about having two programmes to-day?

BOB: Programmes? Not me. Give me work, old boy, and I'm happy. I like work—live for it. Every good actor does. Old Thorburn—you remember old Thorburn's Shakespearean Company?—I was with him for five years—well, old Thorburn used to say, "Bob, you're a glutton for work, boy—I'll say that about you." There's no work here, Fairfax. It's child's play to a man who's been brought up in repertory. No, it's not work but the other thing that's got me down, to-day.

HAYCRAFT: What other thing?

BOB: Well, what do you think—women.

HAYCRAFT: Oh, I see.

BOB: You go to your digs hoping for a nice quiet lunch on a busy day—and what happens? Hell breaks loose. And why? Only one answer—the women.

HAYCRAFT: What women? Who was there besides Hetty?

BOB: My wife.

HAYCRAFT: Oh—I say! She turned up then?

BOB: Yes, she does every month or two, just to see how I'm getting on. She knows about Hetty and me, of course, but that doesn't stop her coming. Embarrassing I call it, but nothing seems to embarrass women so long as their clothes don't start

falling down. If I was married to a man who was living with another woman, would I keep turning up for lunch? Of course I wouldn't—and neither would you, old man. But *they* do, think nothing of it. And you ought to have seen the way they walked into that duck we had, both Hetty and the wife.

HAYCRAFT: Didn't they leave any for you to-night?

BOB: I'll be lucky if there's a leg. Well, the first half of the lunch, while they're wolfing the duck, the wife and Hetty are taking cracks at each other all the time—you know how women are—"My dear, you're looking so tired"—"No he never cared for your acting, did he, dear?"—like a couple of talking cats round that duck. Till I got fed up and told 'em I'd like a bit of peace and quiet. That settled it. They rounded on me, then, both of 'em at once. I was a fine one to talk! You know. And no delicacy, no tact, old man, about the situation at all. Out comes everything, with me to blame all through, of course. In the end I simply couldn't stick it and walked straight out on the pair of 'em—round to the Lion. So—for God's sake, old man, don't leave Uncle Bob alone with Auntie Hetty this afternoon, else your Children's Hour is going to sound like a dog fight.

Enter TRISTAN, *looking rather wild, with present in box wrapped up.*

TRISTAN: My mother's just telephoned from Leamington. She's met a theosophical Indian there who remembers her as the favourite concubine of a Chinese Emperor who flourished about two-thousand B.C. (*Crosses to settee and sits.*) No good'll come of that. Before the week's out he'll be borrowing his fare to Bombay.

BOB (*to* HAYCRAFT): You see. Nothing but trouble with 'em.

HAYCRAFT (*to* TRISTAN): Bob'a had a bad time with his women folk at lunch.

TRISTAN (*starting to untie parcel*): It's worse though when they use the telephone for all their most fantastic and revolting statements. I think the girls at the exchange listen in and then tell all bona-fide subscribers. That's why, wherever I go, I hear the unpleasant sound of only half-suppressed giggles. I ought to

telephone myself to somebody, but I can't remember to whom about what. (*Has untied parcel and taken out envelope, flowers, scarf.*) What extraordinary things people do send for presents. (*Looks at envelope.*) Oh, Fairfax, this is for you.

HAYCRAFT *takes present and puts scarf round his neck.*

HAYCRAFT: I see that Sir Reginald Runtun, late of the Board of Fisheries, has just been appointed our deputy-assistant director-general.

TRISTAN: Stop it, Fairfax. You sound just as if you're reading the choicest news of the Baldwin government. You'll have us all in Westminster Abbey in a minute if you're not careful. That's what wrecked you, Fairfax. You've never been able to get Westminster Abbey out of your voice. (*Rise and move up stairs.*) I must rehearse those monstrous Punnets some time this afternoon. Then there are the other three rural druids to arrive.

BOB: You know Tristan old man, I've never understood why you're down here doing these rustic Barset programmes.

TRISTAN (*at top of stairs*): For the same reason that Dick Hodge, who's really a farmer, is up in town doing light sophisticated metropolitan programmes like "Café Society" and—(*Down stairs*)—"Company at Claridges". If I'd turned up to Radio House covered with hayseed and reeking of manure, I'd have been in town yet, eating *supreme de volatille* and drinking *Montrachet.*

Enter EDNA.

Oh, Edna, do something for me, will you?

EDNA: Yes, what is it?

TRISTAN: That's the trouble, I can't remember. Why do I think fish comes into it?

EDNA: Do you want some fish?

TRISTAN: Good God—no! Fairfax was announcing about fish. That's it. Sir Reginald Thing, our new deputy-assistant D.G., was discovered in the Board of Fisheries. (*Giving string to* FAIRFAX.) That's yours. "Put those mackerel away," they said, "and try broadcasting. Have you ever done any? No? Good! Interested in drama, music, entertainment, news, popular talks? No? Splendid! You're just what we want." Where's Paula?

EDNA : I don't know. I came out to see, because a long telegram's just come for her.

TRISTAN : Don't tell me what it's all about.

EDNA : I'm not going to.

TRISTAN : That's right—let me guess. They want her to go to Sheffield and produce one of those stark documentaries. *Steel ! Iron ! Copper ! Lead !* Humph ?

EDNA : No, it's nothing to do with E.B.C. business. It's private.

TRISTAN (*lies on settee*) : I don't like all this secrecy. No private life here.

EDNA : You mustn't be inquisitive. I can't tell you any more.

Enter GRONOVA *looking very agitated.*

GRONOVA : A most extraordinary thing has happened to me. I'm terribly upset.

BOB (*rising*) : This is where I go. (*Crossing to door.*)

GRONOVA : Why do you say that ? It has nothing to do with you. Why are you so rude ?

BOB : Because I've had enough of women being upset for one afternoon. I'll be in the little talks studio, Tristan, if you want me.

Goes out. GRONOVA *still does her agitated act. Up to piano and down to desk.*

TRISTAN (*severely*) : It would serve you jolly well right, Moya, if we just didn't ask you what was the matter. Let's not. Now as I was saying——

HAYCRAFT (*a kindly soul*) : No, we want to know what happened. Go on, Moya.

GRONOVA (*dramatically to* FAIRFAX) : It was a voice I overheard.

TRISTAN : That'll do, Moya. We can't have anybody in our drama department being as dramatic as that.

GRONOVA : I had to call at the hair-dressers to arrange an appointment——

EDNA (*interested*) : Which one ? Maison Binns ?

GRONOVA (*to* EDNA) : Maison Binns, yes. Just inside there is a thin partition one side for Ladies, one for Gentlemen——

TRISTAN : Always a decent arrangement, I think.

GRONOVA : I am in the Ladies' side . . .

TRISTAN : Good !

GRONOVA : . . . making my appointment—when I hear a voice. I hear it through the partition, from the gentlemen's side. This voice, it is refusing a shampoo. " No," it is saying, " no shampoo this afternoon, thank you," it is saying. And at once I know this voice. I know it. I know it, I know it. But at once I know it.

TRISTAN (*with solemn irony*) : Ah—you knew it, then ?

GRONOVA : Yes, I am telling you—but at once, I knew it. This voice—it was part of my life. I could hardly wait for the stupid girl to book the appointment. I hurried to the door—(*Runs to door. Opens it*)—to see the man who owned that voice. But there was no one. (*Closes door.*) He had gone.

TRISTAN : Oh what a shame !

GRONOVA : It *is* a shame, because I cannot remember whose voice it was I heard—but I know. I *know* that it belongs to my past. My heart trembled when I heard it. And now I must wonder and puzzle my head all day. I am—*haunted*—by it. I must go out again. (*Crossing towards door.*)

HAYCRAFT : Don't be so haunted that you forget you're helping us with the Children's Hour to-day.

GRONOVA : No—of course not—I am always conscientious—my work comes first—but I must go out again—I feel stifled here——

Goes out.

HAYCRAFT : She evidently heard somebody she once knew.

TRISTAN : Think so, Fairfax ? I got that idea too. Edna, I've remembered something. Ring up Philip in Manchester—and ask him to put those two Irish recordings on the train.

As EDNA *is going out,* DOROTHY *enters, with some memos, one of which she gives to* TRISTAN *before giving the others to* HAYCRAFT, *and busies herself at desk C.*

What have you brought us this time, Dorothy ? (*Looks at memo and reads.*) " Owing to copyright difficulties, until further notice no use must be made in any programme of *Hot-pants Hortense*. Don't forget that, Fairfax. That'll cramp your twilight

hours a bit. (*Calling her back as she is going out.*) Dorothy! (*Rises and moves to* R.)

DOROTHY (*turning*): Yes.

TRISTAN: Come here, mavourneen. There's something that's worrying me. (*As she, rather reluctantly, comes to* R. *of him.*) My spies are telling me that young Martin Bradburn—as proud and high stepping a cavalier as ever turned the knobs on a producer's panel—got himself sent down here to continue to pay his court to you, my haughty beauty. (*In mock bad actor's voice.*) Tell me, girl, is't true?

DOROTHY: Don't you think you ought to mind your own business?

TRISTAN: Good Lord—no! I never heard of such a loathsome idea. Come now, tell me and Uncle Fairfax the truth.

DOROTHY (*indignantly*): Well, if you must know, Martin Bradburn's been behaving like an idiot. And I've told him so. It was all off when I came down here, and now he comes charging down to try and start it all over again.

TRISTAN: Do you want me to understand, Dorothy, that the fact that he came down here specially to see you really annoys you?

DOROTHY: Yes it does. It makes me look so silly.

TRISTAN: No ordinary man, mind you—but quite a distinguished producer, distinguished in the theatre before he came to the E.B.C. a man who will go a long way—a man——

DOROTHY (*curting in, impatiently*): Oh—what's that got to do with it?

TRISTAN (*with mock severity*): Dorothy, my famous insight into feminine psychology tells me that if that's your attitude, you must have gone and fallen for somebody else.

DOROTHY (*rather embarrassed*): Oh—don't be silly.

Goes out hastily. TRISTAN *follows her round.*

TRISTAN (*giggles*): Damn nuisance that! It's obvious Copley's her man, not Bradburn.

HAYCRAFT: Yes, but why is it a nuisance?

TRISTAN: Because if Bradburn had been happy here with his Dorothy, I was going to apply to get back to London, where

I belong and where they might have allowed me to do some real broadcasting. Strange as it may seem I didn't join the E.B.C. because I had nowhere to go, but because I believed in Radio and cared for it. It's a hell of a handicap of course, and think it was that and not the fact that I was drunk and disorderly in the sight of the director of programmes—that got me sentenced to these salt mines.

HAYCRAFT (*rising, indignantly*): I wish you people wouldn't talk of this station as if it were a prison or something. It's as much part of the broadcasting scheme as Radio House. And I'd *rather* be here than in London——

TRISTAN: Uncle Fairfax, Uncle Fairfax, we're alone. Nobody's listening. You needn't put on that how-happy-are-the-regions act for me. You're just as much an exile as I am.

HAYCRAFT: Nonsense! They're only giving me a rest.

TRISTAN: Oh—quite, quite, quite. And when the E.B.C. get back to Westminster Abbey, they'll be asking for you. Where's Paula Leeds?

Enter MARTIN *looking gloomy.*

Hello, you look a mite grim.

MARTIN: I feel a mite grim. Where's Paula?

HAYCRAFT (*going to door*): I thought you and she lunched together.

MARTIN: We did. But we split up an hour or two ago. She was friendly, and it was a good lunch she gave me, but somehow we couldn't get going together somehow.

TRISTAN (*as* HAYCRAFT *goes out, crossing legs on desk*): Now why doesn't Paula give *me* lunch? I'm unusually good at being given lunch to. Did you have a row?

MARTIN: No, but we didn't tick over properly. My fault probably.

TRISTAN: Your fault certainly. Paula wouldn't ask anybody to lunch just to start a quarrel.

MARTIN: I'm worried—about various things.

TRISTAN: You realise now, of course, that you were an idiot to come down here?

MARTIN: Yes, that's fairly obvious.

TRISTAN: If I hadn't a singularly noble nature —(*Moving to sofa and sitting* R. *of* MARTIN)—I'd try to sell you the idea of staying here, so that I could get back to London. But your need is greater than mine. (*As* MARTIN *sits down and looks dejected.*) Why don't you ask Copley, who doesn't want you here anyhow, to ring up Radio House and see if you can't go back. Say the place is bad for your sciatica. I've never tried them with sciatica, but I've an idea that our administration department would react very favourably towards it. It sounds such a respectable complaint.

MARTIN (*gloomily*): I suppose I've made a fool of myself but it isn't just that.

TRISTAN: Can't be. (*Leaning on* MARTIN's *shoulder.*) I rather like making a fool of myself. At least it's making *something* of yourself.

MARTIN: If that was all, I wouldn't mind. But—oh, I dunno—but nothing's *right*. And I can't put my finger on what it is that's making everything seem wrong. Good Lord—I'm beginning to sound like Hamlet.

TRISTAN: He put it better, I think. But you might try going on a blind. It removes the inhibitions, and then up from the grimy old unconscious comes the dirty dripping truth. Try a blind, Bradburn. I'll join you to-night as soon as I've taken the radio customers " down here in Barsett ".

MARTIN: I don't like drinking on principle——

TRISTAN: Well, pretend it's for fun then——

MARTIN: But if I still feel like this to-night, it'll probably mean a blind.

TRISTAN: Let me know. But it's a pity you don't get on with Paula.

MARTIN (*moves down, lifts* TRISTAN *up and sits L. of settee*): Well, I don't. Never did. I suppose I don't like that type.

TRISTAN: She isn't a type. As a matter of fact, she's a darling—and about the best we've got in the E.B.C.

MARTIN: There's something about her—and always was—that irritates me.

TRISTAN (*considering him*): I think it's probably because she's very intelligent. You're the kind of British male

who doesn't want women to be intelligent.

MARTIN (*indignantly*): Now what d'you think I am, Sprott?

TRISTAN: I didn't say *you* weren't intelligent. I said you might be the kind of British male who doesn't want his women to be intelligent.

MARTIN: Yes, I heard, I heard, I heard . . . (*With sudden change of tone.*) My God!—you might be right too. Perhaps I don't like them intelligent. If so, then this *does* serve me right.

He considers himself in dismay, while TRISTAN *stares at him.* PAULA *now enters and both men stare hard at her in silence.*

PAULA (*going over to desk*): Hello! Nobody been asking for me, I suppose? (*She then notices their stares and silence.*) Why these fixed stares, gentlemen?

TRISTAN: Bradburn's staring at you because somewhere at the back of his innocent mind the dawn is breaking. *I'm* staring to remind you of a recent memo that says senior members of the staff must try to keep regular office hours. Paula, you've taken about four hours for lunch.

PAULA: No, hairdresser's, mostly.

TRISTAN (*interested*): Maison Binns?

PAULA: No, the other one. Betty and Phyllis. Ye Olde English.

MARTIN (*rousing himself*): I must see Copley.

Goes out.

TRISTAN: He's trying to get back to London. (*Moves to L. end of settee.*)

PAULA: What about his Dorothy?

TRISTAN: He's recovering.

PAULA: About time too! (*Moves up and down between desk and piano.*)

TRISTAN: Do you like him?

PAULA: He's a damn good producer. Not only for us, but he was very good in the Theatre too.

TRISTAN: I know that, but do you like him?

PAULA: Not much.

TRISTAN: Do you find there's something about him that irritates you? (*Pats settee for her to sit beside him.*)

PAULA (*sits settee* R.): Yes. That's very clever of you, Tristan. There always *was* something about him that irritated me.

TRISTAN: I guessed that. The trouble is, I don't think he likes intelligent women.

PAULA: I'm not surprised. He's that type.

TRISTAN: No, he isn't a type. As a matter of fact, he's really rather a darling—and of course about as good as we've got in the E.B.C.

PAULA: He can't do with me, can he?

TRISTAN: He *thinks* he can't. But secretly—he's fascinated.

PAULA: Oh—rubbish!

TRISTAN: And in the same secret way *you're* fascinated too.

PAULA (*rises and crosses to desk C. and sits*): Good Lord!—what rot you talk!

TRISTAN: You see—you're beginning to say Good Lord just as he does. Always a sure sign.

COPLEY *enters, carrying his hat and coat.*

COPLEY (*putting on coat*): Bradburn wants to go back to London now—doesn't seem to know his own mind, that chap—and of course I've no objection, so long as he can make it right with Radio House. So I've left him trying to get through to talk to 'em.

TRISTAN: Quite right, Commander. It's up to him.

COPLEY: By the way, a bloke I knew in the service may blow in this afternoon, so if you should find anybody asking for me, tell him I'll be back in half an hour or so and keep him amused.

PAULA: How do we amuse him?

TRISTAN: We could tell him a thing or two about broadcasting.

COPLEY: Good idea! The old boy knows nothing about it, and he'll probably feel he's having the time of his life. I'll be back in time for our Children's Hour programme.

Goes out.

TRISTAN (*imitating* COPLEY): I'll be back in time for the Children's Hour programme. Why should he be back in time for the Children's Hour programme? It'll go on just the same without him.

PAULA: Just doesn't want to miss it, I suppose. A little good clean fun with the kiddies.

TRISTAN (*shaking his head, coming down to edge of piano*): You're bitter, Miss Leeds, you're very bitter. Have you ever asked yourself if you're showing a cheerful spirit of co-operation and pulling your weight in the boat?

PAULA: No, I don't talk to myself like that.

Enter EDNA, *with note book.*

Oh—Edna—any messages for me?

EDNA: Yes. A telegram. (*Above desk.*)

TRISTAN (*crosses to desk interested*): Oh yes—that telegram.

EDNA: It's private—not E.B.C. business.

PAULA (*not unpleasantly*): In that case, Edna, we just wait until Mr. Sprott goes. (*She smiles at him.*) He'll be going any minute now.

TRISTAN (*with mock dignity*): Oh—well, if that's how you feel—of course I'll go. I have my pride. By gosh, I have my Punnets too. And I warn you that when I find 'em, I'm going to rehearse 'em in here.

PAULA: Why can't you take them into Two?

TRISTAN (*as he goes*): Because the old man would think it was all different when I brought him back in here. Must get him house-trained to this studio.

Goes out.

EDNA (*with note book, sits*): I took this telegram over the phone and I haven't copied it out yet.

PAULA (*a light rebuke*): Too busy?

EDNA: No, only I couldn't copy it on the machine up there without Dorothy or Brenda knowing all about it—and so——

PAULA: Yes, of course. Well, read it.

EDNA (*reading*): "Play accepted by Harland who is enthusiastic (PAULA *rises and moves round to read.*) stop Good terms for immediate production West End with option New York production next season stop contract in post but could you come up as soon as possible discuss cast etc. stop any ideas for producer stop congratulations Blake," You'd like me to type this out, wouldn't you?

PAULA (*excitedly*): I'd like you to copy it in gold letters about two feet high. My goodness, Edna! (*Moves to couch.*) Harland's taken my play. *My play*, Edna!

EDNA: I know. I'm so glad. Isn't it exciting?

PAULA: Exciting? It's frightening. Harland 'll drop down dead. (*Sits couch.*) Or perhaps Blake—he's the agent, Edna—has simply gone mad. What does it say? Good terms! Immediate production West End! New York next season! Will I come up as soon as possible? Will I be found waiting on Harland's doorstep? And what was that about a producer? (*Back to* EDNA.)

EDNA (*referring to note book*): "Any ideas for a producer?"

PAULA (*thinking hard, sits on settee*): Any ideas for a producer? How extraordinary that is!

EDNA: Why is it extraordinary?

PAULA: I'm sorry, Edna—I feel almost ready to tell you the whole story of my life, but I just can't tell you why that particular thing's extraordinary. You'll just have to take my word for it. . . . Yes, I'll do it.

EDNA: Do what? Or is that a secret too?

PAULA: Yes, that's a secret too. (*Crosses to* EDNA.) In fact, the whole thing must be. Listen, Edna—please don't tell anybody just yet. Really, not a soul. I've a special reason for asking.

EDNA: Yes, Miss Leeds, I promise. And I haven't told anybody about this telegram. I really am good at keeping secrets.

PAULA: I'm sure you're wonderful at it.

EDNA: If you become a famous dramatist, you'll have to have a secretary, won't you?

PAULA: I get the idea, and I'm sure you'd do very nicely. But I must point out that I'm an appallingly long way from anything that remotely resembles a famous dramatist. But—gosh!—Harland's taken my play—hasn't he?

EDNA: Yes, and I believe it'll be a success.

PAULA: You don't know anything about it.

EDNA: I do. I read it one afternoon when you were out. It was in the drawer of your desk.

PAULA: Well—of all the cheek——!

EDNA: Oh, but I thought it was frightfully good. You don't mind, do you?

PAULA: How can I if you think it's frightfully good. But remember—not a whisper to anybody—for all kinds of good reasons.

EDNA: I promise. Do you think I could come to the first night? If I could get leave I could——

As door opens.

PAULA (*hastily*): Sh-sh! (*Moves up.*)

HETTY *comes in, looking rather agitated.*

HETTY: Is Bob anywhere about?

PAULA: No. Do you want him?

HETTY: No, I'd like him to keep right away from me. (*To desk, looking at* PAULA *curiously.*) What's the matter with you? You're very excited about something.

PAULA: I get like this sometimes. I'm a smouldering volcano really.

HETTY: You haven't gone and fallen in love, have you?

PAULA: No, I haven't. And you don't sound as if you recommend it.

HETTY: Recommend it! I wish they'd give me the air for half an hour sometime just to tell girls the truth about this love business. But then they wouldn't believe me.

PAULA: What's poor Bob been doing this time? (*Sits arm of settee.*)

HETTY (*disgusted*): Poor Bob! You wouldn't say "poor Bob" if you'd seen the way he went on at lunch to-day. It would have served him right if I'd said to his wife, "There he is. Take him. And take him a long way off while you're about it."

PAULA: But was his wife lunching with you?

HETTY: Yes, she turns up now and again, just to see how we're getting on. And of course Bob thinks it's terrible. He's very conventional for all his talk. (*To* EDNA.) I don't know that you ought to hear all this. (*Sits at desk C.*)

EDNA: I'll go if you want me to, Hetty, but everybody here knows all about you and Bob.

HETTY: I suppose they do. I must say, Paula, I don't blame

you now for keeping so close, as if nothing ever happened to you.

PAULA: Nothing, in your sense, ever does.

HETTY: What about those long week-end leaves you're always taking?

PAULA: Ridiculous as it seems, I spend them at home with my mother.

HETTY: Ah!—if I'd known at first what I know now, I'd be telling everybody *I* spent all my spare time at home with my mother. But I was telling you about lunch to-day. (*Starts to knit.*) Well, to begin with it wasn't so bad. Maisie—that's Bob's wife—I've known her for years—we were on tour together for years—well, Maisie as usual points out all the defects in the digs, and tells us how sorry she is for us having to stay here in Barset, and be working for the E.B.C., and of course as usual I keep the ball in play, so that she gets back as good as she gives—and really we're all getting on nicely——

PAULA (*laughing*): Having a lovely cosy time, I'd say.

HETTY: Well, dear, you know how it is. She may be Bob's wife—but I know plenty about her—a lot more than Bob does—and she knows I do—so she knows too she hasn't too much room to talk—and it's all *right* really—if Bob'd let it alone. I didn't want her there, specially when we were having duck and there wasn't too much of it—God knows what ducks do with themselves once you put 'em in an oven! (*Bus. tape measure.*) And of course Bob, who wasn't having any, not till to-night, was watching every mouthful she ate—but really we were all getting along nicely if Bob had just kept quiet.

PAULA (*amused*): Poor Bob!

HETTY: There's no "poor Bob" about it. All he'd to do was to keep quiet. But suddenly, he starts on the pair of us. Women were this, that and the other! We ought to be ashamed of ourselves! No delicacy or tact or something! All this from him, of all people, with his wife—and *me*—together there looking at him. Well, I wasn't going to stand that—and neither was Maisie, though if she'd kept out of it, we'd have done better. Then the next minute, up he jumps, bangs on the table—and upsets the

gravy dish all over a clean table-cloth—shouts at the top of his voice, like a madman, and goes tearing out. And then, of course, Maisie tries to tell me that I don't know how to handle him. I'm not going to take that from her, of course, when he was never sober the last years she had him and couldn't remember his lines—so I tell her a few things—and——

She breaks off because BOB *enters hastily.*

BOB (*not noticing* HETTY *at first*): Oh—I say—— (*Breaks off.*)

HETTY (*icily*): Well, what *do* you say, Bob Dinty?

BOB (*stopping near door*): Nothing—to you.

HETTY (*going forward*): Now you just listen to me.

BOB: I've something better to do.

HETTY (*hastily and angrily*): Oh—no—you haven't——

As she darts forward, he hastily leaves, and she goes after him.

PAULA: Let's hope they settle all that before they turn into Aunt Hetty and Uncle Bob this afternoon, or the kiddies may smell a rat.

EDNA: Do you want to send a reply to that telegram?

PAULA (*rises*): Yes, I've been thinking about that.

EDNA *prepares to take down the telegram.*

"Blake Play Agency"—no, he has a telegraphic address—yes, it's "Blaplay, Dover Street, W. 1." Wait a minute now. "Your exciting telegram received——" (*Breaks off.*)

Enter JOE, *bringing with him old* PUNNET *and* DAISY. *The old man has no serpent with him, and looks very sleepy and very cross. As* JOE *takes them across the studio—*

JOE (*as he brings them in*): Come along please.

PAULA: Upstairs, Edna, the circus is here.

They go out. JOE *almost forcibly puts* PUNNET *into chair at* PAULA'S *desk.*

JOE: Now you're going to be all right there, and I'll find Mr. Sprott for you, and you won't have to worry any more.

As old PUNNET *apparently sinks into a coma.*

Doesn't seem very lively, does he? What's the matter with him?

DAISY (*loudly*): He'd two pints o' cider with 'is dinner—an' me mother told me not to let 'im 'ave any—but soon as me back's turned, 'e gets it—'e's that artful. An' now 'e's testy as a weasel—

an' gone an' lost 'is sarpent into the bargain. (*Shouting at the old man.*) But where did yer leave it, grand-dad?

Old PUNNET *opens one eye, looks malevolently at* DAISY *and* JOE *and makes a deep gurring noise.*

DAISY: It's all right yer saying *gurrr*, but yer've gone an' lost yer ould sarpent, an' yer no good to the E.B.C. without yer sarpent, grand-dad.

JOE (*crosses at back to L. end couch*): Percy's looking for it. He's a bright lad, Percy. He'll find it. Now you wait here.

As he starts to move settee, SIR REGINALD RUNTON *enters, very hesitantly. He is a tallish, slightish, very gentlemanly fellow in his fifties, with a timid but precise manner. A senior civil servant clean out of his depth. He punctuates his phrases with a little apologetic cough.*

SIR REGINALD (*to* DAISY): Oh—I say—could I see Commander Copley? (DAISY *giggles.*)

JOE (*coming forward*): What name, sir?

SIR REGINALD: Oh—er—Sir Reginald Runton.

JOE: I beg your pardon.

SIR REGINALD (*rather surprised*): Not at all, not at all.

JOE (*after a pause*): I mean, I didn't catch the name.

SIR REGINALD: Oh—sorry. (*Distinctly.*) Sir Reginald Runtun.

JOE (*who has never heard of him*): I see. Well, Commander Copley's out just now, but he'll be back soon. (*Moving away to L. end of couch.*)

SIR REGINALD (*looking round helplessly*): Well—er—I suppose I could—er—wait somewhere. (*About to sit.*)

JOE: We're a bit short of space just now—and we've got a transmission in here soon—oh will you give me a hand.

SIR REGINALD: Oh—yes of course. (*He does so.*)

JOE: So, as Commander Copley won't be long, what I'd suggest is that you have a walk round and then come back again in about a quarter of an hour. (PUNNET *gives loud snore.*)

SIR REGINALD: Yes—of course—probably the best thing under the circumstances——

As they move together slowly towards door—

You—er—on the staff here?

JOE: Yes, engineer.

SIR REGINALD (*with affable condescension*): Job all right, eh?

JOE: No, lousy.

They go out. DAISY *watches them and now shakes the old man who has dropped his hat.*

DAISY (*picking up hat and giving it to him*): Grand-dad, yer behavin' something terrible—an' what me mother'll say if she finds out, I don't know. Wake up an' behave proper!

OLD PUNNET (*waking up*): Grrr! Woi be we a-sittin' 'ere girl? Oi want to go 'ome.

DAISY: 'Ow can we go home when yer promised to play for the E.B.C.?

OLD PUNNET (*suddenly and viciously awake*): 'Od rabbit un! Oi says 'Od rabbit un—E.B.C. an' all.

Enter TRISTAN *and stares at* PUNNET.

'Od rabbit 'em all!

TRISTAN (*comes over to* DAISY *and bends over to look at* PUNNET): What's he saying?

DAISY: He's just a-swearin' an' carryin' on something terrible—(TRISTAN *crosses to L. of desk, sits on arm of sofa and looks at* PUNNET)—the silly old turnip. He's full o' cider an' gone an' lost 'is sarpent.

TRISTAN *kneels down on sofa and leans on desk and looks at old* PUNNET *anxiously. The old man is beginning to doze off again, but manages to stare at* TRISTAN *with one malevolent eye.*

OLD PUNNET (*only half intelligibly*): 'Tisn't 'im as be image o' Farmer Bates's cowman.

TRISTAN: What does he say?

DAISY (*loudly*): He says it isn't you that's the image o' Farmer Bates's cowman.

TRISTAN: Well, that's something, but it doesn't get us very far. Where do we go from there?

OLD PUNNET (*with startling violence*): It be all slummerty-wummerty—ay, masters—slummerty-wummerty! (*Relapses into coma again after this effort.*)

TRISTAN: Did he say "slummerty-wummerty"?

DAISY: Yes, it's a saying of 'is when he loses 'is silly ould temper.

TRISTAN (*in comic despair*): He's right too. It *is* slummerty-wummerty. (*Suddenly, direct to* DAISY, *solemnly.*) Just go down there—(*Pointing.*)—and try the opening line. "Good evenin' all! Is moi grand-dad 'ere?"

DAISY (*going, as in Act I*): "Good evenin' all! Is moi grand dad 'ere?"

TRISTAN (*in despair*): Honestly, I don't know if that's any better or not, duckie. I just don't know. It's all slummerty-wummerty with me now.

DAISY (*continuing her rehearsal*): "Moi grand-dad was the foinest sarpent player in the whole o' Barset. 'Ere, grand-dad, wake up an' give us all a tune."

TRISTAN: Yes, yes, yes. Thank you very much, duckie.

DAISY (*going back doggedly*): "Good evenin' all. Is moi grand-dad——"

TRISTAN (*in despair*): No, no, no. Not again. I must think.

DAISY: What about?

TRISTAN: I dunno. Just think about my past and my future. With just a passing glance at the Gobi Desert. (*Looks in despair at old* PUNNET *now dozing again.*) How is he? Any rigor mortis setting in?

DAISY *moves to* PUNNET.

Enter PERCY, *carrying the serpent, stands just inside door which he has placed open.*

DAISY: Why, there's grand-dad's sarpent. Oi, grand-dad, 'e's found it. (*Round to back of* PUNNET.)

As DAISY *tries to waken old* PUNNET *and* PERCY *stands like a saxophonist holding the serpent,* PAULA *and* MARTIN *enter.*

PAULA: Oh dear! Are the rustic revels still proceeding? Must we go?

TRISTAN (*in comic despair*): No, for God's sake, don't go. Everything's slipping. Just going all *slummerty-wummerty.*

MARTIN: Going what?

TRISTAN: No, no. Don't let's go into it.

PERCY (*cheerfully*): Get a load of this, Mr. Sprott.

(*He sounds a deep sustained note on the serpent.*)

TRISTAN: Percy, you're a marvel. Deeper, as Shakespeare nearly said, than Punnet ever sounded.

PERCY: It's in the bag, eh, Miss Leeds?

PAULA: You've only to grow the whiskers, Percy, and then you've got something there.

TRISTAN (*suddenly decisive*): Percy—take Miss Punnet and old Mr. Punnet and the serpent into Studio Two and give them all some tea. (DAISY *and* PERCY *help* PUNNET.) Give the serpent a saucer of milk. I'll join you when I'm feeling a little stronger. Trot along, Daisy, and just keep going over your lines.

DAISY (*crossing as* PERCY *assists old* PUNNET): "Good evenin, all—is my grand-dad 'ere——"

TRISTAN: Yes, yes, Daisy, that's the idea. Only not again here. I'm not feeling very well.

Old PUNNET *suddenly and angrily snatches the serpent from* PERCY. *These two,* PERCY *and* DAISY, *go trooping across, the old man muttering "slummerty-wummerty", etc., as he goes.* PERCY *closes door.* TRISTAN *stretches out on two chairs, exhausted, down L. During following dialogue* MARTIN *sits at* HAYCRAFT'S *desk.* PAULA *on arm of settee.*

MARTIN (*with quiet despair*): It isn't like this here all the time, is it?

TRISTAN (*dreamily*): Not quite all the time.

PAULA (*dreamily*): Sometimes nothing happens for days and days on end. Very restful really.

TRISTAN: This hell on earth we're having now is due to my enthusiasm for my Barset programme. I never ought to have touched those Punnets. I freely admit it now. I was carried away by my enthusiasm.

PAULA: Where's the rest of your local cast?

TRISTAN: They won't be here for hours. They're just ordinary plain folks, not like the mad Punnets. Are they letting you go back to London, Bradburn?

MARTIN: I got through to Radio House, but of course Barton and Rudolph were out. I'm going to try again later. I can't stay here. Even if I wanted to, there isn't room for me.

PAULA: There really isn't room for anybody except Copley and a couple of admiring secretaries.

Enter, with the same hesitant manner, SIR REGINALD.

SIR REGINALD: Oh—good afternoon. Is—er—Commander Copley in?

TRISTAN: No, he isn't back yet. But he said you might be popping in.

SIR REGINALD (*surprised*): Oh—I say—did he?

TRISTAN: I think he did. (*To* PAULA.) Didn't he?

PAULA: Yes, he asked us to amuse you until he got back.

SIR REGINALD (*still surprised*): Oh—really—I'm rather surprised—I didn't—er—expect——

TRISTAN: He said you might be interested to learn a thing or two about broadcasting.

SIR REGINALD: Well—yes, of course, I would. I don't know anything about it—really—and I suppose you people——

TRISTAN (*grimly*): Yes, we know all about it. Don't we?

PAULA (*same tone*): We do.

MARTIN: And I'll say we do.

SIR REGINALD: Yes, well—of course—I'd be delighted. Can't begin learning too soon. (*Sitting R. of desk.*)

TRISTAN (*rises and sits astride front chair*): Well now, you see before you three employees of the English Broadcasting Company.

SIR REGINALD: And—er—what do you do?

PAULA: We're all producers. This is Martin Bradburn. This is Tristan Sprott. And I'm Paula Leeds.

SIR REGINALD: And—er—what do you produce?

MARTIN (*gloomily*): Jolly entertainment for the million.

TRISTAN: We're in the drama department, and—with a bunch of other people—we handle plays, poetry, readings, and a sort of hybrid product of dreary information and ham acting known in the trade as a "feature".

MARTIN (*rises, down to* R. *of* RUNTON): Some of us were very excited, at first, by the possibilities of broadcasting as a medium. I know I thought that with such a vast audience we ought to be able to provide some fine stuff on a grand scale. I really believed the air could really be used as a sort of huge

People's Theatre. Big stuff done in a big way, and handled professionally. On a kind of Reinhardt scale.

PAULA: Don't I know *that* dream? The best plays, the best actors, the best producers. We all thought that ought to be possible.

SIR REGINALD: Quite, quite. But—then—er—isn't it?

TRISTAN: Do you ever listen to our programmes?

SIR REGINALD: The 9 o'clock news occasionally . . . and some of those jolly little nature talks . . . but don't listen to much really.

TRISTAN: Well, you see, the whole thing comes out of the spout watered down for safety.

MARTIN: And for economy.

PAULA: And for stupidity.

MARTIN (*turning on* SIR REGINALD): If only the programmes weren't made up and cut into snippets for half-wits who can't concentrate for more than five minutes at a time—one half-wit's night a week would be enough, if you ask me.

PAULA: Yes, we might call it Half-wit's Night too, and that would sell it.

MARTIN: British broadcasting at present is mostly just amateurs inside having fun among themselves to amuse amateurs outside. Nobody on the staff in authority is an artist or even a good showman. They don't know what real entertainment means. Why, the stuff is stale before the public gets it.

TRISTAN: Where are the shows of yesteryear? Why, right here, in our programmes.

PAULA: And we're all typed so stupidly. Just because I'm a woman I get handed all the old lace and lavender. Any script with a sedan chair in it flies to me like a homing pigeon.

MARTIN: The trouble is, you see—by the way we're not boring you, are we?

SIR REGINALD: Not at all. Most int'r'sting. You were saying?

MARTIN: The trouble is, the English Broadcasting Company is all wrong from top to bottom. . . . It's run as a kind of Civil Service department with a bit of broadcasting tacked on as an afterthought.

TRISTAN (*rises and sits on back of sofa above* PAULA): The people who *do* the broadcasting, believe it or not, are the least important on the staff.

PAULA: If you *will* fool about with microphones in studios, you're kept in the slave class.

TRISTAN: What's really important is our enormous Organisation department, crammed with reliable chaps who work out that if a half-hour programme starts at eight, it ought to finish round about eight-thirty.

MARTIN: And they obstruct us on principle, I think most of 'em hate broadcasting and so do all they can to strangle it.

PAULA: Half the time, it's just plain jealousy, though. They think that producers have a high old time at rehearsals, drinking champagne out of actors' slippers.

SIR REGINALD: Really—and of course—I don't suppose you do, do you?

PAULA: Hardly ever. But what with all this policy nonsense and organising and administering and timidity and red-tape, we're so cluttered up with these dead-heads that we can hardly breathe, let alone move.

MARTIN (*squatting beside* SIR REGINALD): Now here's something you won't believe—yet it's true and absolutely typical. A new deputy-assistant-director-general—and we're stiff with deputy-assistants and assistant-deputy-assistants, and the rest of it—well, as I say, a new deputy-assistant D.G. has been appointed to lord it over us, and do you know where he comes from?

TRISTAN: And this, believe it or not, is the truth.

MARTIN (*standing* R. *of* SIR REGINALD. *Slowly and impressively*): He comes—from the *Board of Fisheries.*

The three of them begin laughing.

PAULA (*laughing*): Straight from his files on the Herring Fleet!

They laugh.

SIR REGINALD (*apologetically*): Well—you know—I believe there are one or two quite intelligent—er—administrators—at the Board of Fisheries.

The others laugh again.

MARTIN (*indignantly*): Yes, but what in the name of thunder do they know about broadcasting?

PAULA: I'll bet this Sir Reginald What's-it never even listens in.

TRISTAN: And any moment now he'll come bouncing in here, asking idiotic questions and then firing even more idiotic memos at us. The whole E.B.C. system is cock-eyed.

MARTIN: Half-witted.

PAULA: Wasteful, pedantic and stupid.

MARTIN (*sits* R.): And that, my dear sir, is broadcasting.

SIR REGINALD (*who appears to have been cornered and overwhelmed*): Yes—I see—well, you appear to have very strong views—really I hadn't the least idea——

HAYCRAFT and PERCY, *with scripts, etc., enter and cross, preparing to broadcast. The other four are grouped upstage, with* SIR REGINALD *facing the other three and with his back to studio end.* PERCY *is preparing his effects.* GRONOVA *enters hastily, without looking at* SIR REGINALD, *and takes her place at piano.* BOB *and* HETTY *now enter looking furious, and quarrelling.*

HETTY (*to her chair, reckless of being overheard*): And after all I've done for you!

BOB (*angrily*): Well, what have you done for me? You talk as if I'd been paralysed for ten years!

HETTY: You *were* paralysed half the time when I tried to make something out of you.

BOB: *You* made something out of *me!* eh?

HETTY: Oh—shut up!

BOB: And you shut up!

PAULA (*explaining sweetly*): Just Aunt Hetty and Uncle Bob getting ready for the Children's Hour.

As they take their places, still muttering and glowering at each other, COPLEY *enters.*

TRISTAN (*to* SIR REGINALD): Oh, sir, here's your friend Commander Copley.

SIR REGINALD (*turning distinctly*): Oh—(*Rises.*)—Commander Copley—I'm Sir Reginald Runtun.

COPLEY: What—our new deputy-assistant director-general?

TRISTAN (*in anguish*): Oh—slummerty-wummerty!

But GRONOVA *turns excitedly on her piano stool.*

GRONOVA (*rises*): Sir Reginald Runtun?

SIR REGINALD (*surprised*): Yes. (*Turns to her.*)

GRONOVA (*joyfully*): *Topsy!*

MOYA *drops an armful of music on* TRISTAN. *He and* MARTIN *dive on floor to pick it up.*

COPLEY (*shocked*): *Topsy!*

HAYCRAFT: *Quiet please!*

A steady red. Everybody frozen, except for their eyes, which express their bewilderment, consternation, etc. HAYCRAFT *begins in the most arch manner.*

HAYCRAFT: Hello, Children! This is Uncle Fairfax, talking to you from the Barset Regional Studio. And here's Aunt Moya, all ready at the piano—aren't you, Aunt Moya?

GRONOVA (*rather shakily*): Ye—es, Uncle Faxf—Fairfax. (*Plays a little run.*)

HAYCRAFT: And Uncle Bob's here too.

BOB (*in deep, still cross voice*): Yes, I'm here, Uncle Fairfax.

HAYCRAFT: But where's Aunt Hetty this afternoon. . . . Aunt Hetty, Aunt Hetty! . . , I say children, this is serious. No Aunt Hetty.

PERCY *now solemnly opens and closes door effect.*

HETTY (*doing running in effect*): Here I am . . . *so* sorry, Uncle Fairfax . . . Hello, children!

SIR REGINALD (*innocently forgetting*): I say—rather jolly that——!

He is immediately sh-sh'd and almost collapses.

HAYCRAFT: And now that we're all here, children, we're going to give you another adventure in our serial. Elsie and the Pirates. Some Pirate music please, Aunt Moya.

SIR REGINALD *offers* COPLEY *a cigarette.* GRONOVA *obliges with some pirate music. Music starts.*

You'll remember that we left the pirates all having a tremendous fight among themselves . . .

PERCY *clashes cutlasses, etc., while the cast do atmospheric noises—groans, shouts, etc.*

HETTY (*in little girl style*): Oh dear, Elsie thought whatever shall I do. If I run away I shall never be able to find the

treasure. No, I *won't* run away. I *must* be brave.

HAYCRAFT: Just then she noticed that one of the biggest and strongest of the pirates, with an *enormous* black beard, had stopped fighting. (PERCY *stops knives.*) Perhaps because he was hurt, and was sitting groaning just near her hiding place. So she crept out.

PERCY *makes sea noise.*

BOB (*in pirate style*): Ohhh! (*Groans.*) Them tarnation old wounds o' mine is openin' agin.

HETTY (*as* ELSIE): Mr. Pirate! *Please* Mr. Pirate!

BOB (*as* PIRATE): Oo's a-whisperin'? Why—stap my vitals—if it isn't the little gal!

HETTY: My Pirate, are you hurt?

BOB: I be mortal bad, missie, mortal bad. Get me a canikin o' rum, missie.

HETTY: If I do, will you help me to find the treasure? It belongs to my grandfather really, you know. And I know he'll give you a big reward, and then you needn't be a pirate any more.

PERCY *stops sea noise.*

BOB: Missie, I never wanted to be a pirate, s'elp me Bob. Bring me a swig o' rum, sharp. (*Groans.*)

PERCY *picks up, earphones off.*

HAYCRAFT: So Elsie ran below, for she knew where the rum was—for, as you know, Elsie was a clever little girl and noticed *everything*—and then she hurried back—(PERCY *taps his feet and moves to L. of* BOB)—and gave the rum at Blackbeard.

BOB: Arr—bless yer little 'eart. 'Ere goes—yer 'ealth, missie.

PERCY *does loud gurgling effect.*

HETTY: What did you want to be, Mr. Blackbeard, instead of being a pirate? (PERCY *ready with knives.*)

BOB (*whispering*): A market gardener, missie, out Saffron Walden way. Now, if you promise that I helps you to git the treasure, you'll set me up in a nice market garden out Saffron Walden way, then I'm yer man, see?

HETTY: Oh yes—I promise. And thank you! Isn't this *exciting?* (PERCY *clashes knives.*)

HAYCRAFT: But it was even *more* exciting than Elsie imagined,

for just as she and Blackbeard had agreed to find the treasure together, the fighting among the pirates suddenly stopped. . . . (PERCY *stops knives and puts them down, picking up drum stick.*)

BOB (*in another voice*): A sail! A sail!

PERCY *now does distant gun effect. One bang on drum.*

A frigate o' the line. She's firing across our bows, an' a signalling of us to stop.

PERCY *does three bangs on drum.*

HETTY: Oh dear—this is going to be *very* difficult.

GRONOVA *plays softly.*

HAYCRAFT (*very arch*): Listen again, children, in a fortnight's time to another thrilling adventure of *Elsie and the Pirates.* And listen to-morrow to your friends Goosie and Henny. Good night, children.

HETYT, BOB AND GRONOVA: Good night, children.

HAYCRAFT (*super-arch*): Good night, children, everywhere.

Quick curtain as red light goes out and GRONOVA *plays louder.*

ACT III

As before, evening.

Just before rise of curtain we hear the piano being played. Door is open.

TRISTAN *playing piano,* HETTY *at desk sitting.* BOB *down L. sitting on small table.*

HETTY: Well, aren't you going to tell us what we ought to do? Do I go on living with him or don't I?

BOB (*hastily. Rises and crosses to settee*): Now just a moment don't start making a personal favour of it like that. We agreed——

HETTY (*cutting in*): We agreed to let Tristan decide for us, so don't start arguing all over again.

BOB (*angrily*): I'm not arguing all over again. I was going to say that we'd agreed to let Tristan decide——

HETTY: Well then, why don't you shut up, and let him decide.

BOB *sits in small chair L.*

TRISTAN (*stops playing piano*): But I can't attend to your problem, can't give it my full attention, until I know what's become of those three local idiots. My programme will be on the air in an hour, and half the cast hasn't turned up. Give me a chance.

EDNA *looks in.*

(*Up to her.*) Well, Edna?

EDNA: The man at the garage at Long Boopley says they left there all right, after he'd done something to the magneto. He says we haven't to worry.

TRISTAN (*cheerful now*): All right then, we won't worry.

EDNA: But I suppose I'd better ring up the other place—Bursetford—to see if they know anything about them?

TRISTAN: Yes, though they'll probably be here now before you get through. No need to worry, though, that's the point.

EDNA: A call came through from London for Sir Reginald Runtun——

TRISTAN: Oh dear! Oh dear, oh dear!

EDNA: I told them to try the County Hotel. I think he's dining there——

HETTY: With Moya?

EDNA: Yes, I believe so. (*Going.*) Well, I'll ring up Bursetford.

She goes out.

TRISTAN (*sits cross legged on floor with playing cards. Cheerfully*): Let's hope Moya is putting in some very heavy do-you-remember-darling work on him, or some of us are sunk. But there's no need to worry about my cast. It's on its way. So now, children, I examine your problem in the spirit in which it ought to be examined. And I say to you, giving you at the same time an old man's blessing, forgive and forget. Hetty, if you take my advice you'll forgive him.

BOB: Now wait a minute. What's all this forgiving about?

HETTY (*indignantly*): You're not going to tell me now I haven't plenty to forgive. My Lord, when I think——

TRISTAN (*cutting in*): Now, now, now, comrades! Not again. And to you, Bob I say—life is too short and we are

creatures of sorrow—be tolerant. Hetty has her faults——

HETTY (*angrily*): It's not Hetty's faults we're talking about.

BOB: Of course it is.

HETTY: What, after the way you went on this afternoon!

BOB: There isn't a man alive who wouldn't have—— Tristan, I appeal to you . . .

TRISTAN (*cutting in*): No, no, no. Don't disappoint me. After all, life is hard, my friends. There is nothing we can do, in the end, but be kind to each other. So—forgive and forget. You two, with all your faults, were meant to cherish each other. So give him a smile, Hetty. Bob, open your arms. And bless you, my children!

BOB (*disgusted*): What is this—a musical monologue?

Moves up to piano and leans on it looking upstage.

HETTY (*rises*): I thought you'd give us a bit of sensible advice, not "Bob, open your arms". Look at him!

Sits in desk chair.

TRISTAN: But this isn't the right spirit at all. As we travel along life's highway, we must greet each moment with a smile and turn to each fellow wayfarer with loving-kindness——

HETTY (*bitterly*): Wishing you a merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

TRISTAN: Now look at me. What a day I've had so far! Including, don't forget, giving the lowdown on the whole E.B.C. to its new deputy-assistant D.G., little Reggie Runtun. But am I cast down? Do I lose my bright friendly smile? Do I—— (*Breaks off because* EDNA *enters again.*)

EDNA: They got as far as Bursetford and then the car broke down again so they gave it up as a bad job.

TRISTAN (*leaning on sofa. Horrified*): Do you mean they're not coming here?

EDNA: Yes. All three of them have gone home.

TRISTAN (*furious*): My godfathers! Completely let down! That's the last time I ever ask any of these bullock-witted rural stinkers to do anything for me, the very last time. Why was I ever condemned to do programmes in this manure-heap, tell me that? (*Sits settee. Groans.*) All right, Edna.

She goes.

HETTY: Can we get anybody here to help us with the programme?

TRISTAN: We'll have to, that's all.

BOB: I can always do a good double.

HETTY: Your only double is whisky.

TRISTAN (*gloomily*): That's an idea—whisky. The best thing we can do now is to get screaming drunk. We'll never get through this programme sober. Let's go and join Martin Bradburn at the *Lion*. I left him there, putting 'em down steadily. And as for you two—— (*Back to cards.*)

HETTY (*after pause*): Well, what about us two?

TRISTAN (*picking up cards*): If you want *my* advice, you'll give up trying to live together. Obviously you don't really like each other. What's the use of spending your time having rows?

BOB (*indignantly*): What d'you mean—spending our time having rows?

HETTY (*rises. Indignantly*): Who told you we didn't like each other?

BOB: Let me tell you this, Hetty and I can get on better together than any couple I know in this barmy broadcasting company of yours.

HETTY: Yes, and we don't need drink to do it on either, do we, Bob?

BOB: No, we don't, Hetty. At least—not much. Now listen to me, Tristan; when you've seen as much of life as I have, when you've been around and seen what a miserable mess most people make of it, the last thing you'll want to do is try and separate two hard-working decent pro's who are fond of each other and know how to look after each other.

HETTY: That's right, Bob. Here!

BOB (*crosses to her*): Sorry I threw my weight about, old girl. Won't happen again.

HETTY: Never mind, Bob. It was half my fault. (*Looking indignantly.*) My word, if one took notice of *some* people!

BOB: He's young and silly. He'll *learn.*

TRISTAN: Now I only——

HETTY (*severely*): You've said enough for one night. Come on, Bob, I know you're dying for a drink.

They go out, affectionately. TRISTAN *looks after them in comic despair. On their exit* TRISTAN *crawls across to piano.*

TRISTAN *plays a few notes of "The Dead March"—then on* COPLEY'S *entrance changes to "A Life on the Ocean Wave" and stops when* COPLEY *speaks.*

COPLEY *and* DOROTHY, *dressed for going out, now enter.* COPLEY *is spreading himself on some glamorous tale of his service life. They come down C.*

COPLEY: So I said to Jumbo, "Look here, old boy, you and I can take on a dozen of these dagoes, can't we?" And Jumbo said, "You bet your life we can, Coppo." They called me Coppo in that ship. But things weren't looking too bright. The first dago pulled out a knife. You know what these chaps are.

TRISTAN (*who wasn't asked*): Yes, by Gad, Sir! Always ready to pull out their knives, but when it comes to war, terrified of the bayonet—cold steel.

COPLEY: Well, you know, that's about it. Just show 'em the bayonet——

TRISTAN: Just show *me* the bayonet, and see what I'd do. Tristan Sprotto would run quite as fast as any dago, Coppo.

DOROTHY (*possessively*): Tell me what happened afterwards. It's frightfully exciting. But don't spoil it now.

COPLEY: No. Remind me to finish the yarn at dinner. We're going across to the County for a bite of food.

TRISTAN: And I'm going across to the Lion for a gallon of whisky.

COPLEY: Everything all right?

TRISTAN: Everything's splendid. I've carefully insulted the E.B.C. to one of its senior officials. Half my cast aren't coming at all. The other half—the mad Punnets—seem to have disappeared. We're on the air in less than forty minutes, and, if time allows, I propose to get screaming drunk.

Enter MARTIN.

MARTIN (*to* TRISTAN): I thought you were coming back to the pub.

TRISTAN: I am.

DOROTHY (*to* COPLEY): Shall we go?

MARTIN: Are you going to the pub too?

COPLEY: I'm giving Dorothy a bite of dinner at the *County*.

MARTIN (*looking carefully at them*): Do I congratulate you both?

DOROTHY *and* COPLEY *look at each other, embarrassed.*

I believe I do too!

COPLEY: Well, what do *you* say, Dorothy?

DOROTHY: Oh—all right—I suppose it was bound to come out soon.

COPLEY: We'd meant to keep it quiet for a month or two, old boy—you know, bit embarrassing for us both—but—well—seeing you've guessed it——

TRISTAN (*shaking hands with* COPLEY): I think it's wonderful.

MARTIN (*shaking hands with* DOROTHY): So do I.

TRISTAN: It's a perfect match. (TRISTAN *and* MARTIN *shake hands across C. and D.*) That's what I say, and I shall go on saying it. When people ask me what I think—and they will, you know—I shall say "I think it's a perfect match".

COPLEY (*shakes hands again with* TRISTAN): Thanks, Tristan. Flatters *me* too much, of course—but still——

MARTIN: No, I don't think it does. I might have done at one time, but now I don't.

DOROTHY (*annoyed*): You're not being insulting, by any chance, are you?

COPLEY: No, Dorothy, of course he isn't.

TRISTAN: No, Dorothy, of course he isn't. Martin couldn't insult anybody or anything—except of course the entire English Broadcasting Company—about which we'll all hear more later. (MARTIN *moves up to desk.*)

DOROTHY: All right. Come on, Arthur.

They go out, DOROTHY *with a fine possessive air.*

TRISTAN (*sits on arm of settee*): It's nice to think that Copley's called Arthur.

MARTIN: Now why didn't I realise before how terribly stupid that girl is?

TRISTAN: You weren't in a fit condition to realise it. She's

one of the stupidest girls in the E.B.C. and that's saying plenty. But then you're one of those clever fellows who are idiotic when it comes to women.

MARTIN (*rising*): I was, but I'm learning. Where's Paula?

TRISTAN: Gone home long since.

MARTIN: I call that a dirty trick. (*sits on downstage edge of desk C.*)

TRISTAN: Why, you can't expect her to hang about here all night, on the off-chance of amusing you.

MARTIN: I oughtn't to expect it, but somehow I do. Pity she isn't more attractive.

TRISTAN: Don't be a dam' fool.

MARTIN: What does that mean?

TRISTAN: I thought you theatrical producers were supposed to have eyes.

MARTIN: Some of us have.

TRISTAN: Then take a good look at Paula next time. That is, if there is a next time, and we don't all get the sack, by special courier, to-night.

MARTIN: I suppose we might. What are you going to do then?

TRISTAN: I shall disguise myself as an Armenian astrologer and let my mother keep me. As a matter of fact, we've done nothing to deserve the sack and if we had, the E.B.C. wouldn't sack us. They'll just find some way of killing us by inches, in the decent Civil Service fashion.

Enter JOE *with record of "Shepherds Hey".*

JOE: They're back, Mr. Sprott.

TRISTAN: Who is? What is?

JOE: Them Punnets.

MARTIN (*rises*): I'm going back to the pub. (*Going towards door.*)

TRISTAN: Wait for me. Order me a double horse's neck.

MARTIN *goes.*

TRISTAN (*to* JOE): How are the Punnets?

JOE: Mad as hell. They're asking for you. Shall I send 'em in?

TRISTAN: Certainly Joe, certainly. They're all I've left for to-night's programme.

JOE: D'you know what I think, Mr. Sprott?

TRISTAN: Yes, Joe. You think it's all escapist and that we ought to be doing a programme all about the town drains, with an interlude for you to tell us about your Toscanini rehearsals.

JOE (*solemnly*): Allow me to finish, Mr. Sprott. What I think is this—that the sooner these outsiders are stopped from coming in to do bits in programmes the better. There ought to be a radio trade union, and no outsiders allowed.

TRISTAN: What about Toscanini?

JOE: He'd join the union. (*Crosses and puts record in position upstage.*)

The PUNNETS *burst in. They are carrying several awkward shaped parcels, but no serpent. They are very angry.*

DAISY (*loudly*): My grand-dad says 'e's 'ad enough.

TRISTAN: Had enough? He hasn't begun yet.

DAISY: 'E says 'e's going 'ome. An' I'm not goin' to try an' stop 'im, becos I've 'ad enough too.

TRISTAN: But why? We've all been very nice to you, haven't we?

DAISY: No, yew 'aven't. Not a single one of you 'cept Mr. Haycraft, an' 'e's gone.

TRISTAN: But he'll be back to do the announcing——

DAISY: 'E'll do no announcin' for us, will 'e, grand-dad?

PUNNET (*winding himself up to speak, and clutching at various parcels*): Grrrrr! Oi make nuthin' of it at all, this yer E.B.C. (*Crosses to* R. *of* TRISTAN.) Nuthin' at all, Oi don't. It be all—all——

TRISTAN (*triumphantly*): I know. Slummerty-wummerty.

PUNNET (*snarling scornfully*): Neow—yew're wrong, young man. (*Loudly, to* DAISY.) Daft in the 'ead, this un be, as I tould ee.

TRISTAN (*conciliatory*): Well, I may be a bit daft in the head—wouldn't be at all surprised—but this afternoon you said it was all slummerty-wummerty.

DAISY: It's worse nor that now, ain't it, grand-dad?

PUNNET (*triumphantly*): Ay. Oi've got a word for un—for all this yer foolish E.B.C. wamsy—ay, masters—for neow Oi think it be all midgety-madgety. Neow more an' neow less nor

midgety-madgety. (*Looks round triumphantly, as if for applause.*)

JOE (*seriously*): I ask you, Mr. Sprott, how are you going to make a revolution of the workers with types like that about?

TRISTAN (*moves a little nearer to* JOE): Well, he seems to be making one all right.

JOE: No education, that's the trouble.

DAISY: Don't you be insulting.

PUNNET (*still having trouble with his parcels, but now launched into big speeches and enjoying himself*): Eddication, young man! Oi tell ee—it be all yer mimsy-mamsy eddication an' yer midgety-madgety E.B.C. an' the like 'at's takin' the lads out o' the fields an' the maidens out o' the dairies——

TRISTAN (*helps* PUNNET *to adjust parcels, forcefully*): Now look here, grand-dad, never mind the big agricultural issue just now. The point is, you promised to help me to-night with my Barset programme and now you say you won't.

DAISY: He thinks he did it this morning.

TRISTAN: Oh—my hat! But explain, that was only a rehearsal.

JOE: We've tried him but he won't understand about rehearsals, Mr. Sprott. No education, see?

DAISY: So now he wants to go home —an' I don't blame him—the way we've been messed about to-day something shameful.

TRISTAN (*making a last attempt*): Now look here, grand-dad, I——

PUNNET (*his big speech*): Grrrrr! If Oi'd the care of ee, young man, Oi'd grand-dad ee wi' a big stick, Oi would—ay, masters, Oi would—to knock parcel o' daftness out o' your head. Eddication! E.B.C., an' woireless! Can ee do hedgin' an' ditchin'? Can ee harrow an' plough an' mow an' reap? Can ee milk a cow or calf a cow? Can ee dip a sheep or shear a sheep? Can ee ring a pig? Can ee harness an' droive a team o' horses? Who were the best bee-keeper there ever were i' North Barset?

TRISTAN: You were.

PUNNET (*triumphantly*): Wrong again, young man, for it were ould Sam'l Daggs out at Little Fitchington. Yer know nuthin' but bits o' mimsy-mamsy, midgety-madgety. (*Moves R. taking* DAISY'S *hand,* TRISTAN *follows, then* PUNNET *turns on him.*) It's the

first toime yer get Matthew Punnet to yer E.B.C. an' it's the last. Oi promised to play me serpent for ee, an' Oi played un this marnin', so now Oi be off home. (*Crosses to door.*)

DAISY (*stopping*): But where *is* your serpent, grand-dad?

PUNNET (*passes* DAISY *across himself to door and she exits*): 'Old yer tongue, girl, an' be off home, where we belong proper. Let un keep bloody ould serpent. (*Turning in doorway to* TRISTAN.)

He goes out hurriedly.

TRISTAN: And that, Joe, just tears it. (*Staggers across to L. and sits on effects box.*) Now there can't be a Barset programme. The listeners will get thirty minutes of gramophone records and I shall most certainly get the boot. Well, remember me to all the boys, Joe.

JOE: Now Mr. Sprott, it isn't as bad as that. You'll manage somehow.

TRISTAN: Not this time, Joe. Sunk without a trace. I knew it this morning when I woke up. Something told me.

Enter PAULA. *She has changed her clothes, taken off her spectacles, etc., and now looks very attractive indeed.*

PAULA: Good evening, Tristan. Hello, Joe.

TRISTAN (*sadly*): Hello, Paula. You look beautiful. I feel like death.

PAULA: Tell me afterwards. I want Edna.

JOE: I'll tell her.

Goes out up right.

PAULA (*to downstage edge of piano*): What about Sir Reginald Runtun?

TRISTAN: He's giving Moya dinner at the County, and for all I know, they may be doing a big Chekhov act together—telling each other over the prunes and custard that in a hundred years time life will be very beautiful. But what I do know is that he's talking to London, and London's talking to him.

PAULA: With certain names, no doubt, passing along the wire.

TRISTAN: No doubt, no doubt. A brewing of hell broth. Meanwhile, to give it a seasoning, there'll be no "Down Here in Barset" programme to-night.

PAULA: I've heard you say that before.

TRISTAN: But then I had most of my cast. Now I haven't any, except Hetty and Bob. And it's too late to change the script. No, it's gramophone records to-night, and curtains to-morrow.

Enter EDNA. *She is dressed to go out.*

PAULA (*crosses down to centre*): Any telegram, Edna?

EDNA: Yes, it came about half an hour ago over the telephone. (*Reads it.*) "Harland agreeable to your producer if you insist. Blake."

PAULA: Good!

TRISTAN: What *is* all this about, Paula?

PAULA: I'll explain later. Does anybody know where Martin Bradburn is?

TRISTAN: Yes, he's across at the *Lion*, doing some serious drinking.

PAULA: Edna, you're going home now, aren't you?

EDNA: Yes, unless you want me for anything.

PAULA: No, thanks. But would you mind looking in at the *Lion* on your way, and asking Martin Bradburn if he'd mind coming back here to see me about something. Say it's important.

EDNA: I'll go now.

TRISTAN: I'll be going there myself in a minute.

PAULA: No, you won't. You've a programme to do.

TRISTAN: I tell you—there can't *be* a programme——

PAULA: All right, Edna. You tell him. Good night.

EDNA (*going*): Good night, Miss Leeds.

TRISTAN: By the way, Copley and the Limple girl are tied up.

PAULA: No.

TRISTAN: Yes, definitely. Already the salad bowl from the staff and the fortnight in Torquay are stirring in the womb of Time.

PAULA: Does Martin Bradburn know?

TRISTAN: Yes. We congratulated them.

PAULA: Did he mind?

TRISTAN: No, the cure's complete.

PAULA: Thank goodness! (*Turns up to desk.*)

TRISTAN: Why?

PAULA: Well, I hate to see a man making a fool of—(*Sits at desk.*)

TRISTAN: Yes, yes. Yes, yes, yes. Quite so.

Enter BRENDA *hurriedly and excitedly.*

BRENDA (*breathless*): Mr. Sprott!

TRISTAN (*preparing to go*): No, Brenda, a thousand times no.

BRENDA (*getting in his way*): Oh—but please listen, Mr. Sprott——

TRISTAN: The smallest imitation from you, Brenda—the tiniest flick of Beatrice Lillie or Gertrude Lawrence—at this moment, and I fell you to the ground.

BRENDA: No, please, Mr. Sprott, it's not that——

TRISTAN: What, no impersonation?

BRENDA: Yes, but——

TRISTAN: I don't care who they are, Brenda—English, American, even Chinese—I won't have 'em.

BRENDA (*pleading hard*): But this is *aifferent.* You'll want it to-night. Listen! (*In perfect imitation of* DAISY PUNNET.) "Good evenin' all. Is moi grand-dad 'ere?"

TRISTAN (*impressed*): I say! That's pure Punnet. Go on.

BRENDA (*as before*): "Moi grand-dad was the foinest serpent player in the whole o' Barset. 'Ere, grand-dad, wake up an' give us all a tune."

TRISTAN: Duckie, it's perfect, but perfect. You could go straight into the programme with that.

BRENDA (*excitedly*): Well then, why can't I?

TRISTAN: You can.

BRENDA (*bubbling over*): Oh gosh! That's marvellous. I've been practising for *hours.*

TRISTAN (*who has been thinking*): No, it's no good.

BRENDA: Oh—but why?

TRISTAN: Not because of you, Brenda. You're Daisy Punnet plus that little bit of something the Punnets never had. *But*—you see, duckie—those lines of Daisy's were put into the script simply to introduce the big star act—old man Punnet's serpent playing—a unique turn. And now the old man's gone home, all midgety-madgety.

BRENDA: Yes, but the serpent hasn't.

TRISTAN: Where is it?

BRENDA: It's still here. (*Moves to door.*)

TRISTAN: Waiting for its mate, I suppose. (BRENDA *stops.*) But, you see, these serpents don't play themselves.

BRENDA: No—but—just wait. (*Goes to door and calls.*) Percy Percy.

After a moment, PERCY *enters with the serpent.*

TRISTAN (*excitedly*): Don't tell me you can play that thing, Percy?

PERCY: Listen to this, Mr. Sprott. (*Sits* R. *below* HAYCRAFT'S *desk.*) (*He plays a short jazzy phrase.*)

PAULA: Don't swing it, Percy.

TRISTAN (*kneels on settee—triumphantly*): Oh—midgety-madgety—we can do it, we can do it. Paula.

PAULA: Yes?

TRISTAN (*calling across*): You must read the part of Nancy, assistant barmaid at the old *Brown Cow.*

PAULA: But really, Tristan, you can't drag me into your programme—especially as a Barsetshire rustic.

TRISTAN: Why not? By this time you're more a Barsetshire rustic than anyone else in the cast—you've been down here the longest.

Enter MARTIN.

Bradburn, I congratulate you.

MARTIN: Why?

TRISTAN: You're going to read the part of Mr. Caxton, a regular patron of the old *Brown Cow,* in my programme to-night.

MARTIN: I'm not. (*up to* HAYCRAFT'S *desk.*)

TRISTAN: You must. Two lines—literally. And Paula's in it too.

PAULA: I didn't say——

TRISTAN: Besides, you two fancy yourselves as people of the Theatre. Well then, the show must go on. (*To* BRENDA *and* PERCY.) Come on, toots, we've work to do.

They go out. Percy closes door. MARTIN *stares appreciatively at* PAULA. *He has come down to her L.*

MARTIN (*admiringly*): I say!

PAULA: What do you say?

MARTIN: Why don't you always look like this?

PAULA: I try to, outside the E.B.C. I called in to collect a telegram I was expecting.

MARTIN (*disappointed*): Oh—you're going on somewhere.

PAULA: I was. To see some people I know.

MARTIN: But you asked me to come across to see you.

PAULA: Yes, did you mind?

MARTIN: No, I'm glad.

PAULA (*moves away to front of piano*): You see, I couldn't say it before, because of the telegram.

MARTIN: Where does the telegram come in?

PAULA: I'll explain later. But this really is important. (*Leans on piano—pauses, then earnestly.*) Martin, why did you leave the Theatre? You were doing grand work there and you must have loved it.

MARTIN: I did love it, but I began to feel it didn't love me much.

PAULA: Not enough work?

MARTIN: Not enough regular work. And no security. I was beginning to be frightened. You see, I began producing in repertory. You know the sort of thing—eighteen hours a day, and never having time to get anything right. Then I took a chance and went to London.

PAULA: Well, then you got plenty of work.

MARTIN: I had three plays to produce in my first year. One good one—two duds. The next year, apart from some not very bright Sunday shows, I only had two to produce—one a good one, but it was a flop —and the other the usual Surrey lounge hall bit of nonsense, which wasn't even a successful bit of nonsense, Then I'd been too pleased with myself and had rows, and, I suppose, made enemies. And then I began to get frightened No work coming along. No money. I was broke and didn't seem to be getting anywhere at all. I'd never bothered much about broadcasting, hardly ever listened in—and thought radio drama just third-rate footling stuff.

PAULA: Which it mostly is.

MARTIN: Yes, but I happened just then to listen to an

E.B.C. production of the *Wild Duck*. And it was good.

PAULA (*very quietly*): You mean the one Margaret Owen did?

MARTIN: Yes. You knew her, of course?

PAULA: She was my greatest friend. She died just after she did that production. I begged them to do a memorial programme of her work—a lot of her shows had been recorded—but of course they wouldn't. They just wanted to forget her. I never forgave them for that. It was then I stopped caring much about my work. Sorry—go on.

MARTIN (*humbly*): I've never understood you at all, have I?

PAULA: No, you don't really know anything about me. But then how could you?

MARTIN: I ought to have guessed.

PAULA (*sits on settee arm, facing* MARTIN): Please go on about yourself. This really is important.

MARTIN: Well, after hearing that production, I thought, "What's wrong with doing some of this stuff?" So I made enquiries, and they were all very nice and flattering to me at Radio House, and after a short trial trip, I signed a contract and joined the staff. That's all.

PAULA: No, it isn't. What's happened to you since?

MARTIN: Nothing very much. (*Moves down L.*) You know that part as well as I do. I can't really complain. If I haven't got on too well, I suppose it's mostly my own fault.

PAULA: No, you're wrong. it isn't really. That's what we all come to think. But it's not true. Just because, behind all their fuss and silly memos, they seem easy-going and kind and considerate.

MARTIN: That's just it. You know what a hell the Theatre can be.

PAULA: Yes, but that's because it's *alive*. And this isn't. It's a nice, easy-going, kind and considerate machine—but it's still a machine. And after a time it quietly takes something vital and essential out of you.

MARTIN: Yes, I've been wondering about that. Something certainly seems to go.

PAULA: It does. I'm nearly an old stager now. Ten years

of it. I've watched 'em come and go. It's not broadcasting itself. I suppose at best it's a rather limited medium, but it can be turned into something vital, moving, quite beautiful sometimes. Margaret did it. I even did it myself once or twice. What's wrong is the organisation itself, the machine. It doesn't care—and the people who run it don't care—for that precious vital impulse which makes the artist an artist. And so that impulse just fades away and dies. And that's why some of us sit about making wisecracks. If we didn't laugh so much, we might start to cry.

MARTIN: But *you* haven't given in, Paula. You couldn't talk like this if you had. You're alive all right.

PAULA: Only just. And I'm really very tough, very fierce, very determined, though I may not look it.

MARTIN: You don't—thank God!

PAULA: Besides—I've found—well—compensations.

MARTIN (*alarmed*): You're not in love with somebody?

PAULA: No, I didn't mean that.

MARTIN: You terrified me then. Listen, Paula——

PAULA: No, Martin, let's finish this first. It's most important. Never mind about regular work and security and all the rest of it. You must get out of the E.B.C.—at once, before it's too late—and you must go back to the Theatre.

MARTIN: But who wants me? What am I going to do?

PAULA: You've got to take a chance on that. I may tell you that I'm going, as soon as they'll let me resign, and I don't think they'll make any difficulties about that, after what Sir Reginald Runtun has told them to-night.

MARTIN: That goes for me, too.

PAULA: Yes, that goes for you too. Now you may have been forgotten in the Theatre, you may have to start all over again, but that's the chance you've got to take, Martin.

MARTIN: It'll be a lot worse than you think, Paula. And I'm still almost broke.

PAULA: I dare say.

MARTIN: You wouldn't like me to kiss you, would you?

PAULA: No. One thing at a time is my motto. And you've got to decide, Martin. You've got to leap into the dark.

MARTIN (*after a pause, decisively*): I'll do it.

PAULA: That's what I wanted to hear you say, Martin. I wanted to feel you were ready to take the chance.

MARTIN: Well, I am. And a pretty thin chance it'll be.

PAULA: It's not as bad as you think. There's a play you can do at once—for Harland.

MARTIN: Harland? But how's that? Whose play is it?

PAULA: It's mine. I was determined not to tell you until you'd decided to take the chance. Harland has accepted a play of mine for production at once, and he's agreed to let you produce it if I insist. And now—I *do* insist.

MARTIN (*delighted*): Good lord, Paula—but this is marvellous. (*Moves to her.*) What a girl!

As he advances upon her. JOE *enters.*

JOE: Ahem! The little big noise is back.

PAULA: What do you mean?

JOE: Our new D.A.D.G.—Sir Reg. So look out. (*Moving up.*) I *think*—he's bottled.

JOE *goes out.*

MARTIN: He won't have it all his own way. I'm rather bottled myself.

PAULA: Now listen, darling, there's only one thing to do. As soon as we see him, we announce that we're resigning.

MARTIN: Right. What's your play called?

PAULA (*hastily*): *The Silver Ship*—but we can talk about that afterwards.

MARTIN: I adore you.

PAULA: Good. And we can talk a lot about *that* afterwards. But just now we've got to disentangle ourselves from our E.B.C. contracts.

MARTIN: I'll bet Sir Reginald's going to throw 'em in our faces.

PAULA: Here he comes.

Enter SIR REGINALD *with* MOYA GRONOVA. *They have been dining, and both are in fine form.*

SIR REGINALD (*continuing some splendid reminiscence for the admiring* MOYA): So he said "I don't know why you should say that

Runton." So I said, "Aren't you forgetting one thing, Smithers?" "What's that?" he said. "Aren't you forgetting," I said, "that beaten copper work has been one of my hobbies for over thirty years. So I really do know what I'm talking about, old chap," I said.

GRONOVA (*earnestly*): I think you were—*splendeed.*

SIR REGINALD (*jovially*): A-ha—we—er—meet again, Miss—er—Leeds—Mr.—er——

MARTIN: Bradburn.

SIR REGINALD: Yes, of course—Bradburn. (*Sits on arm of settee.*)

GRONOVA (*sits in desk chair*): Paula, we 'ad the most wonderful deener.

PAULA: I thought you went to the *County.*

GRONOVA: We did. But to-night—it was all—*speciale.* (*Flashing a terrific glance at* SIR REGINALD.) Thanks to *you.*

SIR REGINALD (*pleased*): Well—I always say—you can get a decent dinner out of these places—if you only take a little trouble—and of course I'm an old traveller.

PAULA (*stoutly*): Sir Reginald, Martin Bradburn and I want to offer the company our resignations.

MARTIN: Thanks, Paula. (*Crosses to L. of* PAULA.) Yes, our resignations.

SIR REGINALD *and* GRONOVA *are exchanging delighted glances.*

PAULA: We're quite willing to leave at once. We'll go quietly.

GRONOVA (*to* SIR REGINALD): What did I tell you, my deear? I knew they would feel like that.

SIR REGINALD (*smiling*): You did. Well, well, well, well!

He is highly amused. PAULA *and* MARTIN *stare at him in bewilderment.*

HAYCRAFT, BOB *and* HETTY *come in. Lights are switched on L. and they take up positions at studio end.*

JOE *enters up* R., *crosses behind piano to lower mike.* HAYCRAFT *above desk to switch on standard lamp—on his entrance he taps* GRONOVA *on shoulder, she then moves to piano and sits ready.*

MARTIN: What's the joke?

SIR REGINALD (*still amused*): It's not a joke really—but I can't

help being amused by the way in which you've misjudged the—er—attitude of the company and myself. We're really not like that, y'know.

PERCY *with serpent, and then* TRISTAN *enter.*

TRISTAN (*seeing* SIR REGINALD): Oh—help!

SIR REGINALD (*loudly*): Ah! And here's the other culprit—eh? Also ready to offer his resignation, eh? (*Moves to* TRISTAN.)

TRISTAN: Let me do my programme first. The show must go on.

SIR REGINALD: You see, I spoke to the assistant director-general at Radio House to-night, and told him frankly what you three had said about the organisation and policy of the company——

TRISTAN: All right, don't rub it in. I must go and work the panel for the last time. (*He goes into producer's box.*)

MARTIN (*to* PAULA): Everything's okay. We're fired.

PAULA: I don't know. He's got a dangerous pleasant look in his eye.

SIR REGINALD (*loudly*): Fortunately the English Broadcasting Company can appreciate frankness and forthright criticism, so I'm delighted to tell you that you've all been promoted and your contracts extended——

PAULA (*in horror*): Oh crikey! (*Sits on arm of settee.*)

MARTIN (*horrified*): What—can't we leave? (*Kneels on settee above* PAULA.)

SIR REGINALD: Certainly not. You've been promoted to the Organisation Department. Mr. Sprott has been made Assistant Organiser of Overseas Religion.

TRISTAN (*through speaker, horrified*): *What?*

SIR REGINALD: You, Mr. Bradburn, have been appointed Controller of co-ordinated regional children's programmes.

MARTIN (*horror-struck*): Suffering Moses! (*Falls on to the settee.*)

SIR REGINALD: And you, Miss Leeds, will be director of our new Mother's Hour—"Kitchen, Kiddies and Crêpe-de-Chine".

PAULA *breaks into a peal of laughter. The red light is now flickering.* HAYCRAFT *is at the mike.*

HAYCRAFT (*sternly*): Quiet, please! (*Announces.*) "Down Here in Barset". To-night we present another half-hour of Barsetshire humour, melody and folk-lore, in a programme written and produced by Tristan Sprott. It's a beautiful summer night—the men have returned from the hayfields—the door of that friendly old pub the *Brown Cow* stands wide open—"Down Here in Barset".

MOYA *plays her tune.* PERCY *does effects. They all, except* SIR REGINALD, *now in background, produce atmosphere noises.*

BOB (*in rural voice*): 'Nother point o' coider, Rose. Oi saw your young man over boi Jenkins' twenty acre.

HETTY (*same style*): He's no young man o' moine, Charlie Bragg isn't—not since Michaelmas Fair.

BOB: Didn't buy ee a proper fairing, Oi'll be bound, Rose.

HAYCRAFT (*rural*): Oi 'eard tell on 'at tew, Garge.

PAULA (*in fine rustic fashion*): What yew tew 'eard tell on 'at isn't trew would fill the Barsetshire News onny Friday. What's for yew, Muster Caxton?

PAULA *and* MARTIN *are sharing a mike with their backs to the audience, and we see them squeezing hands behind their backs.*

MARTIN (*rural*): Pint of old an' mild, Miss Nancy.

PAULA (*as before*): Yes, Muster Caxton. Would yew be giving us a song to-noight, Muster Caxton?

HAYCRAFT: We do be expectin' your old 'ay-makin' song to-noight, Muster Caxton.

BOB: Oi'll never forget the first toime Oi ever 'eard that 'ay-makin' song—dang my buttons—— (*Much laughter.*) Woi, look oo's 'ere! Young Cherry Gooseman.

BRENDA (*as* DAISY): Good evenin' all. Is moi grand-dad 'ere?

BOB: Naow, yer grand-dad's not 'ere.

HETTY: An' that's where yew be wrong again, Garg. Ol' Gooseman's 'ere. He's asleep in the corner there.

HAYCRAFT: Woi, so 'e be. An' only man in all Barset as can still play the ould serpent.

BRENDA: Moi grand-dad was the foinest sarpent player in the whole o' Barset. 'Ere, grand-dad, wake up an' give us all a tune.

General cry of "Wake up", "Give us a tune", etc., and then PERCY *coolly begins playing a rustic tune, with just a suspicion of swing about it, while gradually the others join in with words and as they are singing the curtain comes down.*

THE END

THE GOLDEN FLEECE

A Comedy in Three Acts

CHARACTERS

(*In the Order of their Appearance*)

MISS WEEKS
GEORGE
ELSIE
MONDOVI
LADY LEADMILL
MISS SELL
TAGG
MRS. TAGG
SIR RUFUS GARNETT
LADY GARNETT
WILLIAM LOTLESS
MOLLY CUDDEN
ALEC ROTHBURY
VERONICA FRENSHAM
DR. PLUMWEATHER
PERKINS
LORD FLEETFIELD

ACT I

An evening in early autumn.

ACT II

Evening, a fortnight later.

ACT III

Afternoon, five days later.

The scene is the entrance lounge of the Golden Fleece Hotel, Cheltingate Spa, an inland health resort.

ACT I

The scene is the entrance lounge of the Golden Fleece Hotel, Cheltingate Spa, an inland health resort. The set is semi-circular, or a half-oval shape. Down right (actors') is a smallish door leading to a small lounge or card room. Next, R. centre is the main street entrance of the hotel, big doors or a swing door set inside the big wide doorway. Next, centre back, is the curved reception desk, with registration books, pigeon-holes for letters at back, telephones, etc. On left of this, which may or may not be behind prolongation of counter, is the door that leads into the staff part of hotel and is only used by employees—called Staff Door in script. About middle of left wall is door to rest of hotel, to lift and stairs, etc.—called Main Door. Between Staff Door and Main Door, near wall can be low table with lounge behind and a small chair or two, and another near wall between Main Door and Pros. Left. Another low table with chairs should be placed a little left of centre in mid-stage. Near reception desk are usual notices of picture-houses, theatre, lectures, Royal Pump Room hours and concerts, etc. The scene should suggest a stuffy comfort, and therefore must not be too modern in decoration, though not farcically Victorian.

At rise of curtain, lights are on. It is late in the evening. MISS WEEKS, *reception clerk, in black, neat, not unattractive, about thirty, with a "refined" manner for guests and a much more shrewd manner for others, is behind the desk, finishing up.* GEORGE PRITCHET, *a rather gloomy middle-aged waiter, is hanging about the lounge, waiting for a final order or two before going off duty, and emptying an ashtray, flicking away a bit of dust, etc.*

MISS WEEKS (*just audible*): And three—and twelve and six—fifteen and six—and eleven and six—twenty-seven shillings—one pound seven—and thirteen and nine—two pounds and ninepence—and four shillings—two pounds four and nine—two—four-nine. . . . (*Looks up some other figure in ledger.*) Five and seven—seven and nine's one and four—six and four's ten—two—ten—four. And three, eight, two. That's five—eighteen—six. You were saying . . .

She books it, and looks speculatively in the direction of GEORGE, *who takes it as encouragement to continue a conversation that was broken off.*

GEORGE (*gloomily*): Yes, two hundred pounds, that's all. Say, twenty fivers and ten tenners. That's all they wanted, and I couldn't lay me 'ands on it. If I could, look where I'd 'ave been now.

MISS WEEKS (*carrying on*): Five—eighteen—six. Well, where would you have been?

GEORGE (*bitterly*): In Preston Pans, with a nice business of me own.

MISS WEEKS: Eight—nine—five. Nine—five—and eleven.

GEORGE: And another thing——

MISS WEEKS (*not too impatiently*): Now, just a minute. Five—and eleven—ten, two and eight—and fifteen and four—ten—eighteen. That's it. (*Gives him all her attention now.*) Well, you're not the only one. If everybody had their own, I'd have five thousand pounds—*at least*—and a third share in a wholesale butcher's in Melbourne. That's what my mother always says. Only her brother—my uncle Fred—it was his money and business—went and lost his memory just before he died—only the lawyers said we'd never prove it. So it just shows you.

GEORGE (*bitterly*): It doesn't need to show me.. I've been shown. Luck! If I told you half the things that's 'appened to me, you'd call me a liar.

Telephone rings.

MISS WEEKS (*at telephone*): The Golden Fleece Hotel—yes? ("*Refaned*" *now.*) Who is it, please? I can't quaite catch. Yes, the lane is very bad. Oh—Mrs. Gore—yes? . . . On Saturday? Yes, of course, Mrs. Gore . . . Did you say the First Flore, Mrs. Gore? . . . Oh, Ai think so. Ai'm sure that can be arranged . . . Yes, of course, Mrs. Gore . . . On Saturday then, Mrs. Gore . . . (*Puts down telephone. In ordinary voice.*) That's that, Mrs. Gore.

GEORGE: Yes, she's stayed with us before, Mrs. Gore. (*Pleased with himself now.*) Here, did you notice that? She's stayed with us before, Mrs. Gore—eh? All you want's a bit of

music to it. (*As this provokes no response.*) Don't laugh.

MISS WEEKS: I'm not going to. Takes more than that to make me laugh, this time of night.

Yawns, then begins leisurely tidying up. GEORGE *goes over to Card Room door and peeps through. She looks up and sees him strolling back.*

Um?

GEORGE (*going nearer, dropping voice.*) Still there.

MISS WEEKS: Who are they?

GEORGE (*same tone*): Sir Something Garnett an' his wife an' that other pair—chap with no manners——

MISS WEEKS: Mr. Tagg?

GEORGE: That's right. And no class at all.

MISS WEEKS: They've plenty of money.

GEORGE (*in despair*): I dare say. Beats me how some of 'em picks it up. Luck again.

ELSIE, *a youngish chambermaid, with a hot-water bottle in her hand, looks in hastily through Staff Door.*

ELSIE (*urgently, in loud whisper*): Miss Weeks!

MISS WEEKS: Well?

ELSIE: Is Molly about?

MISS WEEKS: Haven't seen her. She's not back on duty till eleven.

ELSIE: I know—but Number Eighteen's asking for her—silly old geezer. I s'pose she wants Molly to sing her to sleep.

GEORGE: What for? You'd do for me.

ELSIE (*haughtily*): Don't be personal, please, Mr. Pritchet. (*To* MISS WEEKS.) Tell Molly when she comes. Number Eighteen —S.O.S.

Withdraws hastily.

Sound of a large car outside. MISS WEEKS *and* GEORGE *look towards Street Door, and* GEORGE *moves forward, to look out.*

GEORGE (*whispering*): Don't think it's anybody new. The Old Leadmill, I think. (*Waits at door.*)

MONDOVI, *the maneger, now enters through Staff Door. He is a middle-aged Italian, dressed very formally in morning coat or dinner jacket. He has a letter or two, which he tosses on desk.*

MONDOVI (*importantly*): On Tuesday—the second-floor suite—twenty-eight an' twenty-eight A—for Mistair an' Misses Baxter, of Birmingham. They are all right. Vairy reech. Nice-a people.

MISS WEEKS ("*refaned again*"): Yes, Mr. Mondovi. And Mrs. Gore rang up to ask for the usual first flore rooms for Saturday and the next fortnight. I said I was sure that would be quaite all raight.

MONDOVI: But of course. We know Mrs. Gor-a vairy well. Always spenda plenty money. Nice-a People—Vairy Reech. Nice-a-people.

Sound of voices outside. He looks, managerially.

Who is-a thees?

MISS WEEKS: Ai believe—Lady Leadmill.

MONDOVI *comes forward, ready to smile and rub his hands, Assisted by* GEORGE *at door,* LADY LEADMILL *makes a tremendous entrance, followed by her companion,* MISS SELL. LADY LEADMILL *is a stout, elderly woman, like a bulging-eyed, upholstered monster. She has a loud, wheezing voice. They have been out to dinner, but are well wrapped up.*

MONDOVI (*now bowing nnd smiling*): Good-a evenin', Lady Leadmill! You enjoy your-a evenin' away from us, eh?

LADY LEADMILL: No, I can't say I did very much, Mondovi. They keep a very poor table up there, I must say. The veal was even worse than yours.

MONDOVI: I 'ave spoken vairy specially to chef about-a that veal, Lady Leadmill. An' I am so sorry about-a your evenin'.

LADY LEADMILL: Then they took us to a lecture about some place or other. Where was it, Miss Sell?

MISS SELL (*timidly*): The Adriatic coast, I think it was.

MONDOVI (*all interest and enthusiasm*): Oh yais, I know it well. Vairy nice-a. Spalato—Ragusa——

LADY LEADMILL (*cutting in ruthlessly*): I dare say. Couldn't make much of it myself out. And the lantern slides were most peculiar. Some of them had *nothing whatever* to do with it. I distinctly recognised Market Harborough once—and another time Bury St. Edmunds. Ridiculous of the Colonel to say I dozed off. How could I have recognised Bury St. Edmunds if I'd dozed off? Eh, Miss Sell?

MISS SELL (*timidly*): Well, I did think once . . .

LADY LEADMILL (*heartily*): Nonsense, you never thought at all. Did you tell Horrocks to bring round the Rolls at eleven in the morning?

MISS SELL: Yes, Lady Leadmill.

LADY LEADMILL (*to* MISS WEEKS): Where are my letters?

MISS WEEKS: Ai'm afraid there aren't any to-naight, Lady Leadmill.

LADY LEADMILL: Are you sure?

MONDOVI (*fussily*): Now make-a quite-a sure there are no letters for Lady Leadmill.

MISS WEEKS (*who has looked again, apologetically*): No, not to-night.

MONDOVI: So sorry—not a to-night-a.

LADY LEADMILL (*sternly*): The posts here are most peculiar.

MISS SELL (*timidly*): Yes. A letter of mine——

LADY LEADMILL (*abruptly*): Good night.

MISS SELL (*resignedly echoing*): Good night.

MISS WEEKS (*effusively*): Good night, Lady Leadmill. Good night.

MONDOVI *has gone to Main Door and now stands holding it open, bowing and smiling, as* LADY LEADMILL *sails through, followed by* MISS SELL.

MONDOVI: Good night-a, your ladyship. Goo-ood night-a. Thank-a you so much. Good night-a!

Meanwhile, GEORGE *and* MISS WEEKS *have exchanged significant looks of disgust.* MONDOVI *returns to see these. They both look at him, he looks at them, is about to say something forceful, decides not to, gives a tremendous and most significant shrug, and closes his eyes.*

I go to bed.

Marches out Staff Door.

GEORGE, *looking particularly bitter, comes nearer* MISS WEEKS.

GEORGE (*with bitter parody, softly*): Nice-a people! Vairy reech!

To show what she feels about it, MISS WEEKS *closes her ledger with a sharp-tempered bang, and continues clearing up.* GEORGE, *yawning, flicks a bit more ash off a table. From Card Room come*

MR. TAGG, *about* 55, *coarse-grained North-countryman*, MRS. TAGG, *a year or two younger and a simple woman*, LADY GARNETT, *same age but more self-confident and genteel, and* SIR RUFUS GARNETT, *a thin, worrying fellow. The men are in dinner jackets, and the women expensively but badly dressed.*

MRS. TAGG (*continuing calculations after bridge*): Now are you sure we've got it all straightened out? I know I owed fifteen and six——

LADY GARNETT: No, eighteen shillings, if you remember. So I want another half-crown.

MRS. TAGG: Oh—then I'll have to settle with you in the morning—unless you've got half a crown, Father.

TAGG *hands over half-crown to* LADY GARNETT.

SIR RUFUS: Good game, I thought.

MRS. TAGG (*hopefully*): So did I, Sir Rufus. You enjoyed it, didn't you, Father?

TAGG (*crushingly*): No, I didn't.

LADY GARNETT: Oh-come, Mr. Tagg——

TAGG (*same tone*): I'm not blaming you. But I enjoy a game o' bridge when I play with people who return my leads and don't keep their aces as if they wanted to go to bed with 'em. (*Glaring at his wife.*)

SIR RUFUS: Now, now, no post-mortems. And as the winner, I say—what about a drink;?

MRS. TAGG: Oo—not for me, Sir Rufus, thank you all the same. I ought to get to bed, because I'm supposed to be down at the Pump Room at eight o'clock every morning.

LADY GARNETT (*moving*): I think we all ought to be going to bed. So don't be long, Rufus.

SIR RUFUS: No, dear, just one for the road. Eh, Tagg?

Moves fussily, as the two women go out through Main Door. MISS WEEKS *has now gone.* GEORGE *is anxious to get this last order in, so does not bother opening the door for the women but hovers round the men, who now sit down at one of the tables.*

What's it to be, eh? Say the word.

TAGG (*bluntly*): Double 'Aig an' small Polly for me.

SIR RUFUS: An' I'll have the same, waiter.

GEORGE (*briskly*): Two double 'Aigs an' Pollies, thank you, sir.

Goes out Staff Door.

SIR RUFUS: Always enjoy a game of bridge.

TAGG: So do I when it's played properly. But my wife won't try and learn. But I was tellin' you about Fawcett. Well, he puts up sixteen thousand—that is, of his own money.

SIR RUFUS: Well, tidy little sum.

TAGG: Oh—Fawcett's worth a couple o' hundred thousand pound, if he's worth a penny. What's sixteen thousand to 'im? 'Owever, that's what he puts up, in the first place, and in the original issue that gives 'im a controlling interest.

SIR RUFUS: What—for sixteen thousand?

TAGG: Ah—but look at the way they worked it. Very clever! But then Fawcett *is* clever. I daresay he doesn't look it, but then a lot of us don't look it, yet we manage to surprise some folk.

LADY GARNET: Rufus!

Breaks off because his wife and LADY GARNETT *have returned.*

TAGG: Now, what's up now?

LADY GARNETT: We can't find anybody to work the lift.

MRS. TAGG: I said I didn't mind walking up, but Lady Garnett wants the lift.

TAGG: Well, why not? We've paid for a lift, why shouldn't we 'ave it when we want it.

SIR RUFUS: Quite so. Just slackness on somebody's part. Good deal of slackness here, if you ask me.

As GEORGE *enters with drinks.*

Ah—there you are, waiter. Nobody working the lift, y'know. Keeping these ladies waiting. Not good enough.

TAGG: Time you brightened up, some of you.

GEORGE: Very sorry, sir, I expect the man's gone off duty. I'll tell the night porter. It's 'is fault really.

GEORGE *goes out hastily through Staff Door.*

SIR RUFUS: Sure you won't have anything, my dear?

LADY GARNETT (*severely*): No, and if you'd any sense, you wouldn't either, at this time of night.

TAGG (*heavily*): I like a drop o' whisky before I go to bed.

MRS. TAGG (*proudly*): Always did, didn't you, Father? (*To* LADY GARNETT.) Always did.

TAGG: It 'elps to settle my stomach. (*To* LADY GARNETT, *who winces.*) Might do yours too. I over'eard you complainin' to my wife.

LADY GARNETT *closes her eyes.* GEORGE *hastily returns.*

GEORGE (*hurriedly*): He's just gone through now.

MRS. TAGG (*who is servile to waiters*): Thank you very much.

Follows after LADY GARNETT *who is stalking out.*

The men are now attending to their drinks. GEORGE *is coming closer.*

TAGG: Well—all the best! (*Drinks.*)

SIR RUFUS: Cheers! (*Drinks.*)

TAGG: Yes—there's several of us who's a bit cleverer than we look, especially where money's concerned. We've chaps on our exchange—an' to look at 'em, yer wouldn't think they were worth ninepence—but—don't you make a mistake, some of 'em could write you a cheque for a quarter of a million——

GEORGE (*to* SIR RUFUS): Beg pardon, sir, will you be wanting anything else just now?

SIR RUFUS (*blankly*): Why should I?

GEORGE: Only you see, sir, I'm going off duty now, an' if you *don't* want anything else, perhaps you'd like to sign for these, before I'm away.

SIR RUFUS (*putting down sixpence*): There you are.

GEORGE: Thank you, sir. Good night, gentlemen.

Exits Staff Door.

SIR RUFUS (*staring after him*): Bit arbitrary, that chap, wasn't he? Pay up and let me be off—sort of thing. Eh?

TAGG: There's one or two of 'em could do with dressing down a bit. These old woman spoil 'em. My wife's not much better. I keep saying to her, "We're payin' for it, aren't we? See yer get yer money's worth. And a smile an' all." That's what I tell her, but it does no good. She's too soft.

Enter, through Main Door, WILLIAM LOTLESS, *the Night Porter. He is a middle-aged man, with an intelligent, humorous face, grey hair, clean-shaven, and is wearing hotel uniform.*

WILL: (*richly*) Good evening, gentlemen. Very quiet to-night again, isn't it? (*Nods and smiles and is passing them.*)

SIR RUFUS: Now, just a minute.

WILL *stops and turns.*

You're the Night Porter, aren't you?

WILL (*cheerfully*): Yes, sir. William Lotless is the name, and I've been Night Porter here for—oh!—two or three years. Anything I can do for you, sir?

TAGG: Aren't you supposed to be working that lift when the day man goes off.

SIR RUFUS: Just what I was going to ask.

WILL: Yes, that's one of my jobs. Just one of them. I also supply any drinks that may be wanted, answer the door or telephone, arrange for early morning——

TAGG: All right. All right. We don't want to know all that. What we want to know is why you weren't working that lift when Lady Garnett and my wife are waiting there, a few minutes since.

WILL (*confidentially*): Now, I'm sorry about that. But I'll explain how it is. Now the liftman goes off at eleven every night. But he takes his time from the clock along there, which is always five minutes faster than *our* clock through here. And the trouble is—well, we're both a bit stubborn about it.

SIR RUFUS: Seems a poor reason why guests should be kept waiting.

WILL: That I grant you, sir, I grant it like lightning. And if I'd *known* the ladies were waiting, I'd have been out in a flash. As I was—in a flash—when I *did* know. But, you see, George the waiter here didn't let on.

TAGG: What's he got to do with it?

WILL: Well, it's like everything else—wheels within wheels. Now when I come on duty, George has to go off, and if there are any drinks wanted I serve 'em. But you've just ordered some drinks—and—given him something for his trouble, I've no doubt——

SIR RUFUS: Matter of fact, I did.

WILL: There you are. Now George was after that tip, that's

why he didn't tell me to come on duty before you'd ordered. Not that I'm blaming him, y'know. Very natural thing to do. But I'm just explaining. I tell you, very interesting, this hotel business.

TAGG: Interesting or not, you seem to 'ave plenty to say about it.

WILL (*quietly*): No, sir. That doesn't follow. I can hold my tongue.

Moves away with dignity and goes into space behind counter, where he puts on his glasses and looks at the registration book, etc. The other two take a look at him, look at each other, rather uneasily, have a drink each.

SIR RUFUS (*after a pause*): You were saying—er——?

TAGG (*with mouth-on-one-side manner*): What I'm saying is that there's a bit too much cheek and impudence about a few of 'em round 'ere for my liking.

SIR RUFUS (*same manner*): Have a word with the manager in the morning, I think. Got rather a pull here, matter of fact, because I know Gleason well—director of the syndicate running these hotels, I think. I'll just—er——

Looks round and sees WILL *looking calmly in their direction over his spectacles, and hesitates and pauses.*

TAGG: What?

SIR RUFUS: Turn in, I think, eh? (*Finishes drink.*)

TAGG (*getting up*): I'm ready. (*Shouting across to desk.*) Lift!

WILL *comes across.*

SIR RUFUS: I see East Africans are coming up. Nice rise to-day. Wonder if it's too late for a flutter there.

TAGG (*as they move with* WILL *in attendance*): No. But I got in weeks ago, an' I'm sitting tight on 'em for a bit yet.

They go out, WILL *bringing up rear, smiling rather maliciously.*

After a short pause, telephone on desk rings. Nothing happens. It goes on ringing. Enter, Staff Door, MOLLY CUDDEN, *a pleasant-looking, good-tempered, ripe woman in a chambermaid's uniform. She is carrying a rubber hot-water bottle in cover under her arm, and a small tray with a steaming hot drink in a cup on it.*

She looks at the telephone, hesitates, puts down the tray, touches it, hesitates, then as it rings again and nobody else is coming, she answers it rather tentatively.

MOLLY: Golden Fleece Hotel—Mrs. Ferguson? Oh, she's feeling a lot better . . . Well, you see, I'm Molly Cudden, the chambermaid on night duty, and I've just been upstairs—and Mrs. Ferguson told me earlier to look in to see if she wanted anything—so I peeped in and she was sleeping nicely . . . Yes, I'm sure she's a lot better . . . Oh yes, I've heard her talk about you—and her little grandson. How is he? . . . Isn't that nice? . . . Good night.

WILL (*enters as she puts down telephone*): Good evening, Molly.

MOLLY: Good evening, Will. Good job I was here to answer that. It was Mrs. Ferguson's daughter ringing up to know how she was. Well, what's amusing you, Mr. Lotless?

WILL: Oh, that rude chap—Bag or Rag or Tagg or whatever they call him—I've just taken him and another chap up in the lift, after they'd practically told me to shut up, and this Rag or Tagg's very pleased with himself because he's got a lot of East Africans——

MOLLY: East Africans? Black men?

WILL: No, shares. And though they're going up, he says he's holding on to 'em. He's clever, he is—oh—he's not going to sell yet.

MOLLY: Well, what's funny about that?

WILL (*chuckling*): The bottom'll drop out of that market very soon, you'll see, and those East Africans won't even be worth what he gave for 'em. I tell you, it took me all my time to keep my face straight when he was saying how clever he was.

MOLLY (*staring at him*): You know, I don't understand you, Mr. Lotless.

WILL: Ah—that's how it should be, Mrs. Cudden. (*Points to himself.*) Mystery man.

MOLLY (*ignoring this, earnestly*): But how d'you know about all these shares an' things? Who tells you?

WILL: Nobody tells me. I work it out for myself. I've plenty of time on my hands, these nights here, an' I read all the financial

pages in the papers—and well I work it out for myself. I'm not always right—couldn't be, of course—an' some weeks I take a fairly big loss—like the week before last, I took a nasty tumble on Gold Coasts—must have been about a hundred and fifty thousand pounds down on that lot——

MOLLY (*staggered*): What are you talking about?

WILL: Oh—it's just a sort of game I play with myself, following the market. Here, look——

Brings out notebook and shows her some pages.

MOLLY (*staring*): They don't make any sense to me.

WILL (*pointing*): Now last week I'd have made about half a million—do you see?

MOLLY: But I don't see.

WILL (*showing her*): It's all there, properly worked out.

MOLLY (*staring at him now*): I do think you're a funny chap, Mr. Lotless. I mean, all this—it's all nothing, really—isn't it?

WILL (*gravely*): All imaginary, yes, of course. Just for amusement. That's the only way I'd ever do it now, I promised myself that.

MOLLY (*quickly*): Why did you—and when did you?

WILL (*holding up warning finger*): Ah! I've told you before, Molly Cudden, not to be too curious.

As she looks offended, turning away.

Now don't take offence. We have our work to do—you upstairs, me down here—and we're friends, aren't we?

MOLLY (*simply*): Yes, Mr. Lotless. I think you're a very nice man—I've never worked with a nicer in this business—and I know that really you're very clever and not a bit like an ordinary Night Porter. But you see when you're so different, I can't help being curious, can I?

WILL: That's all right, Molly.

MOLLY (*indicating tray*): Oh—goodness!—look at that. And Number Eighteen's waiting for it. (*Takes up tray, and prepares to go.*) Oh—Mr. Lotless——

WILL (*who has gone to clear small table*): Yes, Molly?

MOLLY (*hastily but impressively*): You remember I told you about all those papers my uncle sent—y'know the uncle who died

so sudden week before last—well, I've brought them for you to look at. Y'know, you promised you would.

WILL: Yes. Where are they?

MOLLY: I'll bring them down, when I've taken this to Eighteen and seen if Twenty-four wants her Benger's again. Shan't be long.

She hurries out with tray through Main Door.

WILL *takes glasses, etc., from counter through Staff Door and comes out with several newspapers. He goes behind desk with these and prepares to read. He can now have changed lighting, so that there is a good light on one of the tables and over the desk and not much elsewhere. He can hum or whistle softly.*

Enter from street VERONICA FRENSHAM *and* DR. ALEC ROTHBURY. *She is a very handsome girl, about* 28, *extremely well-dressed—she is wearing evening clothes—and with an air of luxurious sophistication. He is about* 30, *tall, intelligent, rather awkward, and wears an anything but immaculate dinner jacket. They have only met three or four times, but he is obviously in love with her, and she knows it but does not take him very seriously.*

WILL (*coming forward*): Good evening, miss. Good evening, Doctor.

ALEC: Evening, William. Any message for me?

WILL: No, sir.

ALEC: Good! Miss Frensham, have a drink.

VERONICA (*hesitating*): Well, I don't know. I'm going in the morning—and——

ALEC (*eagerly*): That's all the more reason why you ought to have a drink.

VERONICA (*smiling*): All right.

They go over to the lighted table. WILL *comes along.*

I think—a gin and lime.

ALEC: A gin and lime. And I'll have a lager, William.

WILL: One gin and lime, one lager.

Goes out Staff Door. They light cigarettes.

VERONICA (*not unpleasantly*): Well, the Wednesday dance at the Grand Hotel wasn't any improvement on the Friday dance at the Golden Fleece here, was it?

ALEC (*gloomily*): No. Hoped it might be, for your sake.

VERONICA: Why for my sake?

ALEC: I don't go to these affairs in the ordinary way, I suggested it just to have a good excuse to talk to you again—and to look at you.

VERONICA (*after slight pause*): Go on.

ALEC: Go on? I've finished.

VERONICA: No more compliments?

ALEC: No. Must you have compliments?

VERONICA: Not at all. I rather dislike them from the sort of men who are good at it——

ALEC: That's not me.

VERONICA: I know. They're amusing coming from you because they're so obviously against the grain. You're the kind of young doctor who loves being brutally frank—and rather rude. In fact, I heard one of these old women here—I think it was Lady Leadmill—complaining about you. She said she was going to warn your senior partner against you when he came back.

ALEC (*bitterly*): Senior partner! Don't flatter me. Old Plumweather's my boss, who pays me by the month. And the only reason why I'm able to stay in this hotel is that Plumweather stays here, keeps a consulting room here, and they put a bed for me in the little spare room next to it. Otherwise I couldn't afford it.

VERONICA: And what did you say to poor old Lady Leadmill?

ALEC: She came moaning about not being able to sleep, so I told her she was grossly over-eating.

She laughs.

No, it's not funny. It's disgusting. That old woman treats herself as if she was a Strasbourg goose. Tea and bread-and-butter at eight-thirty. At nine-thirty a large breakfast, and at eleven-thirty perhaps coffee and a cake or two. At one-thirty a three or four-course lunch. At four-thirty she tucks into toast and sandwiches and cake. At eight-thirty she's eating a six-course dinner. At ten-thirty——

WILL *has now arrived with the drinks.*

WILL (*putting them down*): Gin and lime. Lager.

ALEC: Thanks. I'll settle with you later, William.

WILL: Certainly, sir.

Goes back to desk and buries himself behind newspaper. The other two drink.

VERONICA: But even if she does over-eat, why should you be rude to the silly old thing? What does it matter?

ALEC: It wouldn't matter if there was just one of her, but there are thousands and thousands of her—like—like stuffed old frogs—crocodiles—dinosaurs. This country's full of 'em. And there they are, doing no good to anybody, not even to themslves—and because they have the money, demanding services all day long from other people. That's what you see everywhere in this country—the living waiting upon the half-dead.

VERONICA: That's a curious thing for a doctor to say. After all, isn't he one of the living waiting on the half-dead?

ALEC: I'm not talking about the sick. I'm talking about these people who have money, appetites, prejudices, and nothing else. And I say the place is full of 'em, and we can't get on with anything worth doing because they demand our services.

VERONICA: Nobody compels you to give your services.

ALEC (*bitterly*): Oh! Now, my dear Veronica——

VERONICA (*coolly*): I am not your dear Veronica, Dr. Rothbury.

ALEC (*as before*): I know you're not, but unfortunately for my peace of mind, I've spent the last week imagining you were.

VERONICA: And you never told me! Now why have you?

ALEC (*through his teeth*): Because I seem to have been silly enough to have—what do you people call it?——

VERONICA: Oh—we people call it all sorts of things.

ALEC: Don't be so damned flippant. Just remember even if this isn't serious for you, it is for me.

VERONICA (*sharply*): Now wait a moment. (*Smiles beguilingly at him.*) Look at me.

ALEC (*groans*): I don't want to look at you. (*But he does.*) I know. You're beautiful. I've admitted it.

VERONICA: Don't be so grudging. Don't you *like* it?

ALEC (*muttering*): I do—worse luck!

VERONICA (*coolly*): All money, y'know. These clothes—and

I assure you I wouldn't look at all the same in any old thing—they cost money. Figure, hands, hair, face—all cost money too. Looking really attractive is an expensive full-time job.

ALEC (*miserably*): All right, you've won. And don't think it hadn't occurred to me. I've been chewing it over for the last week and not enjoying the taste of it.

Telephone rings. WILL *answers it, then calls.*

WILL: It's the Cottage Hospital for you, doctor.

ALEC: Right. (*To* VERONICA.) Just a minute.

Goes to telephone. She watches him, smiling a little.

Yes, Dr. Rothbury here? . . . I see . . . Yes, I'll come round.

Returns to VERONICA, *who rises.*

Sorry, but I'll have to go round to the hospital. Don't suppose I'll be long, if you'd care to wait.

VERONICA: Too late. And I'm catching the nine-fifteen to town in the morning. So I must say good-bye—now.

ALEC (*awkwardly*): Yes—well——

VERONICA (*smiling, holding out her hand*): Good-bye, then. And thank you—for——

ALEC (*bitterly*): Trying to entertain you—eh?

VERONICA (*coolly*): When you're older and have work you enjoy more, you won't be so arrogant and aggressive, you might——

ALEC (*roughly*): I might be like one of these bedside pussycats. (*Stares at her.*) Well, it's good-bye. And I wish now you'd never set foot in this place.

VERONICA (*a little closer, smiling provocatively*): Oh—why?

ALEC (*savagely*): All right, if you will ask for it.

Seizes her roughly and kisses her soundly.

Good-bye.

VERONICA (*coldly*): That was very stupid.

ALEC (*hastily*): I know. I am stupid. Good-bye.

He hurries out.

She watches him go, then takes bag from table rather slowly and thoughtfully, while MOLLY *enters through Main Door.*

MOLLY (*cheerfully*): Good evening, miss. I heard you'd gone.

VERONICA (*pleasantly*): No, I go in the morning. You're not on duty in the mornings this week, are you?

MOLLY: No, miss. Nights, instead. They usually give me the late turn. I don't mind it, and the younger ones hate it.

VERONICA (*who has taken five shillings out of her bag*): Thank you for looking after me so nicely.

MOLLY (*receiving tip*): Oh—thank you, miss. It was a pleasure, I'm sure. Thank you for the shoes. You gave me no trouble at all, and it's a nice change having somebody who's young an nice-lookin' an' with all their health an' strength. I hope you'll come back here.

VERONICA (*smiling*): I'm afraid I shan't, y'know. Cheltingate isn't exactly my style.

MOLLY (*earnestly*): Well, I know it's a bit—sort of—stuffy an'—an'—purse-proud, but for all that it's very nice sometimes. Often when I've the afternoon off I just sit down in the gardens when the band's playin'—and if the sun's shining an' the flowers are out an' the birds hopping round you, it's as pretty as a picture, an' I just sit, half in a kind of dream, if you follow me—an'—well, I wouldn't want anything nicer.

VERONICA: Lovely! Good night, Molly. (*Pauses, hesitating*). Do you know Dr. Rothbury?

MOLLY: I should think I do. Lives here, you see. Doesn't like it, you know. Wants to be off. He's a bit silly, like all young fellows, but he's a grand young man when you get to know him—very kind and clever with it too. On at the Cottage Hospital, they swear by him. (*Confidentially, but not impudently.*) I think you rather fancy him yourself, don't you?

VERONICA: Good Lord—no. In fact, I'm rather annoyed with him.

MOLLY: Yes, but what's that? You can be annoyed with them just because you're interested, can't you?

VERONICA: You *can*, but it doesn't follow that you are. Well, good night, Molly.

MOLLY (*holding door open*): Good night, miss.

VERONICA *goes out.*

MOLLY *comes in and in her tidy way picks the two glasses from the table and goes to counter, behind which* WILL *is still buried in his newspaper. She waits for a moment, regarding him—*

or what she can see of him—with humorous, affectionate impatience.

Well, I wouldn't call you very sociable.

WILL (*lowering the paper*): I'll explain.

MOLLY: I never knew such a chap for explaining. Here, what about these? Shall I take 'em through? (*Indicating the glasses she holds.*)

WILL (*taking them*): No—and many thanks for bringing 'em, Mrs. Cudden—but they'll do here for the time being. (*Puts them down at back, then comes forward.*) I'll explain. Now—the reason I'd got so buried behind that paper wasn't that I was specially interested in it, although I see that Harrin and his gang are making a big play for Heavy Industrials and may catch a cold——,

MOLLY: Now don't start on about shares and markets or I won't listen. Tell me why you were hiding behind your paper.

WILL: Because I'd been busy effacing myself. Being here on duty, of course, as I have to be, but at the same time, as you might say, being *not* here.

MOLLY: Why?

WILL: Because the handsome young lady who has just left us had been having a little private talk—a tête-à-tête—with our friend Dr. Rothbury.

MOLLY: Ah, that's why she asked about him. I'll bet you listened to all they said, you an' your newspaper! Didn't you? You ought to be ashamed. What did they say?

WILL: He's gone on her. He's smitten. He's done for. Told her so.

MOLLY (*delighted*): Isn't that nice? But I've always said about Dr. Rothbury—let the Right Girl come along—and you'll see.

WILL: I can never understand why you women want everybody sorted out in pairs and tied up and put to bed—as if you were running a lot of Noah's Arks. Nature's bad enough without all you women egging her on all the time.

MOLLY (*earnestly*): I know, but look what a lot of happiness it brings too. And I say—take a chance. For I believe in happiness, Mr. Lotless. Plenty of people don't—they pretend to but they don't, not right down inside themselves—they're against it

and against people who are happy. But not me. (*Pause.*) Now what did she say?

WILL: Oh well, it didn't go your way at all, this affair didn't. So don't start fancying anything for them. It's all off. Money again, you see. He hasn't any. She's got too much.

MOLLY: Has she? News to me. An' she only gave me five shillings.

WILL: Maybe. But you ought to know by this time—the richer they are, the less they give you. And why? I'll explain.

MOLLY: You needn't. I'm thinking about them poor silly young things. If I'd known, I'd have said a lot more to her. I think it's a shame. A fine clever young man like that. An' after telling her that he worshipped the ground she walked on!

WILL: He didn't say that. I'll bet nobody's ever said that outside of a sloppy story.

MOLLY: An' that's where you're wrong again, Mr. Clever. Because it was said to me—once—years ago—when I was only a girl—by a friend of my brother's. He said he worshipped the ground I walked on.

WILL: He must have been soft in the head.

MOLLY: He was a bit. I can see him now. He had them very light eyelashes, and he was a barber and his name was Cyril. But for all that, that didn't stop him, afterwards, from marrying a widow fifteen years older than he was—she owned three grocers' shops——

Hotel internal bell rings. WILL *answers it.*

WILL (*at telephone*): Yes, madam . . . I'll tell her . . . (*Puts down.*) Well, there's another who worships the ground you walk on—Number Eighteen—and she wants another hot water bottle. How many does that make?

MOLLY: Four. The poor old thing can't sleep, and she wants an excuse to tell me all over again about her daughter in India.

Moves towards Staff Door.

WILL: If she'd gone with her to India she wouldn't want so many hot water bottles. (*Just watching* MOLLY *as she goes.*) What about those papers your uncle left you that you wanted me to go through? Where are they?

MOLLY (*hastily*): I brought them down. I'll give you 'em now.

She hurries out. He puts on his spectacles, takes out his pipe and prepares to sit not at desk, but at a table outside. MOLLY *comes out with old worn despatch case or something of the kind.*

Here you are. I expect it's all rubbish really—it looked rubbish to me—but you might have a look, Mr. Lotless. An' I'll bring some tea in when I come down.

WILL (*taking case*): That's the idea, Molly. And I'll give this stuff my very best attention.

She goes out Staff Door—while he settles down to look through case, taking papers out and preparing to examine them in a business-like fashion. Before he has done more than look at the first document, he is interrupted by the return of ALEC.

ALEC: Miss Frensham turned in, I suppose, as soon as I'd gone?

WILL: She did, doctor.

ALEC (*more to himself than to* WILL): I might write her a note.

WILL (*coolly*): I shouldn't.

ALEC: Oh—why?

WILL: If they're really interested, they always write to you. If they're not, then why should you bother writing? Besides it's only committing yourself.

ALEC (*staring*): I believe you're right, though I don't know that that's any real excuse for not minding your own business.

WILL (*coolly*): I've wondered about that myself. Never could make up my mind.

ALEC (*still staring*): Well, it's my turn to butt in now. Come here, William my friend. No, closer—that's it. Take off your glasses.

Has WILLIAM *standing before him in in strong light. He now takes from his pocket about half a sheet of newspaper, folded, and puts it across the lower half of* WILLIAM'S *face, in such a way that he can look at the upper half of the face and at a photograph—of a bearded man—on the newspaper, at the same time.*

My God, I believe you are!

WILLIAM *snatches the paper, gives it a quick startled glance.*

Hey!—that's not mine.

Trying to get it back.

WILL (*determined*): I don't care whose it is, you don't get it back. (*Stuffs it into his pocket.*)

ALEC (*amused, not unpleasantly*): Well, well, well!

WILL (*quietly*): I might say, I've been expecting this.

ALEC: Why?

WILL: Because the other day I caught sight of a fellow who used to be a warder at Maidstone when I was there. And he saw me too. *And* recognised me.

ALEC: He thought he did. He told me about it to-night—he's just been taken on as an orderly at the hospital—and when he described you, I thought it might be you, so he gave me that cutting and photograph so I might make sure.

WILL: I see. What's his name?

ALEC: Robbins.

WILL: That's the chap.

ALEC (*lighting a cigarette*): Better tell me the story, William. Or should I call you Mr. Blofield now?

WILL: William's my name anyhow, but I'd just as soon you didn't use it if you're going to be funny about this, doctor. It isn't very funny to me, y'know.

ALEC: Oh—come off it. I'm not getting at you. I don't give a damn about your having been in jail. You've always seemed to me a decent fellow, and that's all I care about. Tell me what happened?

WILL: In 1916, after I'd caught a packet on the Somme, I was discharged from the army and got a job in a shipping office. For the next four years that shipping business was a proper Monte Carlo, and I was good at it—I'm a born gambler, believe me, doctor—and when I jumped out before the crash, I'd got some real money to play with. By 1930 I was worth over a million—at least, on paper—but there was another slump on top of us, and I'd got to take bigger chances. I took one that didn't come off. It was a question of making some securities do more work for me than they were entitled to do, bit of conjuring and juggling really. I'd done it before, of course, but this time I wasn't quick enough. If I'd been just a shade quicker, I'd be in

the House of Lords now instead of night porter at the Golden Fleece, Cheltingate.

ALEC: I wonder if you're missed much.

WILL: Probably not. But I'm not complaining. I'm just telling you. Well, I did five years in Maidstone. When I came out, I didn't grow my moustache and little beard again, and I changed me name to Lotless——

ALEC: Any particular reason?

WILL (*grinning*): Yes, because when I came out I'd a lot less than when I went in.

ALEC: Why didn't you tuck away a nice little fortune?

WILL (*grimly*): Because I married. Yes, as they used to say, Bill Blofield married well. Out of the top drawer. And that's where all that was left of the money went. Even before I'd landed myself at the Old Bailey, she'd been a bit—well—careless, shall we say? Then once I was inside, she ratted on me good and hard. Couldn't get a divorce so changed her name by deed-poll. I thought once, after I came out, of going down to Cannes and just quietly screwing her neck round, but then I thought, "Oh—let her rot with it. It'll never do her any good, that money."

ALEC: But how did you get here?

WILL: When I was nearly broke, I ran into a fellow who used to be a head-waiter at the Ambassador. I'd given him many a fiver. He was managing the Bournemouth Hotel belonging to this syndicate. Put me in as a porter. Then I was moved up here.

ALEC: Doesn't anybody ever spot you?

WILL: No, why should they? When you catch sight of a clean-shaven night porter called Lotless, you're not naturally reminded of a bearded speculator called Blofield, especially as he disappeared years ago. That chap Robins is different, because he often saw me inside. You get to know faces in there all right.

ALEC: Well, prison didn't seem to do you any harm.

WILL: In a way, it did me good. I was nearly a nervous wreck when I went in, couldn't eat, couldn't sleep. When I came out, I could eat anything, sleep anywhere at any time, and was as cool as a cucumber. Bit of a philosopher, you might say. But all the

same, there's a piece of you dies in those places. Five years of it puts fifty years on to you—somewhere inside you. You're not young any more. You've got your face turned towards the graveyard. Funny, but that's how it works.

ALEC: And no more gambling on the market for you, eh?

WILL: I promised myself *Never Again.* Just as I never take a drink—I don't know if you've ever noticed. I said—no more quick strong drinks—and no more conjuring tricks with paper money. But I often manipulate the market a bit just in theory, y'know, to pass the time and keep my mind lively.

Enter MOLLY, *through Staff Door, with tray with tea for two on it and a few sandwiches.*

ALEC: Hello, Molly!

MOLLY: Hello, doctor, would you like a cup of tea with us?

ALEC: No thanks, I'm turning in. Too late already, listening to William's profound discourse. I'll have a sandwich, though. (*Takes one from tray she has put down on table.*)

WILL: I was telling the doctor how I amuse myself pretending I'm on the stock market.

MOLLY (*pouring out tea*): I know. Silly, I call it.

ALEC (*eating*): I'm with you, Molly.

MOLLY: I'm not sure you've got a lot o' sense either. Dr. Rothbury. Not from something I've heard.

ALEC: Oh, what's that?

MOLLY: Never you mind.

ALEC: I don't mind. And it's time I went to bed. Good night. (*He goes upstairs.*)

WILL and MOLLY: Good night, doctor.

They now settle down cosily with their tea, with MOLLY'S *case handy.*

MOLLY: Have you looked through these yet?

WILL: I was just starting. (*Tastes tea.*) Nice cup of tea, Mrs. Cudden.

MOLLY: I'm glad you like it, Mr. Lotless.

WILL (*beginning to turn over documents*): Now then! Two receipts. Licence for a gun. Menu of the Annual Dinner at the *Red Lion*—good blow-out too——

MOLLY: Yes, I've heard my uncle tell of them dinners. Famous, they were.

WILL (*still examining the papers*): What was this uncle of yours?

MOLLY: He was head gamekeeper for Sir George Curtigan at Charlton Chase, and then afterwards he was a sort of bailiff. Sir George thought the world of him. I used to go an' stay when I was a kid. It was lovely. All among thick woods.

WILL (*turning the papers faster*): Nothing here, y'know. Old licences and bills and receipts—just junk, might as well be burnt. Hello! (*Stares.*) No, he sold 'em. Evidently owned a few shares in his time, your uncle.

MOLLY: Well, you see Sir George was a big man in the City——

WILL: Yes, I know he was. I remember him.

MOLLY: *You* do?

WILL: Yes, *I* do, silly as I look.

MOLLY: I didn't mean that, I——

WILL (*cutting in*): Never mind that. What about Sir George? Did he put your uncle on to things now and again?

MOLLY: Yes, that's just what I was going to tell you.

WILL (*grinning*): I know it was.

MOLLY: Well, next time when I've something of my own to tell, just let me tell it and don't take the words out of my mouth. It's most aggravating.

WILL (*still turning them over*): I'll try not to do it again. Bought himself a nice grave in good time, I see. Another blow-out at the *Red Lion*—steak, kidney and oyster pudding this time. County Court summons.

MOLLY: Eh?

WILL: No, not for him. Solicitor's letters—six-and-eight a time—worth nothing now. Long letter from Tasmania——

MOLLY: My Aunt Millie—his sister, you see——

WILL: Photographs now. Wedding groups——

MOLLY (*suddenly alarmed*): Here——

WILL: Why, this is you.

She gives a sharp cry and then is silent.

He looks at it quietly, then passes it over. She stares at it a

moment, then turns her face away. He looks at her curiously. Then we hear that she is crying quietly.

MOLLY (*after a pause, sniffing*): I didn't know that was still there.

WILL: Sorry if I've started anything.

MOLLY: It was just—seeing myself—twenty years ago—so bright an' happy, thinking it was all going to be wonderful—silly young donkey!

WILL (*quietly*): It wasn't wonderful?

MOLLY: No—it was a proper mess.

WILL: Same here.

MOLLY (*staring*): You as well! Why, I always thought you were one o' them born bachelors.

WILL: Perhaps I was. But for all that I went and said "I will". Like you. (*Goes on turning again.*) Certificates now. Birth, marriage, death. You can burn nearly all this stuff, except the family souvenirs, if you want to keep them. Hello! (*Stares, and turns over several share certificates.*) Wait a minute, now, wait a minute!

Holds the certificates nearer the light and examines them carefully. Then, satisfied they are all right, looks from them to the wide-eyed MOLLY.

Great suffocating Moses! (*Then laughs from excitement.*)

MOLLY: Now what on earth's the matter with you? (*She takes up the certificates and looks at them.*) *Leadenhall and Lombard Trust.* A hundred shares. A hundred shares.

WILL (*trying to repress his excitement*): Yes, five hundred shares in a little company called the *Leadenhall and Lombard Trust.*

MOLLY (*with growing excitement*): But—are they worth something—Mr. Lotless?

WILL (*same tone*): Now a feature of these particular shares—I'll bet my boots—is that their transfer was never registered. And they're about ten years old.

MOLLY (*impatiently*): Oh, don't go on talking that silly stuff. Tell me—are they worth anything? What is this company? What does it do?

WILL (*triumphantly*): I'll tell you. For the last few years the Leadenhall and Lombard Trust has been operating as a parent

or holding company. (*He now takes out a pencil and begins making calculations.*)

MOLLY (*impatiently*): I don't know what that means, but could I sell them and how much would I get?

WILL (*still calculating*): This kind of company simply exists to hold shares in other companies.

MOLLY (*angrily*): Stop it! What could I get? Fifty pounds? A hundred pounds?

WILL (*still busy with figures*): Don't be silly!

MOLLY (*furiously*): You pay attention and answer me.

WILL (*not noticing her*): I'm busy.

With a cry of fury she seizes the plate that held the sandwiches and breaks it over his head. He looks at her in a dazed fashion. She is penitent at once.

MOLLY (*miserably*): You see, I told you I'd a terrible temper. Nobody'll believe I have but I have. Oh—I'm sorry, William. Have I hurt you?

WILL (*still dazed*): No. I don't think so.

MOLLY (*putting a hand on his head*): It's only a little bump. No, it's quite a big one.

WILL (*still dazed, thoughtful*): I've always had that one. (*With sudden excitement now.*) Listen, Molly, I want you to let me handle this business for you.

MOLLY: These shares?

WILL (*excitedly*): Yes. It's a ticklish situation. Take 'em to one of these provincial stockbrokers or solicitors, and the clever boys in London would have 'em tied in knots in no time. But this is just my line. Believe me, Molly, I'm a wizard at it. Give me a hold like this over some of those boys, and I'm Buccaneer Bill again. You'll see. Now, Molly, we've been good pals. Will you let me handle it? All for your sake. I mean it.

MOLLY(*who has never seen him like this*): Yes, of course, William. I trust you.

WILL (*jumping up*): That's a good girl. And—oh!—what a bombshell! Where's that London Telephone Directory of ours?

MOLLY (*bewildered*): But you can't start telephoning people now?

WILL (*going to office*): Can't I? Don't you worry. The Cudden, Lotless syndicate is going to conduct its operations in the market at midnight. Trunks? . . . And just watch the feathers flying! (*Chuckles as he hastily searches directory.*) Trunks . . . Cheltingate 175 . . . a personal call for Mr. Percival Vandermore, Mayfair 67325 . . . that' it.

She stares at him as she mechanically puts together the tea things, etc.

MOLLY (*anxiously*): William?

WILL (*still searching*): Yes?

MOLLY (*anxiously*): Are you sure you're all right? I mean, you did get an awful bang on the head, didn't you?

WILL (*chuckling*): Hardly noticed it. I was too busy thinking. Just leave it all to me. (*Into telephone.*) Hello, Mr. Vandermore . . . Yes, I know it's late . . . Well, it is important business . . . You see, I represent a little syndicate that owns five hundred shares in the Leadenhall and Lombard Trust . . . Oh, no, it's not impossible . . . they're here in front of me . . . the transfer wasn't registered, you see . . . yes, it does make a difference, doesn't it? . . . Oh no, you don't . . . too easy . . . you see, Vandermore, this is Bill Blofield . . . yes, that makes a difference too . . . Yes, I'm jumping in with both feet . . . No, I can't come up and you can't ring me. I'll ring you at one o'clock sharp . . . and I'll have a proposition to put to you then . . . All right then, think it over, and then we'll get down to tricks . . . all right, Vandermore, at one o'clock. . . .

He puts down phone and looks triumphantly at MOLLY, *who is standing staring at him, open-mouthed, carrying tray.*

Well, Mrs. Cudden, we've started. The Cudden-Lotless syndicate is in the market.

MOLLY (*bewildered*): You know, Mr. Lotless, you seem—quite different. And who's Bill Blofield?

WILL: Oh—it's just a name I thought he'd know.

MOLLY: But you haven't told me yet if I could sell those shares and what they'd be worth.

WILL: What they're worth now is nothing to what they'll bring in before I've done with them. You wait.

MOLLY (*wistfully*): Yes. But there are some things I'd like to buy, that's all, and I just wondered if I was a bit better off, that's all.

WILL: Bit better-off?

House telephone rings. He answers it.

Twenty-seven? Yes, madam. Yes, I'm sure she can. She'll bring it up in a few minutes. (*Puts it down.*) Twenty-seven can't sleep and wonders if you could make her a cup of Benger's.

MOLLY (*backing into door with tray*): Yes, of course I can. (*Hesitates, then*!) How much do you think?

WILL: Only a cup.

MOLLY: No, silly, I mean me.

WILL: Oh—well, God knows what we can build it up to if I handle Vendermore and his pals properly and really get going. You don't know where it'll end. (*Casually.*) But at the moment, I suppose those shares of yours are worth about two hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

MOLLY *gives a cry as the curtain falls quickly.*

ACT II

Scene same as ACT I.

Late on a Friday evening, two weeks later.

At rise, full lighting on scene. This time Main Door is wide open, showing corridor to rest of hotel behind it. and through this door we hear sound of dance band, but it is obviously at the other end of the hotel. MISS WEEKS *is behind her counter, as before.* GEORGE *is waiting. Two young couples—men in dinner jackets, girls in simple evening clothes—are having drinks, in separate pairs, at tables near wall. Certain properties—a toy balloon, paper hat, false nose, on the tables—suggest a mild spirit of carnival. The two couples converse, but cannot be heard.*

GEORGE (*crossing over to* MISS WEEKS): I don't know how they're doing along there to-night, but not many of 'em's coming in here.

MISS WEEKS: They mostly go and sit out in the far lounge.

GEORGE (*bitterly*): Yes, what there is of 'em. Birthday carnival! Whose birthday?

MISS WEEKS: Oh—that's just an excuse.

GEORGE (*bitterly*): An excuse for what?

MISS WEEKS (*severely*): To try and give people an enjoyable evening and get a little extra custom.

GEORGE (*same as before*): Carnival dance! Ten bobs' worth of paper 'ats an' false noses among fifty people!

MISS WEEKS: Better than nothing. What do you want?

GEORGE: Me? I'll tell you what I want. I want to put my feet up, read an Edgar Wallace, and get down three or four bottles o' Guinness.

MISS WEEKS (*not impressed*): Well, it's a good thing we're not all alike, isn't it?

GEORGE: No, it isn't. It's a bad thing. Save a lot of bother if we were all alike. Trouble about you girls is—you don't think for yourselves.

As he is turning away from counter, MONDOVI *enters through Staff Door. He is in evening dress, and very important.*

MONDOVI: Oh!—Jorj-a—you are notta busy a moment, eh?

GEORGE: No, sir.

MONDOVI: Then take a tray-a. In there.

GEORGE *goes through Staff Door.*

Not-a finish yet. (*Referring to dancing, which can still be heard—looks at watch.*) How many in there to-night?

MISS WEEKS: Well, I'm not quite sure, Mr. Mondovi, because nearly all the outside lot come in the other way, but I think, including our own guests, about fifty.

MONDOVI: Fifty—no good! Not a complete-a wash-*out*, but no good.

MISS WEEKS: Well, you see, Mr. Mondovi, the sort of people who come to Cheltingate aren't very lively—are they?

MONDOVI (*bitterly*): I think all they want is to eat four-a big bad meals a day, to sleep, to drink-a the smelly waters.

MISS WEEKS *looks shocked.* GEORGE *enters carrying tray with bottles, glasses, etc.*

GEORGE: Here we are, sir.

MONDOVI: To the small-a private room, through the Card-a Room.

GEORGE *crosses towards Card Room.* MONDOVI *turns to* MISS WEEKS.

If one of the girls comes with-a tray tell 'er small-a private room through Card-a Room. I give my little supper in there. (*Follows* GEORGE *across.*)

They go out. Telephone rings.

MISS WEEKS (*at telephone*): Golden Fleece . . . Mr. Lotless? . . . No, he's not here yet. . . . Well, you'll have to ring later.

As she puts down telephone ELSIE *enters carrying large tray with napkins covering cold food, plates, etc.*

Through the Card Room, Mr. Mondovi said.

ELSIE (*grumbling*): I call this being put on. Came down, 'cos I'd finished, an' they said, "'Ere, take this in." They don't ask the waiters to 'elp me with my beds, do they?

As she goes across, GEORGE *comes out and holds door for her, grinning.*

GEORGE (*sardonically*): It does me good to see yer sweet smiling face.

One of the men of the two young couples beckons him across, and in dumb show he receives payment for the drink and a tip. This young couple go out through Main Door. ELSIE *comes out Card Room and crosses to* MISS WEEKS.

ELSIE (*speaking near Staff Door*): Whats' the idea in there?

MISS WEEKS (*in rather superior tone*): Mr. Mondovi is giving supper to a few of our guests.

ELSIE: What for? Don't they get enough to eat already?

MISS WEEKS: Just a stunt. Part of the Birthday Carnival idea. It isn't anybody's birthday, of course.

ELSIE: Oh yes, it is. It's Molly's. She told me this morning. They're doing all this (*Indicating general arrangements*) for her, only they don't know it.

Now she sees SIR RUFUS *and* TAGG *who enter slowly together through Main Door, deep in talk.* SIR RUFUS *is wearing an absurd false nose and* TAGG *a silly little hat. They have obviously forgotten about them.* ELSIE *giggles.*

Oh, crumbs! Look what's blown in!

Exit Staff Door, giggling.

SIR RUFUS (*as they come forward together*): You mean to say—they never intended to pay a dividend?

TAGG (*very solemnly*): 'Course they didn't. That was the idea from the start. And then, what 'appened?

SIR RUFUS: Well, obviously the stock went down——

TAGG: Now, who's telling this? They says: "Well, gentlemen, we've 'ad an offer from the Pranto Company to take over the property and machinery, an' it's the best we can do——"

SIR RUFUS: Yes—neat, very neat! And they're all in the Pranto concern, eh?

TAGG: They were all in the syndicate that 'as a controlling interest in the Pranto. An' they got the whole property and machinery for twenty-five thousand. I tell yer, they were clever, that lot.

SIR RUFUS: Obviously. It reminds me of a tricky little bit of business as I came across about two years ago——

TAGG: And that isn't all they did neither.

Is interrupted by MONDOVI *coming out of Card Room, all smiles and little bows.*

MONDOVI: This-a way, if you please. Lady Garnett, Mrs. Tagg, they are coming, of course?

TAGG: They're following on. And I don't mind tellin' yer I'm feeling fairly peckish.

They go into Card Room, MONDOVI *remaining at door. Second couple go out Street Door.* GEORGE *clears away their glasses.*

LADY GARNETT, *in evening dress and carrying some carnival toy, enters Main Door with* DR. PLUMWEATHER, *an elderly doctor with a very smooth manner, in a dinner jacket. They are talking very confidentially and halt in the centre to finish what they have to say before joining* MONDOVI.

DOCTOR PLUMWEATHER: I can't believe it.

LADY GARNETT: At first I didn't want to say anything, but then I felt you ought to know, Dr. Plumweather.

DR. PLUMWEATHER (*solemn whisper*): And I assure you, Lady Garnett, I'm very much indebted to you. Of course

I *had* other—er—criticisms, as you can well imagine.

LADY GARNETT: Yes, I thought you would have.

DR. PLUMWEATHER (*pompously*): The fact is, Dr. Rothbury is totally unsuited to this class of work. I don't say he's lacking in general ability. He's not. I don't say he's not a hard worker. He is. But—well—he's——

LADY GARNETT (*prompting him*): Crude.

DR. PLUMWEATHER (*archly*): I won't say it, I won't say it——

LADY GARNETT (*also archly*): Etiquette?

DR. PLUMWEATHER: Etiquette, my dear lady. But—(*Solemnly, confidential now*)—between ourselves, that young man won't be here much longer. I've made up my mind.

LADY GARNETT: You're very wise. Not the Cheltingate type of doctor at all, and never will be. Ah!—Now are we all here?

She has moved over towards MONDOVI, *the doctor following. They remain there at door.* LADY LEADMILL, *carrying a sausage-shaped balloon, enters, followed by* MRS. TAGG *and* MISS SELL, *who are wearing very incongruous paper hats. All are in evening dress.*

GEORGE *closes Main Door after this entrance.*

MRS. TAGG (*nervously ending long account*): So now I rest them whenever I can.

LADY LEADMILL (*who clearly thinks nothing of* MRS. TAGG, *stopping*): Rest what?

MRS. TAGG (*whispering*): My feet.

LADY LEADMILL (*aloud, surprised*): Your *feet*!

MISS SELL (*timidly, trying to help*): Mrs. Tagg was telling us the trouble she's had with—her feet.

LADY LEADMILL (*awfully*): Indeed! Enquire if there are any letters.

MRS. TAGG (*flustered*): Oh—yes—certainly.

Turns and then sees that it is MISS SELL *who is obeying the order, going to counter.*

Oh—I see, yes—I'm sorry.

MISS SELL (*returning*): No, Lady Leadmill, no letters.

LADY LEADMILL (*sternly*): The posts here are most peculiar.

MRS. TAGG: Yes, I had a——

LADY LEADMILL: *Most* peculiar. Miss Sell, I think you've worn that paper hat quite long enough now.

MISS SELL (*snatching it off*): Oh—yes, I'd forgotten.

MRS. TAGG *takes hers off too, then looks at it admiringly and wistfully.*

LADY LEADMILL: You had better go upstairs now, Miss Sell as you were not invited to Mondovi's little supper party——

MISS SELL: Yes, Lady Leadmill.

LADY LEADMILL: But don't go to bed as I may want you.

MISS SELL: Yes, Lady Leadmill. Good night, Mrs. Tagg.

Goes upstairs.

MRS. TAGG: Good night, Miss Sell. (*Looking wistfully at hats*) I think it's so pretty.

LADY LEADMILL (*sternly*): For a young girl, no doubt.

MRS. TAGG (*bravely*): Well, I'm not a young girl. (*Puts the hat on again*): But I was once.

LADY LEADMILL (*moving forward*): Indeed!

MRS. TAGG (*following on*): Yes, and sometimes even now I still feel a young girl.

She takes a pin and bursts the sausage balloon that LADY LEADMILL *is carrying.* LADY LEADMILL *turns and glares suspiciously at her, while she looks innocent.*

LADY GARNETT *and* DR. PLUMWEATHER *have now gone in.* LADY LEADMILL, MRS. TAGG *follow, the latter closing Card Room door behind her.*

GEORGE (*going over to* MISS WEEKS, *who is now clearing up*): See that Mrs. Tagg burst old Leadface's balloon?

MISS WEEKS (*looking up*): She didn't!

GEORGE: She did. Quite right too! She ought to 'ave 'ad her balloon busted long since.

Enter through Street Door, PERKINS *of the* Gazette, *about* 40, *moustache, untidy rain-coat or mac, bowler hat towards back of his head, and puffs great volume of smoke all the time from his pipe. Manner half gauche, half impudent.* GEORGE *sees him.*

Yes, sir?

PERKINS: No, sir. Perkins of the *Gazette.* I want to have a word with this young lady.

GEORGE (*bitterly*): Good night, all.

Goes out Staff Door.

PERKINS (*announcing himself to her*): Perkins of the *Gazette.*

MISS WEEKS: What, again?

PERKINS: Well, I haven't got anywhere yet. I tried the *Grand* and the *Queen's*. Nobody there knew what I was talking about.

MISS WEEKS: Well, I told you I didn't know what you were talking about, didn't I?

PERKINS: You did. But now—I've an idea.

Pauses, but she shows no interest.

Wouldn't you like to hear what my idea is?

MISS WEEKS (*still clearing up*): No, not particularly.

PERKINS: Thanks very much. Well, my idea is—I may have been enquiring too early.

MISS WEEKS: You don't call this too early, do you? We think it's late, up here.

PERKINS: You haven't got my point. If it's all supposed to be happening late at night, none of you people on day duty might know about it, anyhow.

Enter WILL, *through Staff Door.*

WILL: Good evening, Miss Weeks.

MISS WEEKS: Good evening, William.

PERKINS (*heartily*): Good evening, William.

WILL (*administering gentle snub*): Good evening, sir.

MISS WEEKS (*finished now*): This is our Night Porter, so you'd better try him now.

WILL: What's this about?

MISS WEEKS: Don't ask me. I've given it up. Good night.

Goes, Staff Door.

WILL (*comes forward*): Well now, what can I do for you?

PERKINS: My name's Perkins and I represent the *Gazette.*

WILL: From London?

PERKINS: The London *Daily Gazette*, of course, but I'm not from London. I'm at the Manchester office. Cheltingate comes in our area, you see.

WILL: Yes, I see. Why don't you sit down?

PERKINS: Good idea! Well, our London office had got

hold—— (*Sits L. of table.*) Here, haven't I seen you before somewhere?

WILL (*standing*): If you've stayed at this hotel and come in late, you probably have.

PERKINS: No, never stayed here. Haven't I seen you somewhere else?

WILL: Not to my knowledge, Mr. Perkins.

PERKINS: No?

WILL: No.

They stand looking at each other, then PERKINS *crosses back and sits.*

PERKINS: Well, it doesn't matter. This is the point. (*confidentially.*) Our London office has got hold of a queer story—or the beginnings of a queer story, for that's about all it is yet—and the idea is that there's a big financial syndicate, which is crashing the market in a very grand style, operating from an hotel here in Cheltingate. (*He takes cigarette out of packet out of his pocket, then offers one to* WILL.)

WILL: Nothing surprising in that. Lot of rich men stay here, y'know.

PERKINS: Cigarette?

WILL: Oh, thank you, sir.

He fumbles in his pocket for matches.

You have to be pretty well-off before you need these waters and baths. Hot sulphur water comes in with the sur-tax.

PERKINS: Yes, but that's not all. According to our assistant City Editor, who's a bright lad and keeps his ears open, these chaps here, who are very hot stuff, do all their business late at night.

WILL: What business? Stocks and shares?

PERKINS: Yes, big gambling on the Exchange.

WILL: How can they do that late at night? The Exchange isn't open.

PERKINS: Oh—they've got people doing their buying and selling for 'em in London during the day, naturally, but *they* do *their* work—send their instructions and all that—late at night. It was a chap he knows at a big broker's who let it slip

to him. So London asked me to come and get the story.

WILL: Well, all I can say is, that if anybody here was spending half the night telephoning to London—about stocks and shares or anything else—I'd be the first to know about it, wouldn't I?

PERKINS: Stands to reason. Yes.

WILL: Yes.

PERKINS: Yes.

WILL: And I can assure you—nobody comes an' asks me to get these London numbers.

PERKINS: They don't, eh?

WILL: No, they don't.

Telephone rings sharply.

Excuse me. (*Goes—at telephone.*) Golden Fleece . . . Oh yes . . . yes, it is, but ring me in about an hour . . . I know, but ring me in an hour's time . . . all right. (*Puts it down, and comes back. Casually.*) Friend o' mine—wants a chat.

PERKINS: Late, isn't he?

WILL: He's another night bird, like myself.

PERKINS: You seem to me a funny sort of chap to be a night porter.

WILL: I'll explain about night porters. Sit down, won't you. There are three types.

PERKINS: It's funny how many things go in threes. I remember I once——

WILL (*firmly*): Yes, three types of night porters. First, the fellows, usually young, who take it on because they're hoping it'll lead to a day job and promotion to head porter. Second, the fellows on the other slope of the hill, who have to take night duty because they're no longer wanted during the day, so it's either that or nothing, see? Then—the third type, who *like* being night porters, just because they're odd fish, misfits, eccentrics, philosophers.

PERKINS: And you're a number three?

WILL: I'm a number three.

PERKINS: I believe you're right.

WILL: I know I'm right.

PERKINS: Three types. I'll remember that.

WILL: You might find it useful. But now—this yarn of yours, about the big financial syndicate working late at night here, well—bit thick, isn't it?

PERKINS: I don't know. Anything's possible these days. Now I've tried this place and the *Grand* and the *Queen's*——

WILL: Well, there's still the *Royal* and the *Bristol*, and the *Spa Hydro*, though I can't see any big financial chaps staying at the *Spa Hydro*.

PERKINS: Why?

WILL: It's a temperance hotel.

PERKINS: Well, I'll try the *Royal* and the *Bristol*.

MOLLY *enters, Staff Door, wearing long outdoor coat over her uniform. She does not come forward but looks at and listens to* PERKINS, *who is now going.*

WILL: No harm in doing that.

PERKINS: And if there's a story, I'll get it.

WILL: Got a nose for it, eh?

PERKINS (*confidentially*): I tell you—with me, it's a kind of—oh—sixth sense. I can smell out a good story where most fellows wouldn't know there was anything happening. I couldn't tell you how I do it.

WILL: A gift, eh?

PERKINS: Absolutely. You'll see. Watch the *Gazette*. I could have sworn I'd seen you somewhere before.

WILL: No.

PERKINS: Oh, well, good night. (*Goes out street.*)

MOLLY: Good evening, Mr. Lotless.

WILL: Good evening, Mrs. Cudden.

MOLLY: What's the matter with that chap?

WILL (*drily*): He's a newspaper man busy taking his sixth sense round Cheltingate.

MOLLY (*rather alarmed*): Here—it's nothing to do with this—er—business of ours, is it?

WILL (*blandly*): D'you know, I think it might be.

MOLLY (*alarmed*): Well, but——

WILL (*stopping her*): You just leave his sixth sense to me. I can handle him all right. He'll never get within a mile of our story.

MOLLY (*gazing at him earnestly*): You know, William, I call you a proper mixture. One minute you seem as simple as a baby, and next minute as artful as a box of monkeys.

WILL: Well, what's wrong with that?

MOLLY: Oh!—Nothing. Makes it interesting. (*Taking her coat off.*) I gave myself a treat to-night—an' I'll bet you don't know why.

WILL: I do. You told me a week ago and I haven't forgotten. Many happy returns!

MOLLY (*pleased*): Well now, I never thought you'd remember.

WILL: Never forget anything with a friend in it. As a matter of fact, I've—er—got something——

MOLLY (*excitedly*): What! A present—for me!

WILL: Too early yet. Somebody might come in.

MOLLY: Yes, but you might tell me what it is.

WILL: Oh—no. Spoil it. Just wait until it's quieter.

MOLLY: Well, it couldn't be much quieter than it is now, but I suppose it is a bit too early.

He has opened the door now. Goes through and we see the lighting outside, which is first at full, go down to less than half, as if he had switched off several lights. MOLLY *can put her coat away, behind Staff Door, now. She is back when he returns.*

WILL: Where did you go? To the pictures?

MOLLY (*with enthusiasm*): Yes. A lovely film. With Robert Drake in it. Don't you like Robert Drake?

WILL: Never seen him.

MOLLY: Haven't you? Oh—he's a wonderful man. Tall an' very good-looking, but that's not what gets you. He's got a little smile—sort of tender—and—and—wistful—and his eyes crinkle up. If he turned that smile on to me, I wouldn't know what to do. And this girl in the film was so awful to him—until right at the end, of course—an' she was so nasty when he kept giving her this special little smile, I could have smacked her silly little face.

WILL (*settling down*): You were jealous?

MOLLY (*indignantly*): I wasn't jealous. To begin with, I haven't got a jealous nature. And then, who's going to be jealous about

somebody in a film? I may be a bit soft, but I'm not *that* soft. But, you see, in this picture, he's a poor young man who has nothing left but an old motor-car and a caravan——

Breaks off because ALEC ROTHBURY *now enters from street He is in ordinary clothes—not smartly dressed but rather shabby—and looks rather tired and depressed.*

ALEC: I don't call him a poor young man if he had a car and a caravan.

WILL: He's poor for the films. They've a very high standard of living on the films.

ALEC: Go on about your film, Molly. Sorry I interrupted. (*Lights a cigarette.*)

MOLLY: Well then, Robert Drake's this poor young man but really it turns out in the end he isn't poor.

ALEC (*sardonically*): I'll bet he isn't.

MOLLY: But this girl he's in love with—*he* thinks, and you think too till you tumble to it, she's very rich—but really she isn't, she's just pretending. So in the end it's all right, and they get married and sail away on his beautiful yacht. Lovely!

ALEC (*shaking his head*): No. Eh, William?

WILL (*also shaking his head*): Certainly not.

MOLLY: Now what's wrong with it?

ALEC: To begin with, it doesn't sound to me in the least like real life.

MOLLY: Who said it was like real life? I don't pay a shilling to sit in the dark and look at real life. I can see real life outside the picture theatre all for nothing. I go inside to get away from real life, just for a nice change.

WILL: That's a woman for you. They can cod themselves, but they *know* when they're codding themselves. We don't, and that's our trouble.

ALEC: It's not *my* trouble. Mine is—I can see all too clearly.

MOLLY: Not you! I'll bet you can't see anything clearly, unless it's other people's measles or chicken-pox.

Hotel telephone rings. She answers it.

Yes, of course . . . coming now. (*Puts down telephone.*)

WILL: Eighteen?

MOLLY: Eighteen. Shan't be long.

Goes out Staff Door.

ALEC (*coolly*): I believe you two are up to something.

WILL: Put that right out of your head, doctor. We're not that sort at all.

ALEC: No, I didn't mean anything of that kind. But you're up to *something*. For the last fortnight or so, you've looked as thick as thieves, and there's something about you, William, a kind of cat-full-of-cream look that suggests to me you're up to something. (*As* WILL *is about to speak, stopping him.*) I'm not asking what it is.

WILL (*drily*): I wasn't going to tell you.

ALEC: But what I should like is a drink and a sandwich. I've had a very long and dreary day to-day, with an extra two hours I didn't expect at the hospital to-night.

WILL: You're looking a bit done in, doctor. And you can have the drink and sandwich now, if you like, but you'd do better if you waited a little longer.

ALEC: I don't see that.

WILL: I'll explain. It's Molly's birthday to-day and—er—well, a fellow I know in London has sent up a wonderful hamper for her—everything of the best—champagne, game pie——

ALEC (*surprised*): For Molly?

WILL (*solemnly*): For our Molly Cudden. And why not? Can you tell me anybody here who better deserves the best for her birthday than that woman?

ALEC: Yes, me. Apart from me, nobody. But where do *I* come in?

WILL: It's a little party, and you're invited. I know she won't mind.

ALEC: And I accept your invitation with many thanks. I'm tired, but I'm not sleepy.

WILL (*challengingly*): You're depressed.

ALEC: Yes. I'm fed up.

WILL: This place?

ALEC: Partly. Though I shan't be here much longer.

WILL: Is the sack coming?

ALEC: It is.

WILL: Is that all?

ALEC: No. But it's plenty, isn't it?

WILL: Yes, but it isn't all.

ALEC: It's all you'll hear.

WILL (*quietly, innocently*): Let's see, what was the name of that girl?

ALEC (*promptly*): Veronica Frensham. Here—what girl?

Telephone rings. WILL *goes to answer it.*

WILL (*at telephone, in sharp masterful style*): Who? . . . Yes, speaking . . . Yes, yes, I know. Get in touch with Vandermore. He's ringing me later on . . . Yes, all those are being transferred . . . Oh, won't I? . . . Don't you believe it. I'll squeeze him so hard I'll have him begging for mercy by this time to-morrow night . . . All right. Tell Vandermore. (*Puts down telephone.*)

ALEC (*sardonically*): Queer business this hotel seems to do over the telephone at night!

WILL: I dare say.

ALEC: And who is Mr. Vandermore?

WILL: He's a clever gentleman in London who knows now that he isn't quite as clever as he thought he was a couple of weeks ago.

ALEC: William, you're not a downright crook, by any chance, are you?

WILL (*smiling*): In one sense I am, and then in another sense, I'm not. Excuse me, it's time we got the party going. (*Goes towards Staff Door.*) You might give me a hand, doctor.

Goes out.

ALEC (*calling*): All right, coming!

Goes towards Staff Door, but when he arrives there WILL *comes out carrying hamper and large cardboard box.* ALEC *takes the box, which is on top. They come forward.*

I hope all this is honestly come by.

WILL: In one sense it is, and then in another sense, it isn't.

Puts down hamper near table and begins unpacking it. Two or three bottles of champagne, game pie, pâte, etc., all very sumptuous.

ALEC (*as it comes out*): My hat, somebody's spent some money on this lot.

WILL: Everything of the best. Though I don't suppose this sort of tack does you any good, does it?

ALEC (*grinning*): In one sense it does, and then in another sense, it doesn't. (*Helps to put things out.*) Taken in very rare doses, it's bad for the body but good for the soul. Taken in regular doses, it's bad for both body and soul.

Enter MOLLY *through main door. She stops in surprise when she sees the table.*

MOLLY: Good gracious me! Where's all this come from?

WILL: From a friend of mine in London—as a little birthday tribute.

MOLLY: For me?

ALEC: And for me. *You've* invited me.

MOLLY: I'm glad to hear it. With all that lot to shift.

WILL: I'll get some glasses.

MOLLY: No, let me.

WILL (*going*): You stay there, and take it easy. It's your treat. *Goes.*

MOLLY (*handling the things*): Look! It's a sort of Christmas de luxe. I never saw such a spread. And all expensive stuff too.

ALEC (*deliberately echoing* WILL): Everything of the best. But who's treated you to all this?

MOLLY: Don't ask me. You heard what William said. One of his friends in London.

ALEC: What friends?

MOLLY: Probably one of these people he's been doing business with.

ALEC: What business?

MOLLY: Here, aren't you nosey?

ALEC: Now, come on, Molly, I knew there was something on between you two. What is it?

MOLLY: I couldn't really tell you even if I wanted to. And I promised William I wouldn't.

ALEC: Has he been making some money for you?

MOLLY (*dodging this*): Do I look as if anybody's been making money for me?

ALEC: Yes, you do, with this stuff all round you.

Begins taking paper off champagne bottle.

MOLLY: We ought to have taken this round to the back. We'll look silly, won't we, if somebody comes in here.

ALEC: Nobody'll come in now. You're all right. Besides, William has to be on duty in here.

MOLLY: I hadn't thought of that. What with its being my birthday, and then Robert Drake in that film, and then all this stuff I didn't expect, I'm a bit light-headed to-night.

Enter WILL, *Staff Door, with glasses, cutlery.*

(*Gaily.*) The doctor doesn't deserve to be in on this, he's being so nosey about everything.

WILL: We can't have that. Dr. Rothbury, you may remember those fairy tales you read as a kid where you could enjoy everything you fancied so long as you didn't start asking questions? Well, this is one of them fairy tales.

ALEC (*holding up glass*): And now a toast! Many happy returns and every good wish—to our Molly.

WILL (*same*): To our Molly Cudden—the most obliging, best-tempered, sweetest-natured woman in the whole hotel business.

They drink.

MOLLY (*embarrassed*): Now, stop that, you two, or you'll be making me go all soft—an' then I'll start crying—an' a fat lot o' supper I'll enjoy. Who'll have some of this? It looks very rich but it can't hurt us much, just for once.

Passes them things to eat.

They settle down to eat and drink, cosily.

WILL: This is living on twenty thousand a year for twenty minutes.

MOLLY (*after drinking*): Sort of gets right up your nose, doesn't it, this champagne. It's not as sweet as that my sister had after her *wedding.*

ALEC (*refills glasses. With mock gravity*): Good champagne isn't supposed to be sweet.

MOLLY: Why?

ALEC: Hanged if I know!

WILL (*solemnly*): It's the custom in England to prefer dry champagne, and in England we live not by reason, not even by instinct, but by custom.

ALEC: And that's how the people are kept quiet. Because, custom——

MOLLY: Is this going to be politics?

ALEC: Yes.

MOLLY: Well, stop it, then. No politics to-night, thank you.

ALEC: Why not?

MOLLY (*good humouredly but firmly*): Because this is supposed to be my party, and I don't like politics, and if you two get started on 'em, I'll soon be sitting here like a stuffed dummy.

WILL (*passing food*): Have some more stuffing.

MOLLY: Thank you. Now let's just be cosy, for once. (*After pause.*) Doctor, I wonder what's become of that very good-looking girl you were so gone on. You're still gone on her, aren't you?

ALEC: Not really.

MOLLY: Go on. Written all over you. I wonder what she's doing to-night.

ALEC: She'll be pretending to be amused and trying not to yawn, in some expensive and ridiculous place.

MOLLY (*to* WILL): It's a funny thing about young men—an' I don't care who they are, doctors or anything else you like—but when they're feeling uneasy and a bit silly inside, they get all pompous.

WILL: True, true. (*To* ALEC.) She's right, y'know.

ALEC: Yes, yes, I'll admit it.

WILL (*to* MOLLY): But don't be too hard on young men.

MOLLY: Me! Why, I love 'em nearly all. Bless 'em.

WILL: You don't know what it's like being a clever young fellow, like our friend here. But I do, because I was one once myself. And I say that except for those occasional times when you fancy you've got the world in your pocket, to be a clever young man is just hell.

ALEC: True, true. (*To* MOLLY.) He's right, y'know.

MOLLY: And I don't believe it. Just try being a woman for

half a day, an' then you'd know something. That's why we like being with men. We aren't reminded of all our miseries. I'm going to drink to women—poor things!

ALEC (*who has been opening another bottle*): Not yet. Here you are. (*Fills glasses.*)

WILL (*raising glass*): To women—excluding nagging wives, interfering spinsters, bullying rich old dowagers, cheating adventuresses, pert little minxes, and——

ALEC (*pointedly*): All girls, no matter how devilishly attractive, who put money first—and——

MOLLY: And all female hotel guests who spill powder all over their rooms and leave their stockings and knickers to soak in the washhand basins——

They all drink off. (MOLLY: *Hic!*)

Here, if I don't eat more an' drink less, I'll be tiddly. (*Suddenly notices cardboard box.*) What's in that box?

WILL (*noticing it*): I'd clean forgotten that. (*Goes to it, and begins opening it.*) It's for you.

MOLLY (*excitedly*): For me!

WILL: Birthday present.

ALEC (*drily*): Friend in London?

WILL: Friend in London. Now, just hold your breath—oh!—and close your eyes.

As she stands with closed eyes, he goes over and puts a magnificent fur coat into her outstretched arms. She feels the thick soft fur, then opens her eyes wide in astonishment, stares at it as she holds it out to see it better.

MOLLY (*gasping*): Christmas! Oooo—look!

ALEC: We are looking. We're overwhelmed.

WILL (*complacently*): You've got something worth having there, Molly.

MOLLY (*all excitement now*): But—I mean—this can't be for me. Look at it!

WILL: Certainly it's for you. Try it on.

MOLLY: But—I've never even dreamt of ever having a coat like this. It's a real one, y'know—I mean to say—not one of these imitations you see about—absolutely real.

WILL: You can bet your life it is.

MOLLY: Yes, but—I mean—*me* in this. Why—I'd never——

ALEC: Go on. Put it on.

She does, almost like a child. Then is delighted with herself, being luxurious in it, rubbing her cheek against the collar, etc.

MOLLY (*at end of this*): How do I look in it? Silly, I expect, eh?

WILL: Silly nothing! You look grand, doesn't she?

ALEC: Straight from Bond Street.

MOLLY: You're just making game of me——

WILL: We're not. You couldn't look better.

ALEC: We can hardly believe you know us now.

MOLLY (*doing creditable imitation of fashionable woman, coming to them*): Oh—but—of course! Dr. Rothbury, I believe, isn't it? I think we met the other morning in the Pump Room, didn't we? And Mr. Lotless too! How d'you do? Such a delightful place you have heah, isn't it?

WILL (*entering into this*): Oh—frightfully jolly—Lady Bilgewater.

MOLLY (*as before*): May I join you?

WILL: Delighted, dear lady, absolutely delighted!

MOLLY (*tapping desk and imitating* LADY LEADMILL): Are there any letters for me?

WILL (*imitating* MONDOVI): Miss-a Weeks, make-a quite sure there are no letters for Lady Bilgewater——

ALEC: Not to-night, Lady Bilgewater.

MOLLY (*as* LADY LEADMILL): The posts here are most peculiar, *most* peculiar.

They all laugh uproariously.

MOLLY (*very much herself again*): Well, I'm not taking it off, though it'll be just like me to go an' mess it up now. (*She stops and looks earnestly at* WILL, *and speaks with impressive seriousness.*) Now, tell me, honestly, is it all right me taking this coat?

WILL (*gravely*): If it hadn't been all right, do you think I'd have let you have it?

MOLLY: But—you didn't buy it, did you?

WILL: Me! All the money I have in the world couldn't buy the collar, let alone the coat.

MOLLY: I don't see that. Didn't I say, the other night, that you ought to take——

WILL (*hastily cutting in*): Never mind what you said. Careful now!

MOLLY (*realising* ALEC'S *presence*): Oh—yes. Sorry! Though I don't see why——

WILL (*cutting in again*): Well, I do. (*To* ALEC.) Excuse me, won't you?

ALEC: Yes, but you might as well tell me.

WILL: Not just now. What we want is another toast.

ALEC (*showing slight signs of tightness*): I'll give you one. To blazes with old Plumweather!

MOLLY: No, that's not very nice. Besides, I'm sure Dr. Plumweather's done nobody any harm.

ALEC: There, you're wrong. He may look a harmless old pussycat, but really he's a pest and a menace. Instead of being a man of science, which he pretends to be, he's something between an old charlatan and a rich old woman's butler. He doesn't speak or even think the truth. He doesn't care about anything but fat fees and fat dinners. He's an example of what's wrong with this pussy-footed, rich old man's country. And if you won't drink him to blazes, I will. (*Raises his glass.*) To blazes with old Plumweather, and may he soon find himself trying to remove a perforating appendix at three in the morning in a slum tenement. (*Drinks.*)

MOLLY (*also showing slight signs*): If I didn't think you were very unhappy about that Miss Frensham, I wouldn't allow you to talk like that, just when we're trying to be cheerful and cosy.

ALEC: I have a terrible contempt for your Miss Frensham——

MOLLY: Not you!

ALEC: I repeat, a terrible contempt. Charming? No doubt. Beautiful? Perhaps. But what is she really? I'll tell you. Something out of a glass case, to be bought with money. Now there's something to drink—to the end of the reign of money. Eh, William?

WILL (*fishing in hamper*): I've got something for that toast. (*Brings it out, and pulls cork out as he speaks.*) Some

old liqueur brandy. Just what we need now.

MOLLY: Not for me, thank you. And you two want to be careful.

ALEC: Certainly not. We've been careful too long. That's our trouble.

MOLLY (*as if suddenly remembering*): Here—William Lotless—didn't you tell me—and more than once—that you didn't drink any more?

WILL: I did. But to-night I do drink. And I give you our young medical friend's toast—to the end of the reign of money——

MOLLY: I like that from you, when you're always *talking* and *thinking* about money!

WILL (*to* ALEC): Isn't that like a woman! If you saved one from drowning, she'd remind you that you promised to keep your clothes dry. To the end of the reign of money.

ALEC: To the end of the reign of money.

MOLLY: To the reign of the end of money.

WILL: Now do you want me to explain about money?

MOLLY: } (*promptly*) No.
ALEC: } Yes.

WILL (*as if beginning lecture*): Money! Money! It's a servant that's become a master.

ALEC: True, but not very original.

WILL: Money—was intended to be simply a sign, a token, a convenience—something like a—well, a railway ticket. That's all. But what's happened to it? Got all out of hand. Become a source of power. The way we allow people to handle money as power, it's just as if we let 'em handle battleships and bombing squadrons for their own private benefit.

ALEC: You're right there, William. (*To* MOLLY.) He's right there.

MOLLY: Oh—he's often right. (*To* WILL.) Is that all?

WILL (*who has found a large cigar in the hamper and is now ready to light it*): All? Of course it isn't all. Now the first thing you have to do is to take most of the power away from money. In fact, private money should be just pocket money. That's the

only kind of money I believe in—pocket money. Everybody should have pocket money and nobody should have any other kind.

MOLLY: What's the difference?

WILL: Pocket money is just short-range, personal money, to be spent on—whatever you fancy. You can't use it to make me do something for you in a year's time, as if you had a pistol at my head. You can't send it out to increase itself, while you sit back and watch it grow——

MOLLY: But you said the other night that's just what we were doing—I mean, in this funny business with all these shares—and now you say——

WILL: But I'm telling you now how things ought to be, not how they are. We're only doing what everybody tries to do. We're not doing anything wrong.

MOLLY: It must be wrong if you think it isn't right. (*As he tries to cut in.*) No, no, no—now let me get a word in.

ALEC: Quite right. It's your birthday party—not his.

MOLLY: Now I say it's all very well, all this clever talk about how things ought to be, but if we think something's wrong, then we oughtn't to do it ourselves. Somebody's got to make a start, haven't they?

WILL: No. It's a question of a system not just of people themselves.

MOLLY: Everything depends really just on how people treat each other. If people aren't willing, and kind, and hopeful, then it's all up. But if they are, then it's all right.

WILL: Now, you can't begin to——

MOLLY (*cutting in ruthlessly*): I can begin. (*Hic.*) I've begun. I think that where the trouble starts is that some people are dead against happiness. They can't have it themselves, so they're going to spoil it for other people. They don't like life at all, these folks—they'd like to be safe an' dead, only they don't know it, or perhaps they never wanted to be born—an' so whenever they see a bit of life springing up, they want to tread on it. They go rolling round like—like tanks—an' God help any little piece of happiness that's in the way.

Now I don't say there's a lot of these people——

ALEC: I do. Millions and millions and millions of 'em.

WILL: I'm not sure we aren't producing more and more of 'em.

MOLLY: Now why should we be?

WILL: Because of the way most people have to live. Now take——

ALEC (*boisterously cutting in*): Take another drink. Must have a toast. (*As glasses are being filled.*) My turn too.

MOLLY: Well, make it something good.

ALEC (*solemnly*): What about the Leeds and Liverpool Canal Company, coupled with the London School of Tropical Hygiene and Major Butterworth, secretary of the North Cheltingate Golf Club?

MOLLY (*seriously*): That sounds silly to me. What about Absent Friends?

WILL: I haven't any.

MOLLY: What? Not one?

WILL: Not one.

MOLLY: Well, you poor thing! (*To* ALEC.) What about you? You must have plenty.

ALEC (*seriously*): Four perhaps. No—three. Well, be on the safe side, and say two.

MOLLY: Good gracious me, I've dozens an' dozens.

WILL (*cutting in solemnly, raising glass*): Molly's Absent Friends.

ALEC (*same*): Molly's Absent Friends.

MOLLY (*same*): Oh—right, then. Absent Friends—bless 'em. (*Drinks.*)

MOLLY (*hiccup*)

ALEC (*laugh*):

LADY LEADMILL: Well!

There is a sound at Card Room Door, which now opens. MONDOVI *is holding it open, and* LADY LEADMILL, LADY GARNETT, MRS. TAGG *come out, followed by* DR. PLUMWEATHER, SIR RUFUS, TAGG. *and finally* MONDOVI *himself. Time should be given for all these to emerge and fan themselves out and forward a little. They have been chattering as they come out, but surprise*

silences them, as it has also silenced the opposite group of three. The silence is finally broken by a roar of laughter from ALEC, *at whom the guests stare angrily.*

TAGG (*annoyed*) : Can't see anything funny about it.

MONDOVI (*coming forward, furiously to* MOLLY *and* WILL) : Funny ! Eet is dis-a-graceful. What are you two doing-a here—eating-a—dreenking-a——?

ALEC : Oh—that's my fault. If it hadn't been for me——

MOLLY (*cutting in, firmly*) : It's nothing to do with Dr. Rothbury. You see, it happens to be my birthday to-day—and——

WILL (*cutting in*) : I'm responsible for this bit of gaiety out here, not her. It was my idea.

LADY LEADMILL (*hoping to crush him*) : Indeed !

WILL (*who is still smoking his cigar*) : Yes, indeed.

LADY GARNETT (*to* MOLLY) : May we ask whose coat you're wearing ?

MOLLY (*indignantly*) : It's my own. It came as a present.

LADY GARNETT : Really !

MOLLY (*same tone as* WILL *above*) : Yes, really.

TAGG : Cheeky talk now !

MRS. TAGG : Yes, but it may be her own coat——

TAGG (*rudely*) : Just take a look at it, and then ask yourself how chambermaids get coats like that.

ALEC : Don't be such a lout.

TAGG : What ?

WILL (*coolly*) He said " Don't be such a lout ".

MONDOVI (*spluttering with rage*) : Fineesh ! Absolute fineesh ! To-morrow—you go——

DR. PLUMWEATHER (*pompously*) : Just a moment, Mondovi. Dr. Rothbury ?

ALEC (*calmly*) : Yes, Dr. Plumweather ?

DR. PLUMWEATHER : I've been looking for a good opportunity to say something to you, and you've provided me with one.

ALEC (*to* MOLLY *and* WILL) : What did I tell you ? It's here—the sack.

DR. PLUMWEATHER (*annoyed*) : The sack ! Yes, exactly. And the sooner we part company, the better.

ALEC: I quite agree.

DR. PLUMWEATHER: And let me tell you, that until you acquire a few decent manners and a sense of proportion you won't get very far.

ALEC (*warming to it*): And let *me* tell *you*, that until you acquire more skill and honesty, which isn't likely now, you'll stay as you are.

DR. PLUMWEATHER: (*angrily*) You confounded young ass!

ALEC: You pompous old donkey!

MOLLY: Hiccup!

LADY LEADMILL (*beginning in awful tones*): Young man——

ALEC: No, thank you. I haven't to listen to you any more.

MONDOVI (*who has been dancing with impatience*): Please-a, please-a, ladees an' gentlemen, let-a me speak-a for a moment, because I am vairy ashamed. Nevair, nevair does it happen with me before. You two—(*pointing to* MOLLY *and* WILL)—fineesh with this hotel—you go in the morning—out—fineesh——

SIR RUFUS: Don't blame you. Probably been helping themselves to your stuff too, eh? Champagne!

WILL (*coolly*): Bollinger '28, too. How do you like that?

LADY LEADMILL: Well, I don't propose to stay down here all night——

She begins moving forward. MOLLY *hastily puts herself in front of Main Door, facing them all.*

MOLLY (*with growing agitation*): Just wait a minute. Nobody's going yet.

MONDOVI (*spluttering*): You are drunk! You are mad. Come away——

MOLLY (*stopping him with her voice*): You be quiet, William there—and I—have worked very hard at this hotel. We've always tried to be obliging and make everybody comfortable. Even if we have made a bit of a slip to-night, we haven't done anybody any harm. You wouldn't see us sacked, turned out, like this, would you?

MRS. TAGG (*timidly*): Well, I must say, speaking for myself, I don't see there's much harm——

TAGG (*in fierce whisper*): Now you shut up!

MONDOVI (*wagging threatening finger*): I tella—you—fineesh—fineesh—thees hotel—all hotels——

MOLLY: You hear him? Anybody got anything to say?

MONDOVI: Yes—feeneesh—out——

There is a moment's silence while MOLLY *stares at them all.*

MOLLY (*urgently*): When I think of all that I've done—an' with never a word of complaint—an' not even asking for any thanks—why—damn your eyes, the lot of you! You'll turn us out, will you? Well, we'll see. William Lotless, you keep telling me I'm really a rich woman. Does it mean anything or have you just been having a game with me? Am I rich?

WILL (*coolly*): Certainly you are.

MOLLY: Am I rich enough to buy this hotel?

SIR RUFUS: Oh—really—this is too much!

WILL (*to* SIR RUFUS): Don't worry. You've heard nothing yet.

MOLLY (*impatiently*): Never mind him. Answer me. Can I buy this hotel?

WILL: You don't need to buy it. Say the word, and it's yours.

MONDOVI (*almost moaning*): Oh—what ees thees? All dronk-mad!

WILL (*masterfully*): You be quiet or you'll talk yourself clean out of the hotel business. (*To* MOLLY.) You don't need to buy this hotel, because three days ago you—acquired a controlling interest in Spa Hotels and Catering Limited, which owns this and six other hotels.

SIR RUFUS (*as the others stare silently*): You don't expect us to believe that, do you?

WILL: You can please yourself.

TAGG: Why there's half a million of good property in Spa Hotels Limited.

WILL (*taking papers from pocket*): Chicken-feed! Now, all of you, I know you like money, so just take a good look at Mrs. Cudden there, because if she could realise on all her holdings to-morrow she'd be worth—(*glancing at his figures*)—well—at a conservative estimate—say, one million four hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

MONDOVI (*dropping into chair*): One milli—oh!—lachrimae Christi!——

LADY LEADMILL: This is a most extraordinary business——

MOLLY (*sharply*): Yes, but the only part of it that concerns all you is this. I'm closing this hotel as soon as I can—to-morrow, if it's possible. We're not going, but you are, the whole lot of you. And as you may have a good deal of packing to do soon, don't stay up too late. Good night.

DR. PLUMWEATHER (*looking at her with interest*): Well—of course —if this is true——

LADY GARNETT (*same look and tone*): It makes rather a difference——

MOLLY (*fiercely*): Not to me it doesn't. Good night.

SIR RUFUS (*conciliatory*): But—really now——

MOLLY (*very fiercely*): I said *good night.*

Her moral superiority is so evident that they go out meekly, all but MONDOVI, *who is standing now but still dazed, As the last of the guests are going,* WILL *goes over to* MONDOVI *and taps him on the shoulder.*

WILL: You go out that way. (*Points to Staff Door.*)

MONDOVI: Meester Lotless, I deed not-a know——

WILL (*firmly*): Pop off. That way.

MONDOVI *goes.*

ALEC (*to* WILL): Look here, is it true?

WILL: Every word. I've been playing the market with some shares she had left.

MOLLY *now sits down L. of table and bursts into tears.*

Now why? Why?

ALEC: Just reaction. Nerves.

MOLLY (*indignantly, through her tears*): It isn't nerves. I hate them all. And now I hate myself.

ALEC (*soothingly*): Now, now, now!

WILL *has now gone to telephone.* PERKINS *enters briskly.*

MOLLY (*explosively*): I'm *ashamed* of myself. (*Cries again.*)

PERKINS: Hello! Perkins of the *Gazette.*

WILL (*now dialling at telephone*): Oh—my God!

PERKINS (*advancing*): What's all this? What's all this?

ALEC: This is one of our chambermaids. She's just heard she's worth one million, four hundred and fifty thousand pounds, has a controlling interest in Spa Hotels Limited, has just closed this hotel, is turning everybody out to-morrow, and is now enjoying a good cry.

PERKINS (*cynically*): Thanks very much. (*Indicates his leg.*) And now pull that one.

ALEC (*to* WILL, *jocularly*): He thinks I'm pulling his leg.

PERKINS (*with tremendous irony*): Oh no! I'm only a reporter—I believe everything. (*Chiefly to* WILL.) Well, I tried the *Royal* and the *Bristol*. Nothing doing. Then it suddenly came over me—ten minutes ago—that there's nothing in it.

WILL (*still at telephone*): Sixth sense?

PERKINS: Sixth sense, old man. I said to myself, "You're wasting your time here, old man," I said. "There never was a story in Cheltingate, and there never will be. Get back to Manchester." So I'm catching the 12.45. Bye-bye, everybody. (*Hurries out.*) Bye-bye everybody—one million four hundred—ha, ha!

WILL: Just one of the bloodhounds of the Press. (*Into phone.*) Yes, I want Mr. Vandermore . . . Oh, yes, he will . . .

MOLLY: What are you going to do now?

WILL: I'm going to make some more money for you.

MOLLY (*distressed*): Oh—stop it. I don't want any more.

WILL (*telephoning*): Vandermore? . . . All right . . . Lotless here . . . Now listen to me. Don't get cold feet, Vandermore . . . I thought you were a good gambler or I wouldn't have taken you in with us . . .

MOLLY (*half crying*): You're different already. Not half so nice . . . I don't want any more.

He hushes her fiercely, and then concentrates, snapping out: "All right . . ." "What of it?" etc., *as she dabs at her eyes and realises it is hopeless trying to stop him, and the curtain comes quickly down.*

The scene is the same as before, a week later. Afternoon, with strong sunlight from street and above, as if through skylight. The scene looks different now. Clearly it is not being used as an hotel any longer. The tables and chairs are no longer neatly arranged. The reception desk is not in use.

At a table just in front of desk is MISS WEEKS, *who now looks like a busy typist in a broker's office. There is a suggestion of barricade about the door and windows. Actually the door has its blind drawn, but there is a peephole through the blind that* GEORGE, *the waiter, but no longer dressed like one, uses to see who is wanting to come in, for the door is carefully locked. Just after rise, the telephone, now on* MISS WEEKS'S *table, rings hard. She answers it.* GEORGE *is standing near door.*

MISS WEEKS (*at telephone*): I'm very sorry, madam, we can't . . . No, but at present the hotel is closed . . .

GEORGE (*sardonically*): Say we can sell 'er some nice shares.

MISS WEEKS (*telephone*): . . . No, I don't know when it'll be open again. . . . And good day to you . . . (*she dials and waits*).

ELSIE *enters through Staff Door carrying small tea tray.*

GEORGE: For me? Thank you, dear.

ELSIE (*contemptuously passing him*): For you! T-t-t-t. This is for Mr. Lotless. (*Halting a moment, with deceptive kindness.*) Would you like some tea?

GEORGE: Yes.

ELSIE (*crushingly*): Then go and make some.

ELSIE *goes triumphantly into Card Room.*

GEORGE (*to* MISS WEEKS): You see!

MISS WEEKS: See what?

GEORGE: That's what you get for being affable. Been my mistake all along. Too friendly and easy-goin'. If I'd been more stand-offish, do you know where I'd be now?

MISS WEEKS (*wearily*): Yes, with a nice little business of your own in Preston Pans. (*Goes on with her work, ignoring his glare.*)

After a moment, we hear WILL'S *voice booming angrily from Card Room, then* ELSIE, *looking rather scared, returns from there.*

ELSIE (*confidentially*): Isn't he in a temper?

GEORGE (*ironically*): I wouldn't be surprised.

ELSIE: Not anything like so nice as he used to be. Is he, Miss Weeks?

MISS WEEKS: He's working too hard. And he doesn't get enough sleep. Life he's leading is enough to put anybody on edge.

ELSIE: Well, I must say——

ELSIE *breaks off because* WILL *now comes hurriedly out of Card Room. He is in his shirt sleeves, smoking a cigar, and somehow looks like a busy financier and not like a night porter at all. His manner is brusque and domineering. He throws some documents on* MISS WEEKS'S *desk.*

WILL (*curtly*): Make two copies of them. And repeat that cable to the Manhattan Trust. Have we had a wire yet from Fox giving us the Investment Corporation quotations?

MISS WEEKS (*the Secretary now*): No, Mr. Lotless.

WILL: How the devil can a fellow be expected to do business under these conditions? What we want here is a tape machine. Get a tape machine. Tell 'em I want it installed at once. Never mind what it costs. Must have one. Oh—you—Elsie—go up and tell Mrs. Cudden I want her to sign some transfers.

As ELSIE *hesitates and looks uneasy.*

Well? Go on.

He sees three of them exchanging uneasy glances.

Well?

MISS WEEKS (*uneasily*): Mrs. Cudden isn't here.

WILL (*astounded*): *Isn't here?* Where is she?

MISS WEEKS: She—went away—last night.

WILL (*furious*): Great jumping Moses! And nobody told me. (*To* ELSIE.) Don't stand gaping there. Pop off.

ELSIE *hurries off through Staff Door.*

WILL (*he takes hold of himself*): Did she say where she was going?

MISS WEEKS (*hesitating*): No, she didn't—not exactly.

WILL: What d'you mean—not exactly?

MISS WEEKS (*hesitating*): Well—I have an idea—she was going to London——

WILL: Worse and worse! Just where I didn't want her to go. Did she say what she was going to do? Bit o' shopping perhaps, eh?

MISS WEEKS: She didn't say.

GEORGE (*slowly*): I've an idea——

WILL (*brutally*): I don't believe you, but let's have it.

GEORGE: Sorry I spoke. Sorry I spoke. (*Looks as if he'll never speak again.*)

WILL: Now listen, you two, this is serious. There's millions at stake. Everything's in Molly Cudden's name, and if some people I know in London got hold of her, that 'ud be the end of me—and of you too. Look at it. Here's a woman worth millions—and as simple as a sausage—wandering about London—Oh Christmas! It's enough to give you heart disease.

GEORGE: I've an idea she went to see that Miss Frensham—you remember, that good-lookin' young piece—who was staying here a few weeks since. I saw Mrs. Cudden lookin' at the register before she went and takin' an address down—and I had a look where she'd been lookin', after she'd gone—and it seemed to me she'd been taking down that Miss Frensham's address.

WILL (*to* MISS WEEKS): Send a wire to Mrs. Cudden care o' this Miss Frensham: "Return immediately very urgent and you are badly needed here. Will Lotless." That ought to bring her back. And we've got to get her back before some o' those smooth City and West End boys get their forks into her, or we'll all be carved up. Get that wire off at once. (*He moves towards Card Room, then wheels on them, accusingly.*) Why didn't you tell me she'd gone away?

As they don't reply.

I see. She specially asked you not to tell me, eh?

GEORGE: Yes, she did.

WILL (*bitterly*): The biggest deals I was ever in—and it's like trying to do it from an infants' school.

There is a sharp knocking at the front door.

Who's that? Don't let any newspaper men in. Or anybody I don't know.

GEORGE (*looking through peephole*): It's Mondovi.

WILL: All right. Let him in.

GEORGE *lets him in.* MISS WEEKS *is busy sending the wire quietly over the telephone.* MONDOVI *is in ordinary clothes and looking worried.*

MONDOVI: Ah—Meestair Lotta-less—good afternoon.

WILL (*curtly*): Afternoon, Mondovi. I told you to go up to London and see the general manager of the company for another job.

MONDOVI: Yais——

WILL *nods and goes into Card Room.*

Thank you so much.

MISS WEEKS: Where are you staying, Mr. Mondovi?

MONDOVI (*confidentially*): Ovair at the Grand with my frien' Pellini. An' I tella you, Mees Weeks, thatta Grand Hotel ees no good. Tairrible!

GEORGE: It can't be much worse than this used to be.

MONDOVI: Oh—yais. Mucha worse. Tairrible! Notta comfortable—an' a vairry bada crew in the kitchen. Las night Pellini says "I give-a you *supreme de chicken Grand Hotel*—speciality of my chef." Alla right, I taste eet. Tairrible! At once I know. Notta poulet—notta chicken—at all. Eet was—— (*He makes scampering gestures with his fingers.*)

MISS WEEKS (*horrified*): Rats.

MONDOVI: Oh—no—notta rats—but—er—you know—*lapin* bunnee—yais—bunnee rabbits. (*With tremendous scorn.*) *Supreme de chicken Grand Hotel*—specialaite—weeth bunnee rabbits.

GEORGE (*gloomily*): One seaside place I worked in, the chicken used to be guinea pig. There were a lot of boys' schools in that town.

MONDOVI: So! What do you do 'ere now?

MISS WEEKS: We're a sort of mixture of millionaires and charwomen.

MONDOVI: The hotel—it is steel closed, eh?

GEORGE: That's right. And if it's a success we'll close down the rest of the company's hotels.

MISS WEEKS: Is there anything we can do for you, Mr. Mondovi?

MONDOVI: Oh—no. I forgot my diplome—diploma, eh? It ees in my office. And I am afraid someone might take eet.

GEORGE: What for?

MONDOVI (*pointedly*): Because wit' theese diploma a man can be something better than a waiter—eh, Miss Weeks? Excusa me, pliss.

MONDOVI *goes through Staff Door.*

GEORGE (*doing his parody*): Nice-a people—vairry reech!

There is a pause, during which GEORGE *yawns and* MISS WEEKS, *does some typing. Then the door slowly opens, and* MOLLY CUDDEN, *carrying a small case and dressed in her fur coat, enters cautiously, after looking round.*

MOLLY (*almost whispering*): Well, I haven't been away long have I? Did he find out I'd gone?

GEORGE: Only a few minutes since.

MOLLY: Shows what a lot of interest he takes in me, doesn't it?

MISS WEEKS: But he was furious.

MOLLY (*shrewdly*): Why? Because he missed me?

GEORGE: No, because he thought one of the other crooks would get hold of you.

MOLLY: For once I believe you're right, George. (*As she takes off her coat and puts bag down, etc.*) Well, I enjoyed that little trip, though I nearly roasted myself in that fur coat. It looks drearier than ever—shut up in here like this—not a bit of life or anything——

MISS WEEKS (*with irony*): Just making millions.

MOLLY: I've enjoyed myself more making beds. Now, you two, pop off and get some tea.

MISS WEEKS: But Mr. Lotless——

MOLLY (*cutting in, firmly*): Never mind him. Besides, I've got a tricky bit of business on, and you'll be better off if you're not mixed up in it.

GEORGE (*moving off*): Suits me.

MISS WEEKS (*rising, rather reluctantly*): Well, if you'll take the responsibility.

MOLLY: Don't worry about that. Off you pop.

GEORGE (*turning just before exit, Staff Door*): By the way, our old pal's here.

MOLLY: Who d'you mean?

GEORGE: Vairry reech, vairry nice-a people.

GEORGE *and* MISS WEEKS *go out.*

MOLLY, *who is clearly bursting with intrigue, peeps anxiously through the peep-hole, then goes towards Card Room quietly, then returns for another peep.* MONDOVI *now returns, triumphantly carrying a large framed diploma.*

MONDOVI: Ah—Meesis Cudden—you are vairry well?

MOLLY: Only just fair. Too much sitting about. What have you got there?

MONDOVI (*showing it proudly*): My diploma. You like eet?

MOLLY (*seriously*): I think it's wonderful. Fancy it saying all that about you!

MONDOVI: Thank you very much. Good afternoon, Mrs. Cudden.

MOLLY (*after short pause*): Mr. Mondovi, what's it like running an hotel?

MONDOVI: Meesis Cudden—I tella you. Running an hotel would be pairfect—eef eet was not for two things—just two things One—the owners. The othair—the guests.

MOLLY: So—if you owned it yourself and had different kinds of guests from the usual—eh?

MONDOVI: I theenk—it would be delightful. An' I theenk I know where they have such hotels——

MOLLY (*eagerly*): Where?

MONDOVI (*pointing upward*): In heaven. Gooda afternoon, Meesis Cudden.

MONDOVI *goes.*

MOLLY: Good afternoon, Mr. Mondovi.

WILL *enters the Card Room. They look at each other a moment. He is furious. She is defiant.*

WILL: So you had to sneak out and go to London?

MOLLY: Well, why shouldn't I?

WILL (*angrily*): Because you might easily have ditched everything. Yes, ruined us both just for a damned silly woman's whim.

Let me remind you of something. A month ago you were a chambermaid here and never looked like being anything else, and now you're the richest woman in England. And who did it? You didn't do it. You don't know yet what it's all about. *I* did it.

MOLLY: Nobody said you didn't.

WILL (*furious*): And all I ask, while I'm making millions for you, is that you should stay here and keep quiet for a week or two. And you can't even do that! You go an' risk everything rather than do what I ask you to do! Another break out like this and you might find yourself making beds again.

MOLLY (*coolly*): Well, that wouldn't kill me. Might do me a bit of good.

WILL: I'm trying to make you into something——

MOLLY (*cutting in*): Well, don't try so hard then. And another thing, Will Lotless. Stop making yourself into something I don't like. When you were nothing but the night porter here, you were a nice chap.

WILL: And what's the matter with me now?

MOLLY: Everything. You go shouting and stamping and swearing. You haven't got a smile for anybody. You look so worried and cross——

WILL (*shouting*): And you'd look worried and cross if you'd got the biggest financial deal of a lifetime in the balance. (*Makes gesture, and then is calmer but still sharp.*) Why did you go to London?

MOLLY: For a nice change.

WILL: Did you see that Frensham girl?

MOLLY: Yes. I knew she wasn't rich really. I told you at the time. She told me she was a secretary. And this morning she introduced me to her employer. And he insisted on coming back here with us.

WILL (*alarmed*): *What!* But who——

VERONICA FRENSHAM *and* LORD FLEETFIELD *enter through Main Door.* LORD FLEETFIELD *is elderly, tall, imposing, superbly dressed.*

VERONICA (*to* WILL): Hello, Mr. Lotless!

MOLLY (*rather nervously*): Will, this is Lord Fleetfield.

LORD FLEETFIELD (*coolly, as* WILL *glares*): No introduction necessary, Mrs. Cudden. Just as I thought. This is Mr. William Blofield.

WILL (*very fiercely, to* MOLLY): You dirty rat!

MOLLY (*furious*): Oh—you——

She marches across and slaps his face—hard, then overcome by what she has done, she turns aside and collapses into chair.

VERONICA (*indignantly to* WILL): And serves you right. What has she done?

WILL (*bitterly*): Finished me—and herself too.

MOLLY (*rising, bewildered*): I don't know what you're talking about.

LORD FLEETFIELD (*smoothly*): Perhaps I'd better explain.

WILL (*bitterly*): That's right. Enjoy yourself.

LORD FLEETFIELD: This is Mr. William Blofield. I thought I recognised his touch in these recent operations on the market. Mr. Blofield was at one time a very well-known and successful speculator. Then he was found guilty of forging securities and was sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

MOLLY (*aghast*): William!

WILL: You had to bring him here, hadn't you? Well, it's true. Blofield—ex-convict—jailbird—that's me.

MOLLY (*almost overcome, moving nearer*): William, I always knew there was *something*. Why didn't you tell me?

WILL (*waving her away, bitterly*): I'll tell you something now. Don't think Lord Fleetfield has come here and told you who I am just for the good of your health. I know *him*. And the only real difference between him and me is that I was found out—and—well, he's Lord Fleetfield.

LORD FLEETFIELD (*coolly*): Oh no, there are other differences.

WILL: Yes, and I'll tell you what they are. The game we played was just the same game, but of course he played it with more style. Nothing vulgar, nothing common, about him. In with the Right People. Decent chap, sound fella, sahib. But playing just the same game, and ten times more dangerous.

LORD FLEETFIELD: My dear Blofield, you overlook the all-

important difference in method. And then perhaps people saw that when I achieved some power I made use of it with tact, courtesy, and perhaps even with some charm. Whereas you bragged and blustered and rode rough-shod. So society took advantage of the first mistake you made to hurry you out of sight and hearing. Let us, it says, at least have pleasant masters. Are you taking this down, Miss Frensham?

VERONICA (*who is*): Yes, Lord Fleetfield.

LORD FLEETFIELD: Quite right. It may come in for something.

WILL (*roughly*): All right, then take it down. I say Lord Fleetfield——

MOLLY (*urgently, cutting in*): No, stop it, William. Let me say something now. (*To* LORD FLEETFIELD.) I didn't know he'd been in prison. But—but I don't see that it matters now. He did something that was wrong. He's paid for it. That's done with. Can't we all forget about it?

LORD FLEETFIELD: No, Mrs. Cudden, we can't. We have here a very serious matter. These bold piratical raids on the stock market are extremely disturbing. Two large combines in important national industries have already been badly shaken. Investors may lose confidence. Therefore it's our duty to stop such raids.

WILL (*bitterly*): In other—and plainer—words—I've been spoiling his racket, and he's not going to stand for it.

LORD FLEETFIELD (*impressively*): Certainly I'm not going to stand for it. And if we must have plain words, here they are. I can send Mr. Blofield here back to prison, and unless I can come to a friendly agreement with him during the next hour, I shall see that he goes back to prison.

WILL (*to* MOLLY): And now do you see what you've done?

MOLLY: Is it true—what he says?

WILL: Yes.

MOLLY: And is that why you had to keep it all so secret?

WILL: Yes.

MOLLY (*distressed*): You see, William, I didn't know. I didn't know. I see why you called me that. And I hit you. I'm sorry, William. I didn't know.

WILL (*bitterly*): You know now.

MOLLY (*reproachfully*): A month ago you wouldn't have talked like that. (*Then bursting out.*) Oh—I think it's horrible—all of it. I wish I'd never had anything to do with it. (*To* WILL.) It's spoilt you once—sending you to prison—and now it's beginning to spoil you again. (*To* LORD FLEETFIELD.) And I thought you were such a nice man—and now when I bring you here, you talk about sending William to prison again. It's all horrible and *wrong*.

VERONICA (*turning to her, sympathetically*): Molly——

MOLLY: No, dear—it's all gone wrong. And I ought to try and think—and I can't—I'm so upset.

She goes out of the group and sits down.

LORD FLEETFIELD *and* WILL *look at her a moment, then at each other.*

WILL: Well?

Comes down.

LORD FLEETFIELD: If you and I could talk this over quietly—away from these emotional disturbances—we might come to some amicable settlement—eh?

WILL (*curtly*): What kind of settlement will that be?

LORD FLEETFIELD: That you're out, Blofield. Out of these deals—but also—still out of prison. And that's my final word.

WILL: All right. You win. I've a room here I use as an office. Let's go in there.

He leads the way.

LORD FLEETFIELD *nods to* VERONICA, *so she follows him and all three go into Card Room.*

MOLLY *sits miserably, trying to think.*

After a moment or two, ALEC *enters, as if from hospital. He stops when he sees* MOLLY.

ALEC: Here, what's the matter, Molly?

MOLLY (*slowly coming out of her misery*): Everything. All gone wrong. I brought Lord Fleetfield here——

ALEC: What—the big financial man?

MOLLY: Yes. I thought he could help William. But now it seems he's threatening to send him to prison. And that's not what I meant at all.

ALEC: Look here, Molly. I've thought for some time you didn't realise what all this money-making does mean.

MOLLY: Are you going to start now?

ALEC: Yes.

MOLLY: Go on then. What does it mean?

ALEC: Well, it isn't just entering figures into a book and finding you've got lots and lots of money to spend. It's grabbing power, Molly. You're playing about with people's lives—the lives of thousands and thousands of people you've never even seen.

MOLLY (*shocked*): Oh—but I never meant——

ALEC: I don't care what you meant—that's what it is. People's savings disappear. They have to give up their houses, sell their furniture. Kids have to leave school. People can't take the holidays they planned. Fellows are sacked—middle-aged men turned out of jobs.

MOLLY (*indignantly*): Stop it. I won't hear another word. D'you think if I imagined it was like that—all real—messing about with people's lives—I'd have anything to do with it. Why, I'd have burnt them shares first. Why—it's *disgraceful.*

ALEC (*grinning*): Here, steady. You could have given them to me—to help me to start that clinic.

MOLLY: That's what you want, isn't it, a clinic?

ALEC: That's all I want.

MOLLY: Oh no, it isn't.

ALEC: What do you mean?

MOLLY: She's in there.

ALEC: Who? Not Veronica Frensham?

MOLLY (*as she begins to move towards Card Room*): Yes. She's this Lord Fleetfield's secretary.

ALEC: A secretary?

MOLLY: I told you she wasn't rich. I'll bring her out.

She marches into the Card Room, and then returns at once with VERONICA.

Now then, settle it between you. And if anybody wants me, I'll be up in my room, trying to stop looking a sight. (*She is now collecting her coat, etc.*) And don't be silly, you two. Get on.

with it. Let's have something sensible out of all this palaver.

She goes out.

VERONICA (*smiling*): Well?

ALEC: What was the idea—pretending to be rich?

VERONICA (*coolly*): Well, I get six pounds a week. Most secretaries only get about four.

ALEC: But why tell me all that nonsense?

VERONICA: I was on a holiday, and pretending to be rich and grand was part of the holiday. Besides, you were so pleased with yourself, and thought you knew everything, so I decided to take you down a peg or two.

ALEC: I don't think it was a very good joke.

VERONICA: I didn't afterwards. And I wrote about six letters to you.

ALEC (*hastily*): I never had them.

VERONICA: No, I tore them up. But I would have written finally if I hadn't suddenly discovered we were coming up here. How *are* you?

ALEC: Broke. Old Plumweather gave me the push, and all I'm doing now is a bit of work for nothing at the hospital.

VERONICA: I've been thinking a lot about you.

ALEC: I've been thinking a lot about you too. In fact, you're a damn nuisance. I think we'd better get married.

VERONICA: What—so that you can stop thinking about me?

ALEC: Yes. I want to get on with my work.

VERONICA: That's not a good enough reason. Why do you want to marry me?

ALEC: Because if I don't, I'd probably get tied up with a nurse, and I hate nurses.

VERONICA: In that case then I'd better marry you. But if I'm going to work to keep us, you'll have to get up and cook breakfast.

ALEC: What do you have for breakfast?

VERONICA: Only tea and toast.

ALEC: I can make tea and toast.

They kiss but are interrupted by LORD FLEETFIELD.

LORD FLEETFIELD (*amused*): Oh—Miss Frensham.

VERONICA (*rather confused*): Oh—Lord Fleetfield, this is Dr. Rothbury.

LORD FLEETFIELD: How d'you do? It's a pleasure to meet a young doctor who believes in the good old-fashioned treatment. Now where is Mrs. Cudden.?

ALEC: She's upstairs. I'll tell her. Don't go away.

He hurries out. LORD FLEETFIELD *looks quizzingly at* VERONICA.

LORD FLEETFIELD: I hope his intentions are dishonourable.

VERONICA: They're not. We're engaged.

LORD FLEETFIELD: I congratulate him, though I suppose no woman is as good a wife as she is a secretary. Being a secretary seems to bring out the best in a woman, and being a wife doesn't.

WILL *now appears from Card Room, carrying some documents.*

LORD FLEETFIELD: Ah, Blofield. I've sent for Mrs. Cudden, we'll explain to her the arrangement we've come to.

WILL: She won't know what we're talking about.

LORD FLEETFIELD: Still the same blunt outspoken fellow, Blofield. What were you in this hotel before you broke into the market again?

WILL: Night porter.

LORD FLEETFIELD: That must have made a late arrival here something of an ordeal for any sensitive guest.

WILL: Don't you believe it. I was a good night porter. Wasn't I, Miss Frensham?

VERONICA: You were sweet. I think the only night porter I've ever really liked.

WILL: You see?

LORD FLEETFIELD: How do you account for your success as a night porter?

WILL: I'll explain. I hadn't much power and I'd few worries, so it wasn't hard to be pleasant. In many ways it's a more satisfying job than juggling with money. For one thing, you've more time to think—and you're not so frightened of thinking, wouldn't suit you, though. Head waiter would be more in your line.

LORD FLEETFIELD: You're probably right. Almost the only

men in London I still respect are one or two head waiters.

He sees MOLLY *entering. She looks better than she did.*

Now, Mrs. Cudden. We're all ready. Do sit down.

He fusses her into a chair. Then he and VERONICA *sit, but not* WILL.

MOLLY: Sit down, William.

WILL (*curtly*): I'm all right.

MOLLY: Oh dear, you're not going to sulk, are you?

LORD FLEETFIELD (*as* WILL *is about to reply*): No, Blofield, let me say something. Mrs. Cudden, we've come to a sensible friendly agreement, and I must tell you that throughout our friend has asked for nothing for himself and has only been trying to safeguard your interests.

MOLLY (*warmly*): William!

WILL: All right. I don't want any votes of thanks now. Let me explain what's happened. I don't go to jail, *that's* settled.

LORD FLEETFIELD (*firmly*): Quite definitely settled, whatever else happens.

MOLLY: That's all right then.

WILL: These chaps get what they want—control of the power we hold, but they'll guarantee you all the money you want to spend. You can have ten fur coats and a diamond suit case. It'll be wonderful. (*He begins to walk away.*)

MOLLY (*rising*): I don't want ten fur coats and a diamond suit case, you fathead. And where are you going?

WILL (*turning*): I'm going to pack my bag.

Stalks out. MOLLY *is undecided for a moment as to whether to call him back, but then decides not to.*

LORD FLEETFIELD: Yes, you've only to sign the necessary documents, which give us the controlling interest we need, and then you can forget all about us. You can draw as much money as you please. And enjoy yourself. Buy what you like. Entertain. Travel.

MOLLY: I see.

LORD FLEETFIELD (*impressively*): There you are, Mrs. Cudden. It's an odd thought—and you might take this down, Miss Frensham—that if you and Blofield could have gone on a little longer,

then without leaving this hotel, you could have thrown your shadow across the world. The fate of whole industries would have been in your hands. You could have controlled commodity markets and, if you wished, created famines. You could have dominated the political life of people at the other end of the world. The fate of millions and millions of people you have never seen might have been in your hands. A remarkable position to be in. Though of course I've had some experience of it for some time now.

MOLLY: Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself I call it disgraceful.

LORD FLEETFIELD: What?

MOLLY (*with growing feeling*) Yes, disgraceful! But I felt it wrong from the start. I watched it spoiling him—yes, and beginning to spoil me. No proper work to do! Just gambling! And all that power. Sitting here interfering with other people's lives, miles away. I don't want to be mucking people's lives up for money, and I don't see why you should either. No, I'm not signing your papers.

LORD FLEETFIELD (*astonished*): But, Mrs. Cudden, I don't think you realise the seriousness of the situation. These enormous interests can't be left to look after themselves.

MOLLY: These enormous interests, as you call 'em, aren't going to be left to look after themselves. The doctor explained what I could do, and a solicitor's coming to straighten it all out for me. I don't know much about these things, but I do know it isn't right that one person should be able to interfere with and mess about the lives and happiness of thousands of other people.

LORD FLEETFIELD: Perhaps not. But under the present system——

MOLLY (*cutting in*): We'd better put a stop to the present system. And I'll make a start by giving all this controlling business to the people whose lives are mixed up in it, to the people of England.

LORD FLEETFIELD: In other words, you'll hand over your interest to the government, in the form of a public trust?

MOLLY: Yes, that's it.

LORD FLEETFIELD: And do you suppose the government will manage these affairs any better than my friends and I would?

MOLLY: Well, if they don't, we can change the government, can't we?

LORD FLEETFIELD (*smiling*): Possibly, though my friends and I generally have a hand in changing governments too.

MOLLY: I dare say. But you won't have this lot—(*Waving papers*)—to help you to do it. I've made up my mind about that.

VERONICA: But, Molly, don't you want anything for yourself?

MOLLY: Yes, I was coming to that. Out of all this lot, I just want two things. I want enough to keep and run this hotel—on my own lines. And I want enough money to provide young Dr. Rothbury a clinic.

VERONICA: Darling! That's perfect. (*To* LORD FLEETFIELD.) She can do that, can't she?

LORD FLEETFIELD: Certainly. The solicitor can arrange that.

VERONICA: Oh, Molly, that's wonderful.

LORD FLEETFIELD: Well, I've accomplished the more important half of my task, so I can't grumble. (*Rising.*) By the way, do you know if my old friend Lady Leadmill is still staying up here?

MOLLY: Yes, she was staying here until we closed, and now she's across at the Grand.

LORD FLEETFIELD: Then I'll go to the Grand too, Miss, Frensham. Report to me there in the morning. Good-bye, Mrs. Cudden.

MOLLY: Good-bye, Lord Fleetfield. Pleased to have met you.

LORD FLEETFIELD: Delighted to have met you. Most unusual experience. And—about this hotel of yours——

MOLLY: Yes?

LORD FLEETFIELD: Don't let your night porter read the financial Press.

He goes, the three of them having been standing near front door MOLLY *and* VERONICA *now come down.*

MOLLY: My dear, fancy me going on like that, I don't know

whether to laugh or cry. Telling 'em all straight. Though I wouldn't have known how to do it if it hadn't been for the doctor —your young man.

VERONICA (*excitedly*): Who's going to have his clinic. Where is he?

MOLLY: He was only waiting till we'd finished. Didn't want to butt in, he said.

ALEC *pops his head in through main hotel doors.*

ALEC: Hoy, Veronica! I want you.

VERONICA: Hoy yourself! You can't talk to me like that.

MOLLY (*delighted*): Course he can. Go on. Pop off.

VERONICA (*as she moves off*): Well, this time perhaps. But I don't propose to be talked to like that all the time.

Suddenly running off, with enormous enthusiasm crying, partly off. Darling, you're to have that clinic. We'll have a flat on the top floor.

MOLLY *listens, smilingly, then sighs as she sits down.* WILL *now enters through Staff Door, dressed in a neat but shabby suit and carrying an old suitcase. He looks at her. She looks at him and rises slowly.*

MOLLY (*reproachfully*): William! William!

He stops but says nothing.

And where d'you think you're going?

WILL: What does that matter? I'm not wanted here any more.

MOLLY: Who says so?

WILL: You said so.

MOLLY: I didn't.

WILL: You as good as said so. But there's one thing I want to tell you before I do go, Molly Cudden.

MOLLY: There's several things I want to tell you, William Lotless.

WILL: Well, listen to me first. Don't think I went back into the market again just to make some easy money. Not this time. What do I want now with a lot o' money? Wouldn't know what to do with it. I went back into the game to try and beat the smart boys again—see? And I did it, Don't forget that—I did it.

MOLLY: I know you did, William. But it was spoiling you again. And you weren't happy.

WILL: That's nothing. Ex-convicts my age don't expect to be happy. That's at least something they learn. But anyhow, I had my flutter, and I know what the game's worth. If people had had any sense, they'd have stopped us years since. But then people haven't any sense.

MOLLY: Don't you think I've any sense?

WILL: Not much. You had a bit when you were still a chambermaid. It's a funny thing. I've never been a chap to bother a lot with women. But every time I've been badly let down it's been by a woman.

MOLLY: And *I* suppose *I* let you down, eh?

WILL: You've said it, not me. What did you ask from Fleetfield—a couple o' yachts?

MOLLY: No. And I didn't sign anything either.

WILL (*astonished*): *What!*

MOLLY: It's all going into a public trust. All I asked for myself was enough money to give Dr. Rothbury a clinic, and enough to run a little business of my own. You wouldn't like a job in it, would you?

WILL (*picking up his case*): No, thanks. I can manage without any pension. And I don't want any woman to keep me.

MOLLY (*going over to him to stop him going*): William, William, come here. Who's talking about keeping you, you silly old chump? Now answer me one question. Do you like working in hotels of this sort?

WILL: No.

MOLLY: Why?

WILL: You ought to know. Because I don't take to most of the people who use this sort of hotel. Too many idle greedy-guts.

MOLLY (*artfully*): The trouble about you is that you just criticise. I'll bet you've got no ideas of your own about running an hotel.

WILL (*indignantly*): Of course I have! What d'you think I've been doing with my brains for the last couple of years? I'm a man of ideas.

MOLLY (*artfully again*): That's what *you* say!

WILL: Certainly it's what I say. Running an hotel! Why, give me a place I could take a real interest in—and——

MOLLY (*cutting in, firmly*): You're engaged.

WILL: What? Where?

MOLLY: Here, as manager.

WILL: What—is this the business you're going to run?

MOLLY: Yes, but it'll be a new kind of hotel for Cheltingate, for people who've been working too hard and not just eating too much, for men who are some use in the world, for women who deserve to be waited on for a change—for real people. Everything must be good but not too expensive. That means I need a man of ideas to run it. But of course if you don't feel up to it——

WILL (*cutting in, vehemently*): Don't be silly, woman, don't be silly. I'm the one man in England who could tackle this job for you. Good ideas! I've got thousands of 'em. Why, look here——

Produces a note book with great zest. Enter, through Staff Door, MISS WEEKS *and* GEORGE.

MISS WEEKS: Mr. Lotless——

MOLLY: And we shall want you, Miss Weeks——

WILL: Senior receptionist.

GEORGE: And what about me?

A knock or ring outside.

WILL: See who's there?

GEORGE *lets in* LADY LEADMILL, *looking more monstrous than ever, followed by* MISS SELL.

LADY LEADMILL (*in tremendous voice*): Where is Lord Fleetfield? I was informed he was here.

MOLLY: He was here, but he went to the Grand to look for you.

LADY LEADMILL: Indeed. Any letters for me here that you've failed to forward?

MISS WEEKS: No, Lady Leadmill.

LADY LEADMILL (*going towards desk, suspiciously*): Are you sure?

MISS WEEKS: Absolutely positive.

LADY LEADMILL (*sternly*): I prefer to make sure. The

posts here are *most* peculiar. And several letters are missing.

MOLLY (*confidentially to* MISS SELL *aside*): Here's a chance for you to get away from that old crocodile. Come and work for us here.

MISS SELL (*eagerly*): Oh—could I? Oh—that would be wonderful. But——

LADY LEADMILL (*marching majestically towards door*): Miss Sell.

MOLLY (*to the hesitating* MISS SELL): This is your chance—your only chance——

LADY LEADMILL (*commandingly at door*): Miss Sell.

MISS SELL (*after giving* MOLLY *a pathetic little smile*): Yes, Lady Leadmill.

She hurries out after her.

WILL: And that's half England.

MOLLY: Well, I'm disappointed. It oughtn't to be like that.

WILL: Well, it is. Millions and millions of Miss Sells——

Telephone rings. MISS WEEKS *answers it.*

MISS WEEKS (*telephone*) Yes? . . . Oh yes, Mrs. Gore . . . I'll just see, Mrs. Gore. (*To* MOLLY, *covering telephone.*) Mrs. Gore wants to know if she can stay. She's very rich.

MOLLY: If she's very rich, tell her we don't want her. (*To* WILL.) I'm disappointed.

WILL: But look.

MISS SELL *re-enters, looking excited and defiant, her hat rather askew, and carrying* LADY LEADMILL'S *umbrella, now broken, which she tosses on to the table.*

MISS SELL: When do I start?

MOLLY (*laughing*): Hurray!

WILL: You start now. Now look here——

Laughing and eager they all gather round WILL *and his note-book and talk all at once as curtain comes down.*

END

HOW ARE THEY AT HOME?

A Topical Comedy in Two Acts

CHARACTERS

(*In the Order of their Appearance*)

KENTON, *an old butler*
HILDA PACKET, *from the factory*
EILEEN STOCKS, *from the factory*
SAM CAWTHRA, *a factory foreman*
LOTTA SCHULBERG, *an operatic cook*
LADY (FRANCES) FARFIELD
PAULINE CHESTER, *a Land Girl*
MAJOR GEORGE WEBBER, *U.S. Army*
RAYMOND KILLIGREW, *a Civil Servant*
COMMODORE PENTWORTHY, *of the B.L.A.D.S.*
GROUP-CAPT. EDWARD CAMYON, *R.A.F.*
SQUADRON-LDR. TONY ACTON, *R.A.F.*
CORPORAL HERBERT PACKET, *Hilda's brother*

The scene is Farfield Hall, Fassington, in the North Midlands, on a Saturday night in Spring, 1944.

ACT I

The scene is the lounge hall of a fairly large country house. It is a lofty and imposing room, though it has obviously seen much better days. At back are very tall windows, through which park-like grounds can be seen. Left Centre (actors' Left) are large double doors which are main entrance to the room from outside. On Left wall is a massive fire-place, and downstage left is a small door leading to kitchen, etc. Right Centre shows foot of handsome old staircase, which curves up, out of sight. On Right wall is large door leading to drawing-room, etc. A fairly long table of refectory type occupies centre of stage, and this can have two long forms with it. Other small tables, easy chairs, etc. A telephone. Some vague family portraits and a few stuffed heads of animals on walls. A camp bed and a pile of blankets in one corner. The place is not dirty but it is dingy, untidy and dilapidated, though the general impression is rather of a cheerful bohemianism than of a depressing decay. At rise of curtain, KENTON, *who is a very old butler, shabby and senile and almost out of his wits but still vaguely impressive, is making an effort to lay the table. The door down L. into kitchen is open, and through it we hear the wireless playing a Viennese waltz and the still excellent voice of* LOTTA SCHULBERG *singing to it.* KENTON *listens to this, with a kind of droll despair, then does his best to get on with his work. Bell rings.* KENTON *goes to answer door, then returns followed by* HILDA, *a lively North-country girl, and* EILEEN, *a shy pretty girl.*

HILDA (*cheerfully*): She *is* expecting us, y'know.

KENTON: Yes, miss. I'll tell her ladyship you've arrived.

HILDA: Tell her it's Hilda and Eileen. You 'aven't seen Mr. Cawthra—that's our foreman—'ave you?

KENTON: No, miss. But I remember her ladyship saying that there would be three guests this evening.

HILDA: Mr. Cawthra's the other one. I say—are you a butler?

EILEEN (*embarrassed*): Shut up—Hilda!

HILDA: You don't mind me asking, do yer? Are you a butler?

KENTON (*gravely*): Yes, miss.

HILDA (*delighted*): Well, I've always wanted to see one. I've seen dozens on the pictures. Well, will you tell her we've come.

KENTON: Certainly, miss, I'll inform her ladyship without delay.

He goes out down L. HILDA *looks after him delightedly.*

HILDA: "I'll inform her ladyship without delay." He talks just like 'em too. You'd think he was doing it on purpose.

EILEEN: Perhaps he is.

HILDA: Well, I don't see any point in 'olding these things any longer. Let's put 'em down 'ere.

Makes a move towards centre table.

EILEEN (*nervously*): I suppose we've come to the right place.

HILDA: Don't be dotty, Eileen. Course we 'ave. You 'eard him say so. Three guests—that's us two and old Sam. (*Looks round happily.*) There's always a room like this in them mystery plays. The body'll be in the libr'ry. That'll be through 'ere. (*She has gone down to door* R. *and now opens it.*)

EILEEN: Hilda, you mustn't.

HILDA: There's only a sort of posh passage. (*Coming in again.*) Fancy old Farfy livin' 'ere!

EILEEN (*shocked*): You won't have to call her that here.

HILDA (*pleasantly*): Well, she can't expect me to start any of this ladyship business, not after workin' with 'er in the Assembly shop for the last eighteen months.

EILEEN: Well, I don't suppose she will—but—after all—it is different for her here, isn't it?

Sound of LOTTA *singing loudly and gaily from the kitchen.*

HILDA: Just listen to that. Proper singing too. I wonder who that is. (*She now goes towards kitchen door.*)

EILEEN (*alarmed again*): No, Hilda, honestly you mustn't.

KENTON *comes out down L.*

KENTON: 'Er ladyship will be free shortly—and asks if you would like to see the house.

The singing stops.

HILDA: Well, this is it, isn't it?

EILEEN: She means—have a look round, doesn't she?

KENTON: Yes, miss. Farfield 'All 'as many features of interest.

HILDA: All right. And anyhow I'd like to have a wash.

KENTON: Certainly miss. The main staircase is this way.

He ushers them upstairs ceremoniously. LOTTA *recommences singing off, down L. After a moment or two there are several rings at the front door. Then* SAM CAWTHRA *enters, rather cautiously. He is carrying some bottles of beer, etc., and smoking a pipe.*

SAM (*calling, not too loudly*): 'Ullo! 'Ullo! Anybody at 'ome.

He puts down the beer, etc., on table, then hears LOTTA *singing. He opens door down L. and calls through.*

Ah say! Is this Farfield 'All? Heigh! 'Ave Ah come to t'right shop?

He steps back a pace or two, and LOTTA *enters down L. through open door. She is wearing apron, etc., for cooking.*

LOTTA: Oh—hello!

SAM: 'Ow d'yer do?

LOTTA: You have not been sent to be billeted here?

SAM: No, no, don't worry. Ah'm only 'ere just for t'evening—that is—if this is Farfield 'All.

LOTTA: Yes it is. Oh—you are from the factory where Lady Farfield works?

SAM: That's right. T'aircraft factory. Sam Cawthra's my name.

LOTTA: Yes, yes—of course—I have heard Lady Farfield speak of you, Mr. Cawthra. And the two girls have already arrived.

SAM (*pointing to the table*): Ah thought they must 'ave. We've brought you a few things.

LOTTA (*going to table*): Oh—but how wonderful! All these nice things. They will make a great difference to the supper. It will be a real celebration.

SAM: Well, that's the idea, isn't it?

LOTTA: Yes, of course. Beer too!

SAM: Ay, an' it's not a bad drop o' stuff either for war-time An' Ah don't know about you, but after cycling five or six mile Ah'm parched an' could tak' a glass this minute. What about you?

LOTTA: Yes—I think that would be very nice—Mr. Cawthra.

Here are some mugs. (*One of them begins to pour out the beer.*) Thank. you. But oh!—how stupid of me. I must introduce myself Lotta Schulberg, once of the Vienna Volksopera—and now—well, an exile, you know. Years ago, I was—what you call a star—in Vienna. And now I do the house-keeping and cooking here.

SAM (*shaking hands*): Good for you!

LOTTA: That is very nice of you—Mr. Cawthra.

SAM: An' you've kept yer voice an' all. Ah 'eard yer. An' Ah knaw a bit o' good singing when Ah 'ear it. Yorkshire, yer knaw. An' Ah'd like to 'ear some more later on.

LOTTA: That would be a very great pleasure for me. Not because I want—as you say—to show off—but because when I sing—I forget. Friends who are dead or have vanished come alive again—I see their faces—I hear their voices—and the theatres, the cafés, the lovely old streets—of my city—they are alight again—but no—forgive me—I am being stupid——

SAM: No, you're not. You're all right. Well—— (*Raising his glass.*) 'ere's to us an' to 'ell with 'Itler. (*They both drink.*)

LOTTA (*fiercely*): He has always been in hell—and that is why he destroys other people's happiness. I should like to have come with Lady Farfield to make airplanes with you—but that was not possible—so—I do the cooking. Perhaps one day I shall sing again in Vienna—if not—then I do something else—more cooking, perhaps. It does not matter so long as *they*—the Nazi cheats and murderers—and all the people like them—have gone—and all nice simple friendly people—in Yorkshire—in Austria—anywhere—everywhere—can get to know each other and understand each other——

SAM: That's right. An' just let anybody try an' stop us, that's all. We're getting our monkey up——

LOTTA (*baffled*): Your monkey up?

SAM: Nay, don't bother with it. Leave it. (*Looking round.*) Well, Ah'd think twice afore Ah'd want to live 'ere. Tak' a bit o' lightin' an' warmin' an' cleanin', this place. No great shakes really, is it, when you tak' a good look at it? The wife would want to 'ave a do at this if it were 'ers.

LOTTA: But it is impossible to know where to begin, with a house this size and no staff at all—except one old man. And we have had dozens and dozens of people billeted on us.

HILDA *and* EILEEN *now come down, with* KENTON.

SAM: Ah—'ere's the girls.

KENTON: I will see if her ladyship is disengaged now. (*To* SAM.) Good evening, sir. Are you a member of the—er—factory party?

SAM: That's right. What about you?

KENTON: Kenton, sir. 'Er ladyship's butler.

SAM: Ah see. Well, Ah don't think yer'll need to do much buttlin' for us to-night. We can buttle for ourselves. Big place you've got 'ere, isn't it?

KENTON: Yes, sir. We used to keep quite a large establishment 'ere at Farfield 'All, but of course, sir, times 'ave changed.

SAM: They 'ave, an' they'll do a lot more changing afore we've finished. But don't let us keep yer, if yer busy.

KENTON: Thank you, sir. I will inform 'er ladyship of your arrival.

Goes out down L.

LOTTA (*laughing*): Her ladyship, at this minute, is finishing cleaning her auto-cycle. Poor old Kenton!

HILDA: I can't get over 'im.

SAM: Taks it all seriously, doesn't 'e? Owerdoin' it, Ah'd say.

LOTTA (*confidentially*): You must not mind him, please. You see, is he very old, and he has been the butler here for a long, long time—and now he forgets and does not understand what is happening—and sometines he thinks this war is the last war, and sometimes he forgets about any war, and often he thinks nothing has changed.

SAM: They might ha' found room for 'im in t'House of Commons. But I must introduce yer.

LOTTA (*smiling at the girls*): Lotta Schulberg—once of the Viennese Volksopera—now—in the kitchen——

SAM: This is one of our Assembly girls—Eileen——

LOTTA: You have beautiful eyes.

EILEEN (*abashed but delighted*): Go on—I haven't—have I?

LOTTA: But of course—and you ought to *use* them. Has nobody ever told you? What a waste! Also, you have a sensitive refined nature. Sometimes I know at once about a person. I am rather psychic, you know. (*To* SAM.) Are you psychic, Mr. Cawthra?

SAM: No, whenever I know at once about anybody, Ah'm always wrong. And this is another of our Assembly girls——

HILDA: I'm Hilda. What have I got?

LOTTA (*who doesn't know*): You have—(*She pauses impressively*)—very good luck—I think.

HILDA: Well, I doubt that.

EILEEN (*hastily*): Oh you can't say that, Hilda—look at last Tuesday——

HILDA: Never mind about last Tuesday—look at last Saturday—do you call that luck? Six miles to a dance—and it was the wrong night.

EILEEN: But that was only an accident——

HILDA (*loudly*): Well, if you 'ave good luck, you don't 'ave accidents——

Telephone rings. LOTTA *goes to answer it.*

LOTTA (*at telephone*): This is Farfield Hall—yes? All right—I wait——

HILDA: Eileen, look!

EILEEN (*turning*): What?

HILDA (*pointing*): All them animals' 'eads.

LOTTA (*still at telephone, but to* HILDA): They are awful, aren't they, those stupid animals? (*Into telephone.*) No, I am not talking to you—I am waiting——

SAM: Big game 'unting, that's what that is. One o' the favourite pursuits o' the leisure class at one time—big game 'unting. Ol' Musso an' Fatty Goering wouldn't look bad up there wi' glass eyes in.

LOTTA (*into telephone*): Yes . . . Farfield Hall—yes . . . Ministry of *What?* . . . is there such a Ministry? (*Laughs.*) Well, I think it is very comical . . . Well, what is it you want? . . . No, Mr. Fleming is *not* here any more . . . Yes, he was . . .

everybody has been billeted here . . . but he left yesterday . . . Yes, I saw him go . . . And good-bye to *you.*

Puts down telephone and turns to visitors, smiling.

Why are they always so stupid, those girls on the telephones of ministries? And now I must take these beautiful presents into the kitchen and prepare for supper. But first I wish to tell you we are all so proud—so very proud—that Lady Farfield is now a *charge-hand.* It is wonderful. I said at once we must have a little party—to celebrate. A charge-hand.

SAM: That's right. And not done by influence, y'know.

LOTTA (*proudly*): No, no—not at all. She has worked her way right from the bottom right up to the top.

SAM: Well, not quite to the top. But Ah knaw what yer mean.

LOTTA: And I tell you this. Do not be afraid.

SAM: All right, Ah won't be. But why?

LOTTA: Lady Farfield will be strict—but just. She will give you your orders—so——

SAM (*aghast*): Give *me* orders!

HILDA (*impressively*): He's the *foreman.*

LOTTA (*impressed*): Oh—I am sorry—of course—the *foreman.*

SAM: All right, yer needn't look at me now as if I wor Stafford Cripps. But Ah 'ave bin on t'job a long time. Ah wor putting planes together when some of yer 'adn't started undressing yer dolls.

LOTTA (*gaily*): For me—I wish it was true. But now I really must return to the kitchen. (*Taking up things.*)

EILEEN: Can I help you with supper? I'd quite like to.

LOTTA (*going down L. with things*): Yes, certainly, thank you, in a little while perhaps. But you would like to see Lady Farfield first, of course. (*She is now at door, opening it.*) Here she is.

She holds door open and LADY FARFIELD *enters, still in greasy overalls.*

LADY FARFIELD: Hello, hello, everybody!

SAM, HILDA, EILEEN: Hello (etc.).

LOTTA: Look what nice things they have brought us for supper.

LADY FARFIELD: Oh—I say—how marvellous.

LOTTA: Now—I make something—very good. You'll see. For how many?

LADY FARFIELD: Just us—and Pauline—and Kenton, I hope.

LOTTA: I hope too. But I doubt it. Somebody always arrives. We have had everybody now except the Red Army and the Jugoslavian Partisans.

She goes out. LADY FARFIELD *smiles at the visitors.*

LADY FARFIELD: I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting, but I did want to finish cleaning my auto-bike. Well, what do you think of this place?

HILDA: Big, isn't it?

SAM: And it 'ud tak' some keeping up.

LADY FARFIELD: Yes, it's big—and it just can't be kept up. I told you it's hopelessly untidy and neglected, so I won't apologise. It looks awful and I can't help it. Before the war there were ten servants here. Now there's a woman from the village who comes in occasionally—Lotta, who's sweet and a great help but can't be expected to start scrubbing—and poor old Kenton——

SAM: An' 'e's a bit barmy, isn't 'e?

LADY FARFIELD: I suppose so. He never knows quite what's happening. And then —apart from Pauline, the Land Girl, that's the lot. To keep this huge place going—I ask you!

EILEEN: And then you have people billeted on you all the time, don't you?

LADY FARFIELD: We've had thousands of them. You heard what Lotta said. Half the United Nations war effort seems to have been through this house. You could look round at the damage and write the history of the war from it. We started, in 1939, with fifty women and children from Sheffield. When they went back home, the battalion headquarters of the Loamshire Light Infantry arrived. After them, the Polish Air Force. Then—let me think—yes, sixty-two women and children from Bootle. After that, Anti-Aircraft and Searchlights. Then a company of A.T.S. Then the Civil Service, mostly with colds. Then—some assorted Americans—with the Bob Hope and other programmes in full blast, day and night. But now—at last—nobody. Just ourselves to-night. Isn't that wonderful? The last four people

who were billeted on us left yesterday, so to-night we have the place to ourselves. That's why I was so anxious for us to have our little party. And here we are!

KENTON *enters from down L. with tray, bottle of sherry and glasses.*

Thank you, Kenton. I thought we'd have a quick drink—it's real sherry—and then I'd rush off and change. Will you pour out the drinks, Mr. Cawthra——

SAM (*correcting her*): Sam.

LADY FARFIELD: Sam. No, don't you bother, Kenton.

Telephone rings sharply. KENTON *goes to answer it, as the others cluster round the drinks, and* EILEEN *and* HILDA *light cigarettes.*

KENTON (*at telephone*): Farfield Hall—yes . . . I will see if 'er ladyship can speak to you . . . What name?

LADY FARFIELD: Who is it?

KENTON (*vaguely*): A person wishes to speak to you, me lady, on official business.

LADY FARFIELD (*going over*): Oh dear—I don't like the sound of this. (*At telephone.*) Yes—Lady Farfield speaking . . . Oh, *no!* Oh dear, dear, dear, dear . . . Why? Because we hoped not to have anybody at least just for this week-end . . . We've had *everybody* all the time . . . No, if you can't, you can't . . . Of course. Who are they? Two Air Force officers possibly? Well, that's all right——

HILDA (*with enthusiasm*): Certainly it's all right.

LADY FARFIELD: But there's some doubt about them, you say? . . . I see, these other two are certain . . . Not women, I hope—wanting cups of tea and hot water bottles . . . Oh I see . . . An American officer, yes. And who else? (*Delighted.*) A *servant?* (*Dashed.*) Oh—a *Civil* Servant . . . Ministry of Reconstruction . . . To-night? Any time now? . . . No, only I'm giving a little party for a few friends . . . Very well, we'll do our best . . . Yes, I know, but you can't cook and eat ration cards, can you?

Puts down telephone and looks at the others with droll despair. Let's hope they're both so tired, they'll go straight to bed.

KENTON: More guests, me lady?

LADY FARFIELD: Yes. Two gentlemen for certain—to-night.

KENTON: Very good, me lady. Shall I give instructions for two of the bachelor rooms in the East Wing to be got ready for the gentlemen?

LADY FARFIELD (*half laughing, but touched*): No, Kenton, you must try and remember that you can't give instructions because there isn't anybody left to give instructions to.

KENTON (*confused*): I'm sorry, me lady—I was forgetting——

LADY FARFIELD (*gently*): I know. It doesn't matter. But you're forgetting too that we haven't been able to use the East Wing for the last two years, not since we had those incendiaries. No, I'll see to their rooms.

KENTON: Yes, me lady. (*Goes out down L.*)

EILEEN: We can help with the rooms.

HILDA: If you'll show us where they are.

LADY FARFIELD: That's sweet of you. It would be a help. I hoped we'd have the place to ourselves to-night. Just for once.

HILDA: What'll the Civil Servant be like?

LADY FARFIELD: Probably dull but harmless. Let's hope he'll creep away with a good book. As for the American officer, he might be terribly nice——

HILDA: I know—like Gary Cooper.

LADY FARFIELD: Yes, he *might*. Then again, he might be very dull, one of the slow boring kind. On the other hand, he might be a bit *too* lively—you know——

SAM: I've seen 'em.

HILDA (*eagerly*): What about those Air Force chaps they're sending.

LADY FARFIELD: Two officers may have to be sent up here from the Experimental Station, but it isn't certain, so don't count on it.

HILDA: I don't care. I like sergeants best. They're not so fancy, and you can understand what they're talking about.

LADY FARFIELD: I really must change—and get those beds made up.

EILEEN: We'll help you.

LADY FARFIELD: Come on, then. Sam, you must amuse yourself for a few minutes. But Pauline ought to be coming in any time now.

SAM: Who's Pauline?

LADY FARFIELD: She's our Land Girl. Rather peculiar but quite a nice child really. You have a talk to her.

The three women go upstairs, leaving SAM *with his pipe. He looks round, notices the stuffed heads, and is particularly fascinated by a very ugly buffalo head—or something of the sort. He takes a chair to stand on, and has a close look at it. Slowly he lifts a hand to touch its nose—the action being in full view of the audience. Meanwhile,* PAULINE CHESTER, *in Land Girl uniform and carrying a basket of vegetables, etc., has entered. She is a rather small girl, in her early twenties, quite attractive, but with a precise, didactic though calm manner that is quaint and incongruous. When she sees what he is up to, she quietly goes up to him unnoticed.*

PAULINE: I shouldn't do that if I were you.

SAM (*surprised, turning on his chair*): Do what?

PAULINE: Feel its nose. You were going to feel its nose, weren't you?

SAM (*slightly embarrassed*): Well—as a matter o' fact—I did just want to see what it felt like. No 'arm in that, is there?

PAULINE: No. But I did that with one of them when I first came here—it was a buffalo shot in Uganda in 1909.

SAM: Well, what 'appened?

PAULINE: The whole beastly thing came down and nearly smothered me. They can't take it, y'know. Everything here is very ramshackle and dilapidated. Including this chair, actually——

SAM (*with touch of alarm*): Oh—is it? (*Gets down at once. Then he grins at* PAULINE.) You're Pauline the Land Girl, eh?

PAULINE: Yes. Who are you?

SAM: Sam Cawthra—foreman of Assembly—where Lady Farfield works.

PAULINE: I see. You're not billeted here, are you?

SAM: No. Just 'ere for t'evening. Bit of a party.

PAULINE: Yes, Lady Farfield said something about it. Can I get you anything?

SAM: Well, I'll 'ave another drink o' this beer I brought. I reckon nowt o' sherry an' suchlike.

PAULINE: Neither do I. We'll both have some beer. Then I'll drop these vegetables and eggs into the kitchen.

SAM: Eggs, eh?

PAULINE: Three. But one of them's rather odd. Actually, I think the hen that laid it—Red Lizzie—is going mad.

SAM: 'Ow can yer tell?

PAULINE: By her general behaviour. I hope you're not hungry.

SAM: Well, I'm fairly peckish. Why? (*She drinks.*) Cheers. All the best! (*Drinks, then surveys her with interest.*) Yer know, I'd call you a pretty cool card. How d'yer like being a Land Girl?

PAULINE: Until I came here I didn't like it. Not because I minded the work, but I hate farmers. I was with three before I got this job, and they all hated me, and I hated them.

SAM: What's wrong with 'em?

PAULINE (*coolly*): Greedy, selfish, miserable old blighters. After the war, we ought to take a few out and shoot 'em.

SAM (*aghast*): *Shoot 'em!*

PAULINE: Yes, shoot 'em. And a few fat old business men. Make all the difference.

SAM: Mak' plenty o' difference, no doubt—but nay—dash it—yer can't start shootin' folk like that.

PAULINE: Why not? Thousands of nice young men, who've never done anybody any harm, are being shot and drowned and burnt to death. Why shouldn't we shoot a few nasty old men, who are always doing everybody harm?

SAM: Ay—but—there's a lot o' difference between chaps bein' killed in a war an' then just shootin' people 'cos you don't like 'em.

PAULINE: I don't see any, except it would do some real good killing off a few of these nasty old men who are so greedy and selfish and stupid.

SAM: My word—you're a bloodthirsty young woman an' no mistake. Where were you brought up?

PAULINE (*rather primly*): I was brought up chiefly by a maiden aunt in Cheltenham.

SAM: You've gone a long way since then. I should think Russia's about your style now.

PAULINE (*coolly*): If this country doesn't improve, I shall go to Russia—if they'll have me—and work on a collective farm.

SAM: But 'aven't yer got a young man?

PAULINE: No, so far I haven't bothered. But I've been thinking lately that perhaps it's time I looked around for one.

SAM: 'E'll 'ave to be careful after yer do find 'im. One wrong move an' you'll be shooting '*im*. Well, there's one or two chaps comin' to-night so yer'd better look 'em over. One's an American officer.

PAULINE: Americans don't attract me. Their attitude towards sex is so adolescent.

SAM: 'Ere, are there any more Land Girls like you? I thought we were seein' summat these days in t'factory, but we know nowt.

PAULINE: You're not being rude now, are you?

SAM: Bless yer 'eart, no! I was just talkin' free-an'-easy, like I would to any chap I was 'aving a glass o' beer wi'. Nay, nay, don't tak' offence.

PAULINE: No, of course I won't. But I'm not very good at telling whether people are being rude or just rather matey. And you seemed such a nice man at first that I was disappointed. (*Now she smiles at him.*) But now it's all right.

SAM: Course it is. The best o' friends.

They shake hands solemnly. HILDA *now comes hurrying down the stairs, calling across to* SAM *as she reaches lower steps.*

HILDA (*calling*): Mr. Cawthra—Sam!

SAM (*rising*): Well, what is it?

HILDA: You understand about putting beds together—buts and bolts an' all that—don't yer?

SAM (*moving*): Course I do. Am I wanted upstairs?

HILDA: Yes, and I'm not. Straight along at the top—you'll 'ear 'em talking.

He goes up and she comes across to PAULINE.

You're Pauline, the Land Girl, aren't yer?

PAULINE: Yes, Will you have some beer?

HILDA: No, I think I'll take a drop more of this sherry wine, if you don't mind. My name's Hilda Packet, and I work with Lady Farfield and Sam at the factory. There's two of us come with 'im—two girls, I mean—'cos we all started about the same time as Lady Farfield in one of the machine shops—an' then we all went to Assembly—so we're sort of friends, yer see—well, as a matter of fact, the one upstairs, Eileen, and me—we're very great friends. 'Ere, are yer interested, 'cos I can shut up if you're not?

PAULINE: No, I love it. You see, I spend all day with hens and geese and cabbages, and you don't get a word out of them. Go on about you and Eileen. Where do you live?

HILDA (*immediately in full flood again*): Oh—we're in the same billet—Mrs. Batsby's. 'Er 'usband used to keep a garage, but that's gone now and 'e's at the factory too—so Mrs. Batsby looks after five of us—'er an' 'er sister—the sister's older than Mrs. Batsby—old maid she is—and nosey!—she's awful. The minute you're out, she's runnin' through everything you've got—an' no shame about it neither. "You'll catch your death o' cold, wearin' them things underneath," she'll say. An' another time, she says, "I wouldn't have nothing to do with that chap you've got the photo of," she says. "That corporal, I mean—'e's up to no good, I can tell by his photo." An' I says, "Well, if you must know, that's my own brother 'Erbert—an' in future you mind yours an' I'll mind mine." Oo, I was that mad at 'er.

PAULINE: And was it your brother's photograph?

HILDA: Just as luck would 'ave it, yes it *was* our 'Erbert's photo. But after that I gave it to Eileen, 'cos 'er an' 'Erbert started writin' to each other. They've never seen each other, but I'd told 'im about 'er—'cos she's my friend—an' she knows all about 'im. An' one day she says, "I wish I'd a soldier in Africa or somewhere to write to"—'cos Eileen's very shy, an' doesn't bother much with boys—says she doesn't care about 'em, but yer know how much that's worth—so I says—yer know, just for a bit o' fun—I says, "Well, write to our 'Erbert—yer can 'ave 'im for me." So she did, an' 'e writes back, an' now they've been at it for months—writin' an' writin'—though God knows

what they wrote about. I don't see 'ow they can find enough to write about, not when they've never seen each other—do you?

PAULINE: Yes. If I once started writing to a boy, I could write reams and reams and reams.

HILDA: What about?

PAULINE: Oh—everything. About what I do here—about Horace the old gander and Red Lizzie the mad hen—and about the Ministry of Agriculture and Reconstruction and the Coming Revolution.

HILDA: Oh—you're one o' these brainy ones, aren't you?

PAULINE (*firmly*): Yes I am. I have a lot of time to think while I'm working, and I've thought about *everything*.

HILDA: Well, I suppose it's all right if yer fancy it. I can't be bothered. Eileen tried it one time—read books an' all that—an' talked to Miss Wilson—our welfare officer—but when she started writin' to our 'Erbert, she packed it up an just thought about 'im instead, though 'ow she can do that for long beats me, knowin' 'Erbert. But I believe if anything 'appened to 'im, she'd 'ave a broken 'eart. I'll bet you don't believe in broken 'earts, do yer?

PAULINE: No, I don't.

HILDA: I bet yer don't believe in 'ardly anything, do yer?

PAULINE (*in calm oracular manner*): I believe in the triumphant destiny of Man.

HILDA: Crumbs! Is that all?

PAULINE (*same manner*): No, I believe in the irresistible forward march of Man towards a classless world of peace, prosperity and justice.

HILDA: Go on! 'Ere, what man's this?

PAULINE: Just Man. All men.

HILDA: Well, they'll 'ave to be a lot diff'rent from the men I know. Anyhow, be a bit careful what you say to Eileen.

PAULINE: I'm never careful what I say to anybody. Don't believe in it.

HILDA: And I'll bet yer don't.

PAULINE: But I won't hurt her feelings, if that's what you mean.

HILDA: Peculiar sort o' girl you are. Do yer talk to boys like this?

PAULINE: Certainly. I've only one way of talking. But I'm not always thinking about boys. I believe you are. You ought to be married.

HILDA: Are you telling me!

There is a sound of a car arriving outside.

That's a car. Somebody's come. Let's have a look.

They go to window at back and look L.

PAULINE (*as she looks*): American Army car. It must be the American officer who's coming to stay.

HILDA (*also looking*) I wonder what he's like. Oh!—— (*Disappointed.*) That must be 'im, getting out. 'E's rather old, isn't 'e? Specs too. Oh—I don't think much of 'im.

PAULINE (*moving down*): We must let Kenton attend to this. I shall go in the kitchen and help Lotta. You'd better come too.

HILDA (*moving too*): All right. So long as it's not peelin' potatoes.

Front door bell is heard and KENTON *comes out L.*

PAULINE: There's an American officer at the door, Kenton.

KENTON: Thank you, miss.

PAULINE *and* HILDA *exit down L.*

WEBBER'S VOICE (*off*): Say, is this Farfield Hall?

KENTON: Yes, sir. This is Lady Farfield's residence.

WEBBER'S VOICE (*off*): Fine! (*Calling back to driver.*) Okay, Joe—this is it. Pick me up in the morning, will you? Yeah, about quarter of nine. Good night.

As WEBBER *comes in, sound of car going off.* MAJOR GEORGE WEBBER *is a fairly plump, clean-shaven, colourless type of Middle-Western American, wearing large octagonal spectacles, in his early forties. He is a pleasant man with a slow solemn manner. He is carrying some brand-new luggage.*

WEBBER *enters, followed by* KENTON *with suitcases.*

WEBBER: I'm Major Webber—George Webber. I've been sent along here by headquarters.

KENTON (*polite, resigned*): Yes, sir.

WEBBER (*delighted by the thought*): Now—to me—you look like a butler.

KENTON (*mildly surprised*): Yes, sir.

WEBBER: Well, well, well! It took a war to bring me over here to meet a butler. How are you?

Holds out a hand, which KENTON, *after some hesitation, shakes.* What's your name?

KENTON Kenton, Sir.

WEBBER What comes before it—Joe, Jack, Sam?

KENTON As a matter of fact, sir, my Christian name is—Frederick.

WEBBER Fine! Shall I call you Frederick—or just Fred?

KENTON Neither, sir, if you don't mind——

WEBBER Now—go on—I don't need any of this feudal stuff—I'm just a plain democrat-

KENTON (*with dignity*): Sir, when I am on duty, I am accustomed to being addressed as Kenton. Only close relations and old friends would call me Frederick or Fred. And if I may say so without giving offence, sir—should you insist upon calling me Frederick or Fred, then you are not only ignoring the custom of this and other English gentlemen's houses, but you are also intruding into my private life, sir.

WEBBER (*slowly*): Do I understand what you're talking about?

KENTON (*looking him in the eye, slowly*): I think so, sir.

WEBBER: Okay—Kenton. (*Looking around.*) Well, well, you got quite a place here, haven't you? One of the stately homes of England.

KENTON: Yes, sir.

WEBBER: I guess nobody's going to run a home like this on a nigger and a boy.

KENTON: A nigger and a boy? Certainly not, sir. The staff here, sir, is ten indoor servants, and five outdoor.

WEBBER (*both shocked and delighted*): Ten indoor servants and five outdoor! Well, sir—we've been asked not to criticise—but I must say I just don't know how you folks justify such a use of man-power at a time like this.

KENTON (*ignoring this*): When the late master—afterwards Sir

Robert—celebrated his twenty-first birthday, sir, we sat down twenty-five in the servants' hall—and three hundred of the tenantry had their supper in the grounds.

WEBBER: Tenantry, eh? Just old feudal customs still going on. And twenty-five sitting down in the servants' hall, eh? When was this—since the war began?

KENTON: In nineteen-hundred and three, sir.

WEBBER: Oh—way back. That's different. Still—— (*Shaking his head.*) Ten indoor servants—five outdoor——

KENTON (*proudly*): It takes three to polish the silver properly.

WEBBER (*shaking his head*): Fiddling while Rome burns.

KENTON (*same manner*): When the Hunt meets here and we have a Hunt Breakfast——

WEBBER: Hunt Breakfast! Now, do you mean red coats and packs of dogs——

KENTON (*reproachfully*) 'Ounds, sir—not dogs.

WEBBER: Hounds or dogs, I'd think you folks would be too busy these days to waste time, money and man-power on keeping up these feudal customs. I'm just a plain American——

KENTON (*politely, but with touch of irony*): Yes, sir.

WEBBER: And I'm here to defend the American way of life. I'm from the Middle West, Kenton—Indiana—and out there we're just plain folks.

KENTON: Quite different 'ere, sir. But you'll soon get used to it.

WEBBER: Well, it'll certainly be most interesting to get acquainted with some of your old-world aristocratic customs. Mrs. Webber'll get a kick out of it.

KENTON: Who will get a kick, sir?

WEBBER: Mrs. Webber.

KENTON: No lady of that name 'ere, sir.

WEBBER: No, no, I know there isn't, but my name's Webber and Mrs. Webber's my wife. Say, I'd better go up to my room and wash up. Where is it?

KENTON (*rather confused*): I'm not quite certain yet, sir. I'll 'ave to enquire. I did give instructions that two of the bachelor apartments in the East Wing were to be made ready for you and

the other gentleman, but I am now under the impression, sir, that those instructions have been countermanded. Perhaps you will take a seat, sir, while I enquire.

WEBBER: Be glad to.

He sits down and lights a cigarette while KENTON *slowly goes upstairs. After a moment,* LOTTA *peeps out of doorway L., sees* WEBBER, *and comes in smiling. He notices her, and politely rises and holds his cigarette in his hand.*

LOTTA: Good evening. How do you do?

WEBBER: Fine, thanks! I'm Major Webber, just arrived. The butler told me to wait till he found out about my room.

LOTTA: He will probably forget to come back. I am Lotta Schulberg. Did you know Vienna in the old days?

WEBBER: No, this is my first trip to Europe. You from Vienna?

LOTTA: Yes, I used to play leading roles with the Vienna Volksopera. Do smoke, please. Is that a nice American cigarette you are smoking?

WEBBER (*producing packet*): Certainly is. Will you have one?

LOTTA: Thank you very much. You know, I adore American cigarettes.

WEBBER: Well, take the whole pack——

LOTTA: Oh—no—I could not do that—— (*She takes the packet and puts it in her pocket.*)

WEBBER (*heartily*): Go on. Glad for you to have them. Mrs. Webber's going to get a big surprise when I write and tell her I've met a Viennese operatic star. You staying here too?

LOTTA (*as she lights a cigarette from his lighter*): Oh yes—I am the cook. Supper will be ready in twenty minutes. Good-bye fot the present.

She goes off down L. humming gaily as she smokes and WEBBER *stares after her in astonishment. He has no sooner returned to his seat, than* SAM, *smoking a pipe and in his shirt-sleeves and holding a large spanner, comes down nearly to the bottom of the stairs and calls.*

SAM: Oy!

WEBBER (*turning, surprised*): Me?

SAM: Ay. Sorry yer've bin kept waiting, but them iron bedsteads wor in a 'ell of a tangle an' I've only just sorted 'em out. Shan't be long now, though. 'Ave a drop o' that beer if yer fancy it.

WEBBER: Not right now, but thanks all the same.

SAM: An' d'yer mind answerin' t'door if t'other chap comes 'cos I've got old Whoosit 'elpin' me.

WEBBER (*puzzled but helpful*): Be glad to, though I don't know my way around here. Say, are you another butler?

SAM (*aghast*): Me! I'm t'foreman from Assembly shop in t'aircraft factory. Butler!

He goes upstairs and WEBBER *is left absolutely bewildered. Before he has recovered from his surprise,* PAULINE *enters briskly.*

PAULINE: How do you do? Is it Lebber or Webber?

WEBBER: Webber.

PAULINE: Lotta wasn't sure. I'm Pauline Chester—member of the Women's Land Army attached to the estate here.

WEBBER (*shaking hands*): Fine! I hear you girls are doing a great job.

PAULINE (*very briskly*): Britain now produces two-thirds of the food she needs. Six million more acres have been ploughed up. The agricultural production per head is now probably the highest in the world. After the revolution, when we have collective farming, it will be higher still.

WEBBER (*doing his best*): But are you going to have a revolution?

PAULINE (*calmly*): Certainly. If it comes soon it can be peaceful. If we wait, then it will be sudden, violent—and bloody. And I don't care which.

Makes as if to move towards stairs.

WEBBER: Now wait a minute, Miss Chester——

PAULINE: Call me Pauline, if you like. Everybody does.

WEBBER: Okay. Pauline then——

PAULINE (*holding up a finger*): But no reactionary talk, no Wall Street stuff——

WEBBER (*exasperated but not out of temper*): Say, wait a minute. What about your fifteen servants?

PAULINE: Fifteen servants?

WEBBER: Yeah. Ten indoors, five outdoors—three to clean the silver——

PAULINE: Where?

WEBBER: Why, right here.

PAULINE: There aren't any servants here. (*Smiling calmly at him.*) Excuse me!

She goes quickly upstairs. He has not recovered from this fresh shock when the front door bell peals loudly. After a moment's hesitation, he goes towards the main doors at back and opens them just in time to admit RAYMOND KILLIGREW, *who comes staggering in with an immense double armful of old luggage, including two violin cases and bags, etc.* KILLIGREW *is a carelessly dressed, scholarly-looking and somewhat eccentric man in his fifties, with a quick staccato way of talking. He dumps the bags, etc., down and goes out for another load, talking rapidly and loudly all the time. His second load consists of string quartette scores, tied in bundles.*

KILLIGREW: Farfield Hall, eh? I was lucky—very lucky. Local farmer gave me a lift, otherwise might not have been here for hours. Int'resting fellow in his way too. Gave me some useful information. Didn't know the American Army was here. But no reason why they shouldn't be, of course. Damned heavy these things. Quartette scores. Take 'em with me everywhere. Well, well, here we are.

He lights his pipe and looks round cheerfully.

Untidy—rather dirty—I imagine—and obviously neglected—but probably got very good acoustic properties. My name's Killigrew.

WEBBER: I'm Major Webber.

KILLIGREW: How d'you do? Billeted here?

WEBBER: Yeah. But only just arrived. That's my baggage. And—say—I don't seem to get the hang of it here at all.

KILLIGREW: New to the country perhaps?

WEBBER: Yeah. Only landed last week. But as I was saying, I just don't seem to get the hang of it——

KILLIGREW (*cutting in ruthlessly*): You soon will. Don't worry. Play the fiddle or the 'cello?

WEBBER (*surprised*): No, I don't.

KILLIGREW: Pity. Always hoping to make a up string

quartette. That's why I carry the scores round with me. Farmer gave me one possible name, though—got the telephone number somewhere——

WEBBER (*while* KILLIGREW *is searching*): There's an operatic singer in the kitchen.

KILLIGREW: Let her stay there. Detest opera. Cheap hysterical muck, most of it. Ah, here it is. Telephone anywhere? Yes, I see.

Goes over to it at once, glancing at the number.

Oh—Fassington Two Five Three, please . . . Yes . . . All right . . .

WEBBER (*as* KILLIGREW *waits*): I didn't know they billeted civilians in this country.

KILLIGREW: Certainly. We've billeted millions—war workers, land girls, civil servants. I'm a Civil Servant. Ministry of Reconstruction. New Ministry. I used to be with the Board of Trade.

WEBBER: Is that so, Mr. Killigrew? What did you do there?

KILLIGREW: Closed things down. Thousands of businesses——

WEBBER (*awed*): Closed 'em down?

KILLIGREW: Yes, thousands of 'em. (*At telephone.*) Oh—is that Mr.—er—Bramley . . . Well, my name's Killigrew, and I'm staying at Farfield Hall . . . and I'm told you have two daughters who play the viola and the 'cello respectively and I want to get some string quartettes going . . . Oh, they are . . . both of 'em, eh? Yes, good girls, but that doesn't help me. Do you happen to know any other people who play the fiddle round here? All right, thanks very much . . . (*To* WEBBER.) Gone to ask his wife. Both his daughters are Wrens. What were we saying?

WEBBER: You were telling me that you are in this new Ministry of Reconstruction, Mr. Killigrew, which interests me quite a lot. Tell me, what do you people propose to do?

KILLIGREW: We don't know yet. There are two schools of thought. One school says "Go straight on. Make a peace effort just as we made a war effort." The other school of thought, if you can call it thought—— (*To telephone.*) Hello, yes? . . . But how old? . . . Eighty? . . . No use, I'm afraid . . . Yes,

Fraser?—Cornland Three Four? . . . What's the other name? . . . Henniman . . . Not on the telephone . . . I see . . .' Well, thanks very much. Good-bye.

Puts down telephone and lights his pipe again.

I'll try that number later. The other fellow isn't on the telephone, and they don't think he's played for years. But you never know. What were you asking me?

WEBBER: This other school of thought, as you called it—y'know, about Reconstruction.

KILLIGREW: Oh—yes. Well, their bright idea is to put everything back to where it was before the war.

WEBBER: And can you do it?

KILLIGREW: My dear sir—here are some eggs all scrambled in the pan—and here, on the side, are all the empty shells—and all they ask you to do is to unscramble the eggs and put 'em all back neatly in their shells. And while they're about it, they might as well ask us to put the eggs back into the hens.

WEBBER: Say—Mr. Killigrew—you're not my idea of a British Civil Servant.

KILLIGREW: Why? Too short, too tall, too old, too young, too fat, too thin—what?

WEBBER: Well, there you go. I expected you'd be kinda slow and pompous. But you think and talk fast—more like a business man.

KILLIGREW (*horrified*): Business man! Good heavens! (*Looks about him.*) Where is everybody? We must see about our rooms.

Enter HILDA *from kitchen with some things for the table—bread, etc.* KILLIGREW *sees her.*

Oh—good evening. I'm Mr. Killigrew. Billeted here. Where is everybody? What about our rooms? What happens?

HILDA (*sharp but not bad-tempered*): What 'appens? Well, for one thing, I come out for the evening, after working 'ard all the week, an' I find myself 'elping to get supper ready. Rest o' the party's upstairs putting yer beds up. (*To* WEBBER.) I say, what are you?

WEBBER (*rather startled*): Me—well, what do you think I am?

HILDA: I can never tell by them things you wear what you

Americans are. I was out with one of your boys one night and I asked 'im to tell me, but 'e couldn't keep 'is mind on it.

WEBBER (*laughing*): Well, our boys certainly take some holding, when there's a pretty girl around.

HILDA (*direct not coquettish*): Would you call me pretty?

WEBBER: Certainly would. And I'm a major—Major Webber. Surveying Department, U.S. War Department.

HILDA: Oh—surveying. I thought you looked a bit old to be a real soldier.

To KILLIGREW, *who is sniffing curiously at the sherry bottle.* What you sniffing at that for? D'yer want some?

KILLIGREW: What's it supposed to be?

HILDA: Sherry wine.

KILLIGREW: Most peculiar.

HILDA: Want some?

KILLIGREW: No, thanks.

WEBBER: I've got a bottle of Scotch in my bag, Mr. Killigrew, and I'll be glad if you'll join me in a drink when I get it out.

KILLIGREW: Delighted.

HILDA: Well, don't finish it between yer 'cos we're supposed to be 'aving a bit of a party 'ere—to celebrate——

KILLIGREW: What are you celebrating?

HILDA: Lady Farfield—she lives 'ere, y'know—an' she works with us at factory, an' she's just been made a charge 'and.

WEBBER (*astounded*): A charge-hand?

HILDA: Yes, an' not before time neither. Y'ought to 'ave seen some o' the charge 'ands we've 'ad, specially down in the machine shop! They didn't know whether it was Christmas or Tuesday, some of 'em didn't.

WEBBER (*earnest and bewildered*): I don't get the hang of this at all. I thought Lady Farfield was a member of your old privileged classes——

HILDA: If yer'd seen 'er coming through 'ere 'alf an hour since, after she'd been cleanin' her auto-bike, in 'er mucky old overall, yer'd 'ave thought she was Black Jack from the boiler 'ouse. Supper'll be on in a minute or two. Yer'd better get washed.

She marches off into kitchen.

WEBBER (*bewildered*): Mr. Killigrew, all this is new to me, and will you do me a favour and put me wise to what's going on around here——

KILLIGREW (*surprised at his bewilderment*): Nothing special, is there? A little party of some kind. Saturday night, y'know. Don't suppose they'll keep it up late or make too much noise—so I shouldn't worry.

WEBBER (*in despair*): No, you've got me wrong. But what about—well, that butler—and three men to clean the silver—and Hunt breakfasts——?

KILLIGREW: Hunt breakfast? Can't have a Hunt Breakfast, my dear chap. Be reasonable. Lucky to have any kind of breakfast. I haven't drawn a bacon ration for months. Always in the wrong place. Ah—here we are.

He says this because he sees LADY FARFIELD *coming to the bottom of the staircase.* LADY FARFIELD *is now properly dressed and looks a fine handsome woman. Behind them are* EILEEN *and* SAM, PAULINE *and* KENTON.

Lady Farfield?

LADY FARFIELD (*smiling*): Yes. I'm so sorry you've been kept waiting.

KILLIGREW: Not at all. Hope we're not a nuisance, arriving so unexpectedly. My name's Killigrew. And this is Major Webber.

LADY FARFIELD (*shaking hands*): How d'you do?

WEBBER (*who has not recovered yet*): Very pleased to meet you, Lady Farfield, and I feel it's a great privilege to be allowed to stay in your lovely home.

LADY FARFILED: I'm afraid it's not very lovely now, but it was once.

WEBBER: And I'll bet you get quite a nostalgia for the good old days, don't you?

LADY FARFIELD: Very rarely. They were much more comfortable, of course, but they were often very dull. And whatever we are now, we're certainly not dull. Now come along, everybody. Let me introduce you. Major Webber and Mr. Killigrew—

Miss Eileen Stocks and Mr. Sam Cawthra, who work with me—and that's Miss Pauline Chester, our Land Girl. And Kenton you've met already. Now let's get all these things upstairs so that you'll be in time for supper.

KILLIGREW *and* WEBBER *take some of their things and* SAM *and* KENTON *take the rest.*

EILEEN: What shall I do?

LADY FARFIELD: Well, if you feel you must do something, will you go into the kitchen and help Lotta—I think Hilda's there. Pauline can help me to finish laying the table.

EILEEN (*preparing to go*): I wish I knew how to cook.

LADY FARFIELD: You can learn how to cook.

EILEEN: I'd like to. It must be awful getting married if you don't know how to cook.

She goes into kitchen. LADY FARFIELD *and* PAULINE *finish laying the table.*

LADY FARFIELD: Poor Eileen's mind is rather running on marriage—because of Hilda's brother, who hasn't even seen her yet.

PAULINE (*calm and clear*): I think I shall marry somebody.

LADY FARFIELD (*amused*): Do you mean—just anybody?

PAULINE: Oh no—that would be stupid, of course. In fact, I shall select the young man very carefully.

LADY FARFIELD: Have you found him yet?

PAULINE: No, I've only just made up my mind about it.

LADY FARFIELD: Well, I think it's better to fall in love first.

PAULINE: I don't see why you shouldn't marry first, while you're still clear-headed and know what you're doing, and then fall in love with the man afterwards. Do you mind if I ask you something?

LADY FARFIELD: No, Pauline.

PAULINE: Well—I know you lost your husband—Sir Michael, wasn't it?—since the war. But you never seem to talk about him. Were you very much in love with him?

LADY FARFIELD: No. I was very fond of him, of course. We had a happy marriage on the whole. But he was older than I was—and—well, before that, there had been somebody else I

was in love with—only we had a stupid quarrel—so I married Sir Michael. I'd better luck than I deserved, but it isn't really a good idea—to marry one man just because you're angry with another one. Don't ever do it, Pauline.

PAULINE: I wouldn't, you know. I think I'd marry the one I was angry with, and then take it out of him afterwards.

LADY FARFIELD: You might not want to, then.

PAULINE: Then that would be all the better, because I don't really believe in taking it out of people. I don't believe in quarreling with people I like either.

LADY FARFIELD: Who does? But when you're in a highly emotional state—and are very excited about somebody—it's easy to quarrel. You wait, my dear. You won't always be so cool, calm and collected.

PAULINE: I didn't used to be, y'know, but when I decided to be a Land Girl and take to the good brown earth and the beasts and the fowls and the vegetables, I also decided at the same time to be calm and quiet and *firm*——

Telephone rings.

LADY FARFIELD: Oh dear—now what is it this time?

PAULINE: If you don't answer it, then it won't matter what it is.

HILDA *comes in with a dish of some kind—e.g. salad or vegetables.*

HILDA: Telephone.

LADY FARFIELD: We're wondering whether to answer it.

PAULINE: And I say—*don't.*

HILDA (*shocked*): Oo—but you must answer the telephone, mustn't you? If I'd one, I'd never dare not to answer it.

LADY FARFIELD (*as she goes*): I rather agree with you, Hilda. It simply *demands* to be answered. (*At telephone.*) Yes . . . speaking . . . Who? . . . Oh, is she? . . . Any minute, eh? All right, thank you.

Puts down telephone and looks at both girls.

What a nuisance! "Commodore Pentworthy is on her way, apologises for having been detained, but will now be here at any minute." I'd clean forgotten she was coming for supper to-night. Oh dear—oh dear!

PAULINE: Is that the terrible woman in uniform who came here once before, the one I had the stinking row with?

LADY FARFIELD: That's the one. And to-night, Pauline, there mustn't be a stinking row.

HILDA: I never 'eard of a woman Commodore before.

LADY FARFIELD: Phyllis Pentworthy, is my husband's cousin, and years ago she organised a mysterious little gang called the British Ladies Auxiliary Defence Squadron—otherwise the *Blads*.

HILDA: What do they do?

LADY FARFIELD: I've never been able to find out, except I know that they wear uniform and salute each other—but they're so old-established and grand and exclusive that they've never been merged into the Waaf or the Wrens.

PAULINE: If you ask me, they're just barmy.

LADY FARFIELD: They occupy a dreary old mansion called Brindlewell Priory, about twenty miles from here. And Phyllis Pentworthy is their chief officer, and calls herself Commodore—though nobody knows why.

PAULINE: She's a frightful reactionary.

LADY FARFIELD: Not really. She's just idiotic. But whatever she is, she's on her way here—and we'll have to make the best of her.

PAULINE: I ought to warn you—that somebody told me her gang were being turned out of Brindlewell Priory, and she's probably plotting to billet the lot of them here——

LADY FARFIELD (*alarmed*): Oh—no. Don't say that. She hinted at it the other day at the telephone, and I told her this house was most unsuitable. I laid it on thick.

HILDA (*as she goes towards kitchen*): Then this time we'll 'ave to lay it on still thicker.

PAULINE: You can't tell that Commodore female anything. She's just a woman Blimp in solid ivory.

LADY FARFIELD (*surveying the table*): Well, we're not going to wait for her.

PAULINE: We ought to open this wine somehow.

LADY FARFIELD: Kenton'll do it. He'll love opening it. The poor old thing doesn't get much of a chance these days to show

what he can do. Now then—I wonder if Lotta is ready. (*She goes down nearer kitchen, calling.*) Lotta! Lotta!

HILDA *returns, leaving the door open behind her, and bringing in more things.*

HILDA: She's ready now. She's just dishing up the stew.

LADY FARFIELD: And I'll bet there's everything in that stew but the kitchen stove.

HILDA: No, there's some of the kitchen stove in it too. She's been telling me about their opera company in Vienna. Some real daft goings on. When I tell me mother an' our 'Erbert, they won't believe a word I say.

Enter LOTTA, *triumphantly carrying a large dish of stew.*

LOTTA: Now we are ready. It is a new kind of stew—with bits of yesterday's rabbit and the American Pork Luncheon meat —and beetroot and cabbage——

LADY FARFIELD: It smells nice, Lotta.

LOTTA: Yes, somehow it smells better than it tastes.

HILDA: That's the beans. Yer've 'ad 'em near moth balls.

KENTON *enters from kitchen carrying a large gong and stick, followed by* EILEEN.

PAULINE: Kenton's going to have a lovely time now. You can go upstairs with it to-night, Kenton.

LADY FARFIELD: And after that, please draw the curtains everywhere, will you, Kenton?

KENTON: Yes, me lady. Can I sound the gong now, me lady?

LADY FARFIELD: Yes, we're ready.

KENTON, *with great pomp, begins sounding the gong, and goes upstairs with it.*

HILDA (*shouting above gong*): Proper warnin' I call it.

LADY FARFIELD: You can begin serving, Lotta. And we'd better light up here. Will you and Hilda do the curtains, Pauline.

She switches on the lights while PAULINE *and* HILDA *draw the curtains at back.* EILEEN *and* LOTTA *are dishing out the food. There is now the sound of a car outside.*

HILDA (*calling from curtains*): There's a car.

LADY FARFIELD: That'll be the Commodore.

HILDA: Who's that?

PAULINE (*grimly*): You'll see.

Sound of front door bell.

I'll go.

She does and ushers in COMMODORE PHYLLIS PENTWORTHY, *who is a determined-looking, square, middle-aged woman, dressed in a very imposing uniform suggesting a general in some exotic revolutionary war. She has a gruff staccato voice and a curt, military, aggressive manner.*

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: (*striding in*) Hello, Frances! Sorry if I'm late.

LADY FARFIRLD: No, that's all right.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Lucky to get here at all really. Having to move headquarters. Not sure yet where we're going. Had to leave this telephone number with my A.D.C., though the girl's a perfect *fool*. Think I know some of these people, don't I?

PAULINE (*pointedly*): You've met me before.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Have I?

LADY FARFIELD: And you know Lotta. And this is Eileen Stacks and this is Hilda Packet, who work with me.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: How d'you do?

LADY F.: Have a drink, won't you, Phyllis?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Thanks. Don't mind a short drink.

SAM *has now arrived downstairs.*

LADY FARFIELD: This is Mr. Cawthra, our foreman—Commodore Pentworthy.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: How d'you do?

SAM (*looking her over*): Just middlin'. Commodore, eh? New to me. What's—er—what's yer regiment—like?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*curtly*): I'm Commodore of the Blads.

LADY FARFIELD, *who has been pouring out sherry, hands glass to* COMMODORE.

SAM (*surprised*): Lads. What lads? D'yer mean—like Boys Brigades?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Certainly not. Blads. Stands for British Ladies' Auxiliary Defence Squadron. Oldest of the women's defence services.

SAM: Is that so? What d'yer do?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Well, we're really just headquarters now. Plenty of difficult administrative work to do, of course. Not a bad sherry this, Frances.

LADY FARFIELD: So glad. Have some more?

COMMODORE PENTWORHTY: Just a spot.

SAM: That officer and the Civil Servant's just coming down.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: What officer's this you're talking about?

LADY FARFIELD: One of our two new billetees—arrived tonight. American.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*dismissing the whole U.S.A.*): Oh—American.

SAM (*with mock anxiety*): They're all right, aren't they—Americans?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: All right in their place. I say, Frances, how many rooms have you got here? Must have scores—surely.

LADY FARFIELD: Yes, Phyllis, but they're hopeless. Haven't been used for years. *Can't* be used for years, most of them.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Possibly not, by civilian standards. But my girls are used to roughing it.

LADY FARFIELD (*alarmed*): Now, now, Phyllis, you couldn't possibly move your gang in here—simply don't think of it.

PAULINE (*loudly*): One whole wing has been damaged by incendiaries.

LADY FARFIELD: Oh yes—no good at all.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Like to see for myself. Mind if I look round afterwards?

LADY FARFIELD: Yes I do. You simply couldn't dream of moving in here—ah. at last!

WEBBER *and* KILLIGREW, *who have tidied up and had a drink, followed by* KENTON, *now arrive.* WEBBER *is carrying an open bottle of whisky.*

WEBBER: I apologise if we're late.

LADY FARFIELD: No, you're just in time. Phyllis, this is Major Webber——

WEBBER: Pleased to meet you.

LADY FARFIELD: Mr. Killigrew. Commodore Pentworthy.

KILLIGREW: How d'you do?

LADY FARFIELD: Shall we all sit down? Supper's getting cold. Will you sit at the head of the table, Sam? Mr. Killigrew, Commodore, and Major Webber next.

WEBBER: Say that's quite a uniform. Kind of Waaf., I guess.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Then you guess wrong. British Ladies' Defence Squadron . . . much older than the Waaf—or the Wrens. Much higher standard too.

PAULINE: Higher standard of what?

They take their places at the table.

LADY FARFIELD: Hilda, will you serve the salad? Pauline, pass the bread. Oh—Kenton—would you like to open that bottle of wine.

KENTON: Certainly, me lady.

KENTON *takes it and opens it in the background.*

WEBBER (*hospitably*): Here's some good Scotch, if anybody prefers it. How about you—er—Commodore?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Glass of wine for me, thank you.

WEBBER: Lady Farfield?

LADY FARFIELD: No, thank you. But I'm sure Mr. Killigrew would like some.

KILLIGREW: I've had one taste of it already, but I won't say No to another. Any of your girls play the fiddle, Commodore?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Not to my knowledge. Don't encourage that sort of thing. Physical jerks. Saluting drill. Get 'em out in the open and keep 'em busy.

PAULINE: Busy at what?

LADY FARFIELD: I hope nobody minds this stew. It seems to me—rather—mixed.

LOTTA (*almost tearfully*): It is terrible. One of my worst.

PAULINE: The tinned herring fishcakes were the worst. Sometimes during the night I can still taste them.

LOTTA: Darling, they were simply a bad *idea*. Are you a musician, Mr. Killigrew?

KILLIGREW: Play the fiddle, when I have a chance to. Quartettes mostly.

LOTTA (*gaily*): That is wonderful. After supper, I could sing the waltz from *Fledermaus*, and you could improvise an obligato on your violin.

KILLIGREW: Don't like that sort of stuff, I'm afraid.

LOTTA (*disappointed*): Oh!

PAULINE: But even if you don't like it, perhaps the rest of us do, and surely you wouldn't object to doing one small thing to please the rest of the party.

KILLIGREW (*who can take it*): Telling me now I'm a selfish old highbrow, are you?

LADY FARFIELD (*hastily*): Oh no, I'm sure she wasn't.

KILLIGREW: Yes, she was. And she's right—I am. But remember, madam, I don't get much time to myself. Been working twelve—sometimes fourteen—hours a day for the last four years—and no extra pay, remember—no overtime—no nice canteens and extra rations—blitz, black-out, everything. However, as this is a party, I'll play anything you want me to. There!

WEBBER (*solemnly*): Mr. Killigrew, I think that's a pretty swell attitood.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*loud, challenging*): Most of these war factory workers have been so well off they'll be sorry when the war's over.

SAM: That's nobbut true of a few. Rest 'as got 'usbands or sweethearts away, and they're as anxious as you for t'war to be ower—'appen a bit more anxious.

LADY FARFIELD: And it's not true they've been so well off. Getting up in the dark, perhaps travelling miles—then working all day in a machine shop—then getting back home in the dark, too tired to do anything—month after month, year after year—away from your husband, perhaps away from your children—doing hard monotonous work—often living with people who don't want you there—I don't think that's being well off.

HILDA: If it is, then they're not doin' so bad in Dartmoor.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Yes. But most of them are not in the least patriotic. I know that for a fact.

SAM : 'Appen not what you'd call patriotic—flag-wavin'—King-and-country stuff—upper-class fancy work. But for all that, they've always wanted this country to come through. After Dunkirk, I saw 'em work till they dropped at their benches——

WEBBER : That's what they told us on the other side. And it sure is a great story—yes *sir*—a great story. That—and the Battle of Britain—and the bombing of London. We had it over the radio every night.

KILLIGREW : I'd just as soon have a blitz as the radio every night. And I've had my share of air raids. Without wishing to boast, I must point out that I'm probably the only man in history who was ever blown clean out of his chair while practising the second violin part of the first movement of Beethoven's A minor quartette, Opus One hundred and thirty-two.

LOTTA (*suddenly pointing at* KILLIGREW *and giving a scream of laughter*) : Of course—I see now—you are really a comical man—a droll.

KILLIGREW : Good heavens !

KENTON *has gone round serving those who wanted it, and are not taking whisky or beer, with wine. There has also been some changing of plates, etc., with perhaps* LOTTA *and* PAULINE *or* HILDA *leaving the table.*

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY : You been over here along, Major Webber ?

WEBBER : No, I haven't. Only landed a few days ago.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY : Indeed ! What d'you think of it here ?

WEBBER : Oh—you seem to me to have done a swell job, though of course I haven't quite got the hang of things around here. One minute I imagine you British are going on in the same old way, and then the next minute—why—I begin to think you're having a kind of revolution.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*shocked*) : Revolution ! Certainly not. Simply tryin' to do our best for the national cause. Got into uniform—obeyin' orders—and so on. Nothing to do with revolution. No sign of one, eh, Mr. Killigrew ?

KILLIGREW : Words, words, words ! Depends upon what you mean by revolution. Suggest we drop the subject.

WEBBER: Have you ever been to America, Commodore?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Yes, once. Didn't take to it.

WEBBER: That's too bad. Why didn't you?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: I object to taxi drivers calling me "Sister"——

WEBBER: Aw—well—they don't mean anything by it-

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: I didn't imagine they did mean anything by it. But I didn't like it. Then again, the hotels and houses were too hot, the waiters inefficient, and there were no egg cups, no toast racks, and my shoes were never cleaned.

WEBBER (*polite but annoyed*): Say—listen——

LADY FARFIELD (*cutting in*): Now Major Webber, you simply mustn't mind what Mrs.—I mean Commodore Pentworthy says. And, Phyllis, we can't have you talking like that. Remember, this is a special little party——

HILDA: Yes, an' Sam wants to say something. Go on, yer promised.

SAM (*rising slowly*): Well—er—friends—when I thought there was just goin' to be a few of us from t'factory, I'd agreed to say a few words—proposin' a 'ealth really—to celebrate t'occasion. Yer see, we're 'ere to-night to celebrate t'promotion o' Lady Farfield. She's just bin made a charge-'and—see? Nah that mightn't sound so much to some of yer, but we think she's done very well—an' I'll tell yer for why. An' mind yer, I speak as an old 'and, havin' bin in t'industry a good long time. But Lady Farfield, she wor new to it, o' course. It wor as strange to 'er as knitting a pair o' socks 'ud be to me—in fact, worse, 'cos I could at least try me 'and at that in private at 'ome. Well, she started down in t'machine shop, same as t'others—ay, an' 'ad plenty o' mucky little jobs an' all, 'cos there's one or two of 'em down there as I know that 'ud go out o' their way to give somebody like 'er muckiest job, d'yer see?——

EILEEN (*with unexpected vehemence*): Yes, they would too. Stinkers!

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*with a look*): What did you say?

PAULINE (*loud and clear*): She said "Stinkers". And quite right too.

SAM (*with good-natured reproach*): Now oo's talkin'—me or you lot? Any'ow, point is—Lady Farfield worked 'er way up to Assembly, which is best shop we 'ave, an' now she's a charge 'and. An' I say we ought to drink 'er 'ealth. Nah—then——

He raises his glass and the others, except LADY FARFIELD, *rise and raise their glasses—murmuring the usual phrases. As they resume their seats, there is much applause, especially from the younger ones.* LOTTA *suddenly bursts into noisy sobs.*

LOTTA (*through her sobs*): I am so sorry—but this reminds me so much—of—of—the old days—oh——

She runs to the kitchen, still sobbing.

PAULINE: I never knew such a one for being reminded.

LADY FARFIELD: Poor Lotta!

SAM: 'Ere, we want a speech from you.

Cries of "Yes, go on"—"Speech!", etc.

LADY FARFIELD (*rising*): Oh—well—thank you very much, Sam—and all of you. I'm really very proud—and grateful. I haven't always liked it at the factory——

HILDA: I should think not!

LADY FARFIELD: All the people there aren't like you three—worse luck—but though I only went at first because I was desperate for something useful to do. I'm glad now that I did. I've met people—and made friends—that I couldn't have known before. I understand a lot of things—important things—that I didn't begin to understand before. I can face the future properly and in the right spirit. I feel that—in my own very humble way—now I can help—and not hinder—the new England most of us want. That's all.

Some applause as she sits down.

KILLIGREW: A most admirable little speech, if you'll allow me to say so, Lady Farfield.

WEBBER: Swell! I'd like to send a copy of it to Mrs. Webber.

LADY FARFIELD: But I haven't a copy of it, I only said the first thing that came into my head.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: And I must say, Frances, that I don't agree with you.

LADY FARFIELD: About what?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Woman in your position could have found something more important and useful to do than going to a factory. You remember, I suggested your joining the Blads.

LADY FARFIELD: No, Phyllis, I don't believe I could have done anything more useful——

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Nonsense! Woman with your background! When any half-witted girl can look after those machines——

HILDA: 'Ere, 'alf a minute with yer 'alf-witted girls.

WEBBER: Well, I've seen something of mass production back home, and I can see what the Commodore's getting at. You see——

SAM (*cutting in*): Now 'old on a minute. Nobody's goin' to tell me she'd ha' bin more useful swaggerin' round in a uniform, playin' at female soldiers——

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*thundering*): Who's talking about playing at female soldiers?

SAM (*who can't be intimidated*): I am. What we needed most of all for this war wor production—planes, tanks, guns an' suchlike—an' that's what the machines wor turnin' out. If uniforms could beat 'Itler, then Poles an' French 'ud ha' beaten 'im afore we started. But yer needed armaments an' machines to mak' them armaments an' folk to look after the machines.

WEBBER: Yeah—but everybody can't be——

HILDA (*cutting in*): No, Sam's right.

PAULINE (*quickly*): And even if he isn't, *she's* wrong.

LADY FARFIELD (*hastily*): Now, Pauline, be quiet.

KILLIGREW: But though you may need production first, man-power must be used properly, and a woman who——

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*cutting in, loudly*): I say, a woman with your social background and experience could have employed herself to better advantage. Otherwise what's the use of a good social background and experience?

PAULINE (*loud and rude*): Well, what *is* the use of it?

HILDA: Girls I know in the A.T.S. and W.A.A.F, spend half their time sitting about——

KILLIGREW: That's not the point, young woman. Kindly stick to the point.

WEBBER: Quite so. Question of use of man-power. You don't want a square peg in a round hole.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Exactly. Why a square peg in a round hole?

PAULINE: Why pegs in holes at all anyhow?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*crushingly*): We're trying to be serious, if you don't mind.

SAM (*cutting in*): Well, just get back to my point——

WEBBER (*cutting in*): No, you made your point——

LADY FARFIELD (*cutting in*): Look here, this doesn't really matter——

KILLIGREW (*cutting in*): No, but if we're going to argue, we might as well argue properly. Now I contend——

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: If you'll kindly not interrupt for one moment——

EILEEN (*topping them all*): Oh—please be quiet!

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*outraged*): I beg your pardon!

EILEEN (*bravely*): Oh—I didn't mean you specially. I meant everybody. We're all beginning to make silly quarrelling noises, that's all. and it simply isn't worth it.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*to crush her*): Indeed?

EILEEN (*not crushed*): Yes—indeed.

The telephone rings. KENTON *emerges from the background.*

KENTON: Shall I answer the instrument, me lady?

LADY FARFIELD (*rising*): No, I'll answer it. And you'll all *have* to be quiet for a minute. It's difficult to hear if you're not. (*At telephone.*) Yes . . . speaking . . . Oh they are, are they? . . . Had dinner? . . . Well, I'm glad of that because there isn't much left . . . I see. All right, thank you. (*Puts down telephone, to others.*) Those two Air Force officers are on their way here. I suppose they're the same two they mentioned earlier, though she didn't say so.

HILDA: Hurray!

LADY FARFIELD: Come from overseas too. Now we'll have to hurry. Some of us will have to get their rooms ready. Pauline

and Sam and I had better do that. Major Webber and Mr. Killigrew, you two had better go along to the drawing-room—we'll join you there afterwards—might have some music—and dancing perhaps——

HILDA: That's the stuff.

LADY FARFIELD: Phyllis, you needn't do anything, of course.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*firmly*): I should like to go round the house again, Frances, and see what accommodation you really have——

LADY FARFIELD: All right, if you must—but don't dream of dumping any of your girls on me here. Now then—Eileen, Hilda—will you help Kenton to clear—and Lotta to wash up. I hope Lotta's recovered. We really must be nice and friendly and cheerful—for the sake of these boys.

KENTON *exits down L. with a tray.* HILDA *follows him with another.*

SAM: Come on, Pauline, back to the furniture job——

They go upstairs with LADY FARFIELD. EILEEN *goes on clearing, but leaving the bottles and a few glasses.* WEBBER *lights a cigar and* KILLIGREW *a pipe. They have now withdrawn from table, and the* COMMODORE *lights a cigarette and joins them.*

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*to the two men*): Look here—I'll show you where the drawing-room is. Along here. I might as well start on the ground floor. My headquarters are over at Brindlewell Priory, but we're being turned out this week-end. Frightful nuisance. Follow me.

They go out by the door down R. *Re-enter* HILDA *with tray.*

HILDA (*as she clears*): When she come out with that about 'alf-witted girls looking after machines, I could 'ave slapped her big fat silly face.

EILEEN (*as she clears*): Still, you must admit that some of our girls are almost half-witted, you know, Hilda.

HILDA: All right. But I'll bet they're no worse than what some of 'ers are—all dressed up to look like somebody shoutin' outside a picture theatre. (*Imitating commissionaire.*) "Standin' Only In the One an' Threes. Seats at 'Alf a Crown". That's what she oughta be doin'—wi' that uniform on.

EILEEN (*bashfully sentimental*): I wonder what your Herbert's doin' to-night, Hilda?

HILDA: Writin' a letter to you, I should think. 'E'll ha' got to page twenty by now. An' my mother could never get ten words out of 'im. Even that time 'e won four-pound-five at dogs, 'e wouldn't tell it to her properly.

EILEEN: He's told *me* all about that night.

HILDA: I'll bet 'e 'as.

EILEEN: I wish I'd sent the other photo to him now—y'know, the one half sideways. It's a lot nicer.

HILDA: Yes, but the other one's more like you.

EILEEN: Now don't say that, Hilda. I get so worried about it, wondering what he'll think when he does see me.

HILDA: Don't you bother about 'Erbert. I know 'im. He'll 'ave to think you're wonderful now that 'e's used all that paper an' pencil on you. 'E never did like wasting anything.

EILEEN (*indignantly*): He's not mean.

HILDA: I never said 'e was, though I can't say 'e ever gave 'is little sister much. But what I want to know now is—what these Air Force chaps'll be like.

EILEEN: I don't care about them.

HILDA: No, you don't 'cos you've got our 'Erbert. But I could do with a bit of Air Force attention for a change. Will they be our sort, like them sergeants who come round the factory that time? Or will they be like them officers who came round that other time—that very 'igh-class bunch, you remember? (*Imitates them.*) They 'alf-closed their eyes an' stroked their fancy moustaches an' went round sayin' "Wizard—absolutely wizard!" But when they thought we couldn't 'ear 'em, they were mutterin' to each other, "Black show, old boy."

They go into the kitchen, leaving door ajar, and through it we can hear music, LOTTA *singing, laughter. Sound of car arriving. Ring at bell.* KENTON *comes out slowly and answers it, admitting two R.A.F. officers. The first,* GROUP-CAPTAIN EDWARD CAMYON, D.S.O., *is a well set-up man about the same age as* LADY FARFIELD. *The other,* SQUADRON-LEADER TONY ACTON D.F.C., *is a high-spirited younger man who wears one of the fancy*

moustaches. Both men are very sun-burned as if newly come from overseas. They have bags with them.

CAMYON: I think you've had a message about us from the R.A.F. Experimental Station.

KENTON: Yes, sir, we 'ad a message and 'er ladyship's expecting you, gentleman. I'll inform 'er of your arrival. We 'ave—er—various guests to-night——

TONY: Yes, sounds quite like a party.

KENTON: Yes, sir. Oh—we 'ave very big parties 'ere at the Hall at times, sir. Bands playin', dancin', singing'. Sometimes I'll 'ave as many as a dozen extra waiters in, as well as our own ten indoor staff. Yes, sir. Very big parties. I'll inform 'er ladyship.

KENTON *goes upstairs. There is a louder burst of music, song, laughter from kitchen, at this moment. After taking this in,* CAMYON *turns indignantly to* TONY.

CAMYON (*angrily*): What did I tell you?

TONY: Yes, sir, black show! How's the head now, sir?

CAMYON: Not so good. Well, you see what it's like at home. You saw last night in town, at the filthy little night club you insisted on our going to——

TONY: I took a poor view of that, as you know, sir.

CAMYON: All right. That's bad enough. But we come down here—and what's happening? This Lady Whatsit has nothing better to do than throw a party. You can hear 'em. Listen to 'em. And that old fool of a butler says they're always throwing parties. Bands! Dozen extra waiters. Ten indoor staff. By thunder, Acton, it makes my blood boil. There weren't any bands and extra waiters for our chaps who went to Berlin and never came back. And think of our fellows in Italy and the Middle East and India—worrying about how they are at home longing to get back—and some of these people here—damned empty-headed, stupid, rich women——

TONY: Couldn't agree with you more, sir. Black show! Not that I can't take a party——

CAMYON: Of course, of course. No objection to people enjoying themselves when they've earned it. But this sort of thing

is a damned disgrace. These women have no imagination, no sense, no decency. They don't realise what's happening in the world. They don't even care. I've been out of this country four years and this is what I come back to find. Parties! Extravagance! Rows of servants! Callous idiocy!

TONY: Yes, sir, doesn't look too good. Take a poor view of it myself, sir. But from what I've heard, I think it must be exceptional.

CAMYON: Doubt it, Acton. But exceptional or not, it's damned disgraceful. I've half a mind to tell this fool of a woman here—what's her name—Lady Fairfield—Farfield—or whatever she calls herself—just what I think about her and then walk straight out of her house.

TONY: Serve her right, sir. But where do we walk to?

CAMYON (*irritably*): What does that matter?

TONY: Well, sir, isn't a bed for miles, they said at the station.

CAMYOM (*angrily*): Filled up with dance bands and waiters and lounge lizards, I suppose. Well, I suppose we can put up with the idiotic antics of these people for one night, but I don't propose——

TONY (*hastily*): Somebody coming, sir.

LADY FARFIELD, *with* PAULINE *behind her, now comes down the stairs.*

LADY FARFIELD (*advancing*): Good evening. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, but I was just—— (*Then she recognises him.*) *Edward!*

CAMYON (*staggered*): *Frances!* Are *you* Lady Farfield?

LADY FARFIELD: Yes, Didn't you know?

CAMYON (*bitterly*): No, but I might have known, I ought to have guessed.

LADY FARFIELD (*annoyed by his tone*): What on earth do you mean?

CAMYON (*loudly and angrily*): I might have known, after being overseas for years, and coming back home to a place like this where people can still give parties every night, and fling money away, and keep rows of servants waiting on them, and generally behaving like callous idiots, that somebody like you would be mixed up in it——

LADY FARFIELD (*cutting in, furious*): Just a minute! I don't know what you're talking about, and I don't believe you do either, Edward Camyon. But of all the pompous, pig-headed, insufferable—why, for years I've waited for this.

CAMYON (*aggressively*): For what?

LADY FARFIELD (*advancing on him*): *This!*

She gives him a loud slap on the face. Then stands glaring at him. He stands amazed. PAULINE *gives a little gurgle of delight.*

TONY (*in a kind of loud dazed murmur*): Black show, chaps! Black show!

LOTTA *and the music from the kitchen swell up magnificently as they stand there and the curtain falls.*

ACT II

At rise, LOTTA *is discovered arranging drinks*—MAJOR WEBBER'S *whisky, beer, a jug of lemonade, and a jug of sinister reddish liquid—and glasses either on the centre table or the small serving table.* MAJOR WEBBER *is good-naturedly giving her a hand and can be handing over some drink or glasses when we discover them.*

LOTTA: Thank you, Major Webber. But please go on with your story. It is so interesting to me—this American business life.

WEBBER: Well, so I said to them, "Gentlemen, I want you to bear in mind that we have right here one of the biggest canning plants east of Chicago, and also that we're turning out more windshield wipers and other automobile accessories then any other city in the state, and that——

LOTTA (*who is really bored by this stuff*): Yes, it must be a wonderful life. So rich, so exciting, so—*strong!*

WEBBER: Well, yes, certainly is—in a way——

LOTTA: But for a woman—no. No, no, no, no. (*Smiling at him.*) And after all I am a woman.

WEBBER: Sure thing! Well, then I said to them, "Another point I'd like you gentlemen to bear in mind," I said, "and I'm not going to try teach you anything about business conditions in general, but I'm a real estate man and I'm here in my own home town—yes, sir——"

LOTTA: One minute, please. You 'ave not heard me sing properly yet, of course, but you have heard me a little. You like my singing?

WEBBER: Swell. So I said, "Now gentlemen——"

LOTTA (*cutting in*): This dress—it is nothing, of course—just for the kitchen. But all the same, it is rather pretty, eh?

WEBBER: Swell. So I said, "And don't forget another thing, gentlemen. This town is producing right now a bigger and better assortment of patent steel fasteners than any place between Pittsburgh and Kansas City——"

LOTTA (*cutting in*): No, no.

WEBBER: Why yes, we were doing just that thing. We were producing bigger and better——

LOTTA (*cutting in*): No, I mean—oh, you would not understand. But I am so glad you had so many steel fasteners!

HILDA *looks in through doorway to drawing-room.*

HILDA: Hey, Major Webber, I thought you wanted to do some dancing.

WEBBER: I'm raring to go.

HILDA: Well, come on then.

She withdraws. WEBBER *turns to* LOTTA.

WEBBER: You coming along?

LOTTA: No, thank you. Not just now.

WEBBER: See you later then. Pardon me!

He goes through door to drawing-room. LOTTA *gives a last look round at her drink arrangements, then sits down and sighs, obviously bored and rather melancholy. After a moment or two,* SAM *comes down the stairs, comfortably smoking his pipe.*

LOTTA: Mr. Cawthra—this party of ours—where is it? What has happened to it?

SAM: Well, yer might say it finished afore it got properly started. Though Ah'm not grumbling. Ah'm feeling all right.

LOTTA: Well, I am not feeling all right. I feel—very disappointed—rather sad. What about the two Air Force officers?

SAM: Well, after that Group-Captain got 'is face slapped, 'e stamps up to 'is room an' says 'e's stoppin' there. Won't 'ave nowt to do wi' this carry-on at all. An' 'e gave that young Squadron-Leader orders to stop in 'is room too, an' 'ave nowt to do wi' us. So we've lost t'Air Force.

LOTTA: But why does not Lady Farfield come and settle everything and make everybody happy?

SAM: 'Cos as soon as she'd slapped 'er old friend's face, she run straight up to 'er room an' locked 'erself in to 'ave a good cry.

LOTTA (*thoughtfully*): So! They knew one another before the war. And now, when they meet again, she slaps his face and goes to her room to cry. Then I think she must still love him at least a little.

SAM (*drily*): I suppose if she'd knocked 'im silly an' then screamed the place down, she'd 'ave loved 'im a lot, eh?

LOTTA (*seriously*): Yes, of course.

SAM: The gentle sex!

LOTTA (*tenderly reminiscent*): I remember one of my lovers—oh, I adored that man—he was our leading baritone—and every time I saw him I wanted to take him and beat him and pull his hair out by the handful. Sometimes I did too—and then he would twist my arms until I screamed. (*Dreamily.*) It was wonderful—love in Spring in Vienna—wonderful!

SAM: All right so long as yer wor i' good training for it. Well, that's all I can tell yer about this party, except that that female General-Admiral is still upstairs making a list o' t'rooms.

LOTTA: I do not care about that woman. She is all wrong.

SAM: Ay, though if she ever retires on a pension, she might mak' a good time-keeper.

LOTTA (*ignoring this, with decision*): But then all of us are all wrong. Look at me!

SAM: I see nowt wrong wi' *you.*

LOTTA: Yes, yes, everything is wrong. These clothes! When I still have some beautiful dresses. All these girls. They too should be wearing beautiful feminine things—romantic, seductive,

glamorous—and then these men would not behave so badly—you would see.

SAM: I don't know that the men 'ave been behavin' badly. Unless you're goin' to blame that Group-Captain for puttin' his face in the way of Lady Farfield's 'and.

Enter HILDA *and* EILEEN *through door* R. *looking rather bored. Dance music has stopped now.*

HILDA: Well, I must say it's turning out a dam' dull party. I've already had enough of dancing with that American officer. Yer go bouncing round on 'is tunic as if he'd just given 'imself another medal. What is there to drink?

LOTTA: Anything here. But—— (*She indicates a dark red liquid in a glass jug.*) I would not touch that stuff. There were two bottles from the chemist—and the labels came off—and I think I have used the wrong one.

EILEEN (*smelling it*): Smells to me like liniment.

LOTTA: If that is the liniment, then Kenton has been rubbing his back with black currant juice.

HILDA: We'll give Commodore Pentworthy a nice stiff glassful o' this. That's something to look forward to, but we could do with a few more ideas.

LOTTA (*impressively*): I have a nice idea. But I must talk first to Lady Farfield.

Enter KILLIGREW *and* PAULINE *from down* R. *deep in talk.*

KILLIGREW (*obviously concluding an account of his troubles*): So I ask you, what is a man to do?

PAULINE (*calmly*): You ought to shoot a few of them.

KILLIGREW (*seriously*) The idea's attractive—but quite apart from the fact that there might be a question or two in the House, my department has no authority or machinery for shooting people. It would have to be referred to the Ministry of Home Security and the War Office.

PAULINE: Well then, choose fifty of the worst of the big fat crooks, and send them up to the coldest moors to make roads.

KILLIGREW: Then you'd have to come to some arrangement with the Ministry of Works or Planning. Or one of the local

authorities—and you know what *they* are. But you're a very fierce young woman, aren't you?

PAULINE: Yes. And it's time somebody was fierce.

KILLIGREW: You'll feel better when you've a husband and a baby or two. y'know.

PAULINE: When I have a baby or two, I'll be *fiercer still.*

Enter LADY FARFIELD, *who looks rather pale and miserable. She comes down rather cautiously, obviously ready to retreat if* CAMYON *is about. When she sees he is not, she comes in, watched by the others.*

LADY FARFIELD (*almost whispering*): Is he—still—up in his room?

SAM: Yes, for all Ah know.

LADY FARFIELD: I was a fool to lose my temper like that. And after all this time! Poor Edward! He looked rather sweet too.

SAM: Well, 'e's stayin' in 'is room—an' I could 'ear 'im tellin' that Squadron-Leader that *'e'd* better stay in *'is* room too.

PAULINE (*angrily*): Then I think he's a mean pig. That Squadron-Leader looked heavenly. And unless he's completely riveted to somebody else, I'd made up my mind to take possession of him.

SAM: Yer'll 'ave to look sharp. I 'eard Group-Captain shoutin' that they'd leave first thing in t'mornin'——

LADY FARFIELD (*annoyed*): Then I'm not a bit sorry for him. Jumping to idiotic conclusions and then refusing to budge. I'd like to make him look really silly——

LOTTA (*calling her away from others*): Frances!

LADY FARFIELD (*going to her*): What is it, Lotta?

LOTTA (*confidentially*): I think this is the man you told me about, once—your first love—eh?

LADY FARFIELD (*same tone*): Yes, it is.

LOTTA: You were in love—but you quarrelled, eh?

LADY FARFIELD: Yes. And look at him! He's just as hasty and obstinate as ever. Worse, in fact.

LOTTA: But I think you are still in love with him—a little—eh?

LADY FARFIELD (*hastily*): Certainly not.

LOTTA: But you ran away—and cried——

LADY FARFIELD: I was upset—naturally—besides, one can't

help remembering. But now I'm absolutely furious with him. I'd like—to make him look completely idiotic. (*Hesitates, as if reflecting, and looks now at the others speculatively.*) There ought to be something we could do. What's happening down here?

SAM: Nowt.

HILDA: We're bored, and Lotta's going on about dresses an' glamour and stuff.

LOTTA (*impressively*): I say it is all our fault. The men do not care—they are sulky—they are stupid—there is no nice party—why? Because we are not truly feminine any more. They come from a war—for years they see nothing but men, men, men, guns, machines, more men, men, men—and what do they see here? We are not mysterious. We are not romantic. We are not glamorous any more. We are—— (*With a big, contemptuous gesture, indicating* PAULINE)—like that.

PAULINE (*loudly*): All right, but just you try being a romantic and glamorous Land Girl and see where it gets you.

LOTTA: I understand that perfectly, my dear Pauline, but you need not be a Land Girl to-night.

PAULINE: I don't want to be, not with that heavenly Squadron-Leader about. But what can we do?

LOTTA (*impressively*): Frances, I appeal to you.

LADY FARFIELD: What do you want *me* to do?

LOTTA: You still have some beautiful things. So have I—a few old costumes I saved. Let us go and make ourselves mysterious and beautiful. Even if none of these idiot men ever notice, we will have had some fun.

HILDA: I'm all for it, though I bet nothing fits me—and then I shan't look beautiful—and not even mysterious.

LADY FARFIELD: It might be fun. And—I have an idea—— (*She breaks off, and holds up her hand.*) Sh! (*They are all still. She whispers.*) I thought I heard them. One of you go and see.

HILDA (*quietly*): That's me. (*Hurries quietly to stairs and creeps up.*)

LADY FARFIELD (*whispering*): I want them to see us later. but not now. If they are coming down, we must hide. Unless they are coming to apologise.

SAM (*whispering*): I'll bet it's too early for any apologising.

LADY FARFIELD: Then be ready to hide—behind that door—if I give the signal. (HILDA *returns.*) Well, Hilda?

HILDA (*whispering*): They're either coming down quietly—or playin' at Red Indians.

LADY FARFIELD (*whispering*): Let's hide then. Hurry!

They hurry quietly across to door R. *leaving the door slightly ajar—to show that they are peeping and listening.* ACTON *comes cautiously downstairs. He is still in uniform. He looks around and then steals to the telephone. He glances at a notebook and picks up the phone.*

ACTON (*at telephone*): Morbury Eight Nine Two.

While he is waiting, not looking toward door R., *the door opens a little wider. Hearing it move, he turns round, but as he turns, the door almost closes again.*

Wing-Commander Fawcett, please . . . I'm speaking for Group-Captain Camyon . . . Yes . . .

Here, if it holds, he can go through the same business as before with door R.

Wing-Commander Fawcett? Squadron-Leader Acton here, sir . . . if you don't mind waiting a moment, sir, I'll get Group Captain Camyon.

Puts down receiver and hurries across to stairs and calls up cautiously.

All right, sir. Nobody here, and he's on the line.

CAMYON *now comes down, less cautiously than* ACTON, *and goes to telephone, with* ACTON *in attendance.*

CAMYON (*at telephone*): Fawcett? Camyon here. You were telling me this afternoon that you needed a good-sized country house or two to requisition. Well, there's one here. Yes, Farfield Hall. Occupied by people who don't seem to realise, even now, that we've had a war on our hands for the last few years. . . . Yes, that's the type—silly extravagant callous women . . . All right . . . Ring me back in about half an hour.

Puts down telephone, and regards ACTON *sternly.*

And now I'm going back to my room—and you're going back to yours, my lad.

ACTON: Yes, sir.

CAMYON: No nonsense now. This is serious.

ACTON: Understand absolutely, sir. Black show.

CAMYON (*sharply*): Come on then.

He walks briskly towards the stairs, followed by ACTON. *As they go, the door* R. *slowly opens. As soon as they have gone,* LADY FARFIELD, PAULINE, LOTTA, HILDA, EILEEN, and SAM *and* KILLIGREW *come through hastily but quietly.*

LADY FARFIELD (*who is really angry*): I'm absolutely furious.

PAULINE: So am I. Did you hear him ordering the Squadron-Leader to stay in his room too. Pig!

LADY FARFIELD: Well, did you hear what he said about us on the telephone? Silly extravagant callous women!

LOTTA: What did I tell you? No glamour y'see.

LADY FARFIELD: Now if we could only get him downstairs again at the right moment.

SAM: I'll bet they'll both be down again soon.

KILLIGREW: We can always invent a message to bring them down, if necessary.

LADY FARFIELD (*who is thinking*): Yes. Mr. Killigrew, you'll have to help us.

KILLIGREW: Certainly. Only I'd like to do a little telephoning first.

LADY FARFIELD: There'll be no hurry for you. I'll have to find the things first. But come up as soon as you've done your telephoning. The rest of us must go through the kitchen and up the back stairs. And we'll collect Kenton—we'll need him. Come along.

As they go, all but KILLIGREW.

If Edward Camyon is determined to make a fool of himself again, I'll jolly well see that he does it properly this time. Pompous obstinate idiot!

As they go out door L. *the telephone rings.*

KILLIGREW (*calling to* LADY FARFIELD): Leave this to me. And I'll join you later when I've done my telephoning.

He goes to the telephone.

Yes, Farfield Hall . . . Who? . . . Oh yes, Commodore

Pentworthy—yes, she's here—doing a survey of the house, I believe—or perhaps firing rocket guns from the roof. Anyhow, she'll be hard to find . . . Yes, yes, I'll take a message . . . Yes, Yes, I've got that. (*Impatiently.*) Yes, yes, the message is perfectly simple, young woman. Clear the line, please.

He waits a moment, glancing at his notebook.

I want Cornland Three Four . . . Yes, I'll hang on . . .

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY *comes downstairs, closing a large official notebook.*

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*curtly*): Is Lady Farfield down here?

KILLIGREW: No.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Has she gone out?

KILLIGREW: No.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Where is she then?

KILLIGREW: I've no idea.

She makes a "humph!" sound, and so he makes another one, rather louder. She stares at him suspiciously.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*importantly*): Well, wherever she is, I want to tell her that it's absurd of her to pretend that she hasn't ample accommodation here. Some of the rooms in the East Wing may seem useless by civilian standards—but my girls in the British Ladies Auxiliary Squadron are accustomed to roughing it.

KILLIGREW: I'll bet they are.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: What?

KILLIGREW: A message has just come through for you. Your headquarters has sent the car back for you. All very urgent.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Urgent. Then I ought to have been told at once.

KILLIGREW: You have been told at once. (*Into telephone.*) Hello . . . yes. Cornland Three Four——

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*going nearer*): I must telephone to my headquarters immediately. I must know exactly what has happened. This is important official business——

KILLIGREW (*angrily*): Do be quiet, I can't hear what they're saying at the exchange——

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*angrily*): I will *not* be quiet.

KILLIGREW (*shouting*): How can I hear what the girl's saying—(*Into telephone.*)—no, not you——

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*loudly*): I say this is important official business and I must ask you to let me have the telephone——

KILLIGREW: Will you be quiet?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: No, my call is particularly important—really urgent.

KILLIGREW (*into telephone*): Oh—all right.

He puts down the receiver and the COMMODORE, *glaring at him, goes at once to take up the telephone.*

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*still glaring at* KILLIGREW): Brindlewell Four Five.

To KILLIGREW, *who is now looking at the drinks, before helping himself.*

I don't suppose the call you want to make is of any great importance.

KILLIGREW: Certainly it is. I'm trying to get a string quartette together.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*outraged*): You call *that* important—at a time like this?

KILLIGREW (*giving himself a drink*): Most decidedly. A man must have a little order, sense and beauty somewhere in his life these days, and I find 'em in string quartettes.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*indignantly*): I shall complain of your attitude—— (*Breaks off to talk into telephone.*) Oh—Millicent—what has happened? No, the car hasn't arrived yet, I'm waiting for it now. Now tell me exactly what's happened . . .

KILLIGREW (*while she is listening*): Going to be long with that telephone?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*at telephone*): Yes, certainly, if necessary this place would do. I've counted more than thirty rooms that could be used at a pinch . . . No, don't be *absurd*, Millicent. Just a minute. (*Calling across severely to* KILLIGREW.) What did you say?

KILLIGREW: I said—are you going to be long with that telephone?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: As long as I please. (*At telephone.*) Yes, yes, Millicent—everything must be ready. We may have to move at once. Yes, *to-night*. Of course I shall come straight back. When the car is here to take me . . . Well, give yourself an aspirin.

She puts down the telephone, still glaring at KILLIGREW, *who now takes himself and his drink back to the telephone.*

KILLIGREW (*at telephone*): Cornland Three Four.

Enter WEBBER *from down* R. *carrying a large book.*

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Where is Lady Farfield, Major Webber?

WEBBER: I haven't seen her around since supper, Commodore. I've been along there looking at this book—some mighty nice pictures of the neighbourhood.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: I'm waiting for my car.

WEBBER: Well, join me in a drink while you're waiting, Commodore.

KILLIGREW (*at telephone*): All right, I *am* waiting.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*pointing to the red stuff*): I'll have some of that fruit cup, thank you.

WEBBER (*holding up the jug*): Is this fruit cup?

KILLIGREW (*still at telephone but calling across*): Looks to me like blood and soda. (*Into telephone.*) No, I wasn't swearing at you, but I may start in a minute . . . You just get me Cornland Three Four.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*who has her drink now*): Well—cheers!

WEBBER: Here's to us, Commodore!

She takes a good drink, watched anxiously by the other two. She closes her eyes a moment, in delight or anguish, before returning manfully to the surface.

How is it, Commodore?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*blinking*): Obviously not made of fresh fruit—that's too much to expect these days—but very refreshing, a jolly good drink. I think I'll have a little more, please, Major Webber.

WEBBER (*taking her glass*): Sure thing!

KILLIGREW (*into telephone*): Yes, it *is* Mr. Fraser I'm wanting. Old Mr. Fraser or young Mr. Fraser? I don't care.

The COMMODORE'S *second good pull at the drink has not been without its effect.*

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*sternly*): If you want *my* opinion, I think we're becoming too soft. Yes, slack and soft. We British are getting too slack and soft. You Americans, Major Webber—so far as I can see—are even worse—*pampered!*

KILLIGREW (*calling across from telephone*): You ought to try the Russians.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*with dignity*): I have no wish to try the Russians. Or to have anything to do with the Russians. I cannot help remembering that many of the Russians are Bolsheviks.

WEBBER: You've got something there, Commodore.

KILLIGREW (*calling across*): What do you expect them to be—members of the Primrose League? (*Into telephone.*) Oh, Mr. Fraser—my name's Killigrew and I'm staying at Farfield Hall——

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*on top of his remarks into telephone*): In any case, this is not a question that any mere civilian can attempt to discuss with any authority, if only because he lacks the necessary experience——

KILLIGREW (*who is trying to hear on telephone*): Oh—be quiet a minute.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*angrily*): I will *not* be quiet. Why should I?

KILLIGREW (*angrily*): Because I'm trying to hear what this chap's saying—and the line's bad. (*Into telephone.*) Yes, yes . . . now, Mr. Fraser, I understand you play the 'cello. . .

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Really—the *'cello*—at a time like this!

KILLIGREW (*loudly into telephone*): Oh—your son. Well, is he there? All right, I'll wait. . . .

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*angrily*): Lord Chipping Norton is a member of the government and he also happens to be an old friend of mine. I'm inclined to make a serious complaint to him about your extraordinary conduct and attitude, Mr. Killigrew.

KILLIGREW (*still at telephone, coolly*): Make fifty complaints to Lord Chipping Norton if you like, madam. I don't care a fig for Lord Chipping Norton, who, incidentally, is a most inefficient junior minister and not likely to be in the government much longer. (*Into telephone.*) Hello, hello!

WEBBER (*moving towards door R. and laughing*): Say—why didn't somebody tell me about you British? Back home we've never had the right idea about you, and Mrs. Webber will never believe me when I tell her.

Sound of car outside.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*preparing to go*): That must be my car.

WEBBER: Well, pleased to have met you, Commodore.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: You may see me again, unless my headquarters staff have been able to cope with this emergency.

KILLIGREW (*turning, at telephone*): Quiet, *please.* I can't hear a word this chap's saying——

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: I don't think it necessary that you should. *Fiddler!*

She marches out main door. WEBBER *laughs and goes out down R. taking his book and drink with him.* KILLIGREW *is still at telephone.*

KILLIGREW (*telephone*): I hear you play the 'cello, Mr. Fraser . . . That doesn't matter, everybody has to make a start sometime . . . Yes, I've plenty of scores . . . Now what about a viola player and a second fiddle? . . . What's her telephone number? . . . Yes, I'll wait . . .

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY *now returns, looking disappointed and cross, followed slowly by* CORPORAL HERBERT PACKET, HILDA'S *brother. He is, in fact, a larger male version of her. The most noticeable thing about him is an enormous slow grin that lights up his weatherbeaten face.*

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*sternly*): Are you *sure* the car was not sent for me?

HERBERT (*who is rather bewildered*): Yes, sir.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Ma'am.

HERBERT: What?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*snapping*): Don't call me *Sir* but *Ma'am*.

HERBERT (*with his grin*): Oh—I see—ma'am.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: Well, what about the car—because I'm expecting one——?

HERBERT: That car belonged to a farmer who gave me a lift—like——

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY: But who sent you here, Corporal?

HERBERT: Well, nobody sent me—miss—ma'am. I come on me own—like. (*Does his grin.*)

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*irritated*): But have you any right to come here on your own?

KILLIGREW (*from telephone*): Why shouldn't he?

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*to* KILLIGREW): This is a service matter. Don't interfere. (*To* HERBERT.) Now then, Corporal.

KILLIGREW: Just a minute. (*Into telephone.*) I see—she'll ring me here . . . Farfield Hall, eh? Good man! Splendid, splendid! (*Puts down telephone and looks delighted.*) Never picked up a 'cello so quickly. And I'm on the track of a viola. Don't let anybody say the Civil Service can't work fast.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*impatiently*): Well, Corporal?

HERBERT: Well, y'see—er—ma'am—I was brought 'ome on a job—an' got a bit of leaf—like—all sudden, y'see. Well, I goes to see my sister an' 'er friend—an' woman where they stop tells me they've come on 'ere—so I get talkin' about it to a farmer in a pub—an' 'e gives me a lift 'ere—I 'ope it's right place—Farfield 'All.

KILLIGREW: That's right, Farfield Hall.

HERBERT (*producing his grin*): Okey, dokey!

He grins from one to the other and lounges a bit.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*sharply*): Come, come, Corporal. Smarten yourself up. I wouldn't allow any of my girls to behave like this. Wearing the King's uniform—you must be soldierly—smart and soldierly.

HERBERT (*apologetic but easy*): That's right. I used to be right smart an' soldierly at beginning, after I'd done me trainin'. But I wor at Dunkirk an' dropped a bit of it there—like. An' then

I went to the desert an' up through Tunis an' Sicily an' into Italy. An' what wi' one thing an' another, yer get right out o' practice—an' start behavin' natural—you're so busy fighting——

KILLIGREW (*approvingly*): Quite right, Corporal.

They exchange grins. COMMODORE PENTWORTHY *looks sharply at them both, then moves away.*

Can you drink beer?

HERBERT: Can a duck swim?

KILLIGREW (*handing him a glass*): Here you are, then.

HERBERT (*taking it*): Thank you very much, sir. All the best! (*Drinks.*)

KILLIGREW: Is your sister called Hilda?

HERBERT: That's right. Hilda Packet. An' 'er friend's called Eileen.

KILLIGREW: They're here. I'll go up and tell them you've arrived. You wait down here, Corporal.

KILLIGREW *goes upstairs.* HERBERT *stands with his beer, near the table.* COMMODORE PENTWORTHY *looks impatiently at her watch.* HERBERT *looks at her drolly. Sound of car, then ring at bell.*

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*eagerly*): That *must* be my car.

She goes out, and we hear the front door slam and then the car move off. HILDA *now comes hurrying downstairs.*

HILDA (*delightedly*): 'Erbert! (*She hurries over to him and kisses him.*) Well, well—— (*Looking him over.*) Same old 'Erbert.

HERBERT (*grinning*): Same old 'Ilda!

HILDA: 'Ave yer been 'ome to see Mother yet?

HERBERT: No, I come 'ere first. But don't you tell 'er I did.

HILDA: She'll be that mad if she knows.

HERBERT: Well, don't tell 'er then. I come 'ere first 'cos it's nearer the depot.

HILDA: Yes, an' 'cos yer wanted to 'ave a look at yer precious Eileen—I know. But why didn't yer tell us you were comin'?

HERBERT: 'Cos I didn't know. They suddenly brought a dozen of us back—six sergeants an' six corporals—in a bomber—to do some instructin'—and then afore we started they said we could 'ave a week's leaf. So yer see, 'Ilda, I went to that Mrs.

Batsby's where you're billeted—an' she says, " Oh, they've gone out for the evenin'," she says—" to that Lady Farfield's at Farfield 'All," she says—an' then she tells me where it is—an' a farmer gives me a lift—an' 'ere I am.

HILDA : An' I must say, 'Erbert, you're lookin' right well.

HERBERT (*grinning*) : You're not lookin' so bad yerself, 'Ilda.

HILDA : I'm all right.

HERBERT : 'Aven't got a steady chap yet, eh ?

HILDA (*sharply*) : No, but I've 'ad plenty o' chances, an' you needn't think I 'aven't. Course I've gone to dances an' the pictures with one or two now an' again, but that's not the same thing. An' if yer really want to know—I'll tell yer something.

HERBERT (*as she hesitates*) : Well—go on.

HILDA (*solemnly*) : I'm waitin' a bit afore I get a steady chap.

HERBERT : What are yer waitin' for ?

HILDA : I'm waitin' till some o' the real boys get back—the boys who've done the fightin' for us.

HERBERT : That's right, 'Ilda. Them's the real bloody lads. We 'ave a sergeant—comes from Newcastle—an' 'e saw that little photo I 'ave of you—an' after that 'e kept askin' me about yer, an' askin' to 'ave another look at the photo. I'll tell yer about 'im after.

HILDA : I'll see yer do. If 'e's not married or anything.

HERBERT : No, 'e's not.

HILDA : You 'aven't got a photo of 'im, 'ave yer ?

HERBERT : Course I 'aven't. I don't carry sergeants' photos round wi' me. But 'is name's Jack Philips—an' 'is old man keeps a pub in Newcastle—— 'Ere—(*dropping his voice*)—where's Eileen ?

HILDA (*dropping her voice too*) : She's 'ere. Yer'll see 'er in a minute.

HERBERT : That's the idea.

HILDA (*very earnestly*) : An' let me tell yer something, 'Erbert Packet. Eileen's a bit shy an' gets silly ideas sometimes—like we all do—but she's a grand girl, Eileen is, an' thinks a lot about you. More than you're worth.

HERBERT : Well, I think a lot about 'er too. Though it's funny

never 'aving really seen 'er—like. An' yet feelin' I know 'er right well—better than anybody in a way—like——

HILDA: Don't kid yerself. Letters aren't people. Yer've got to be with 'em—an' look at 'em—an' listen to 'em—an' see 'ow they behave—before you really know 'em. But Eileen's all right, I can tell you.

HERBERT: Well, you ought to know, 'Ilda.

HILDA: I should think I ought. When a girl works with another girl, an' then shares a room in a billet, there isn't much that girl doesn' know about the other one, I can tell yer. My word, if it were some of 'em, I could make your 'air stand on end. If chaps only knew! But Eileen's different. An' you be nice to 'er or yer'll 'ear something from me. An' don't stay too long down 'ere.

HERBERT: What foi?

HILDA: 'Cos we're 'aving a bit o' fun—dressin' up an' pretendin' we're all grand or something. (*Breaks off and whispers.*) This is Eileen.

EILEEN *comes slowly and shyly downstairs. The other two watch her.*

HILDA (*slowly, impressively*): Eileen, this is 'Erbert.

EILEEN (*slowly advancing*): Hello!

HERBERT (*with his grin*): Hello!

HILDA (*looking drolly from one to the other*): Well, this is where I get out. But don't just stare at each other. Get it over. An' don't be too long about it neither.

She goes upstairs. The other two, painfully shy, do not even look at each other for a moment. The scene that follows must be played with great delicacy and restraint, with no broadening for easy laughs.

EILEEN (*slowly*): You didn't say you were coming on leave.

HERBERT: No, I didn't know. I said I might be sent 'ome to do some instructin'—remember?

EILEEN: Yes, I remember you said that. I was—hoping—you might be.

HERBERT: An' then—it come quite sudden—same as everything does in the army—like I told you.

EILEEN: Yes. Nothing happens an' then suddenly a lot happens all at once, eh?

HERBERT (*with his grin*): That's right—Eileen.

EILEEN (*after a pause*): I expect it seems all different—here at home—doesn't it?

HERBERT: No—not so very different—and any'ow it's 'ome—an' that's all right. . . .

EILEEN (*slowly, softly*): I expect—I look different to what you thought I'd look—don't I?

HERBERT (*cautiously looking*): No, yer don't. I think yer look just like your photo—yer know, that one yer sent . . .

EILEEN: Yes. But after, I thought I oughtn't to have sent it. It wasn't very good of me.

HERBERT: No, yer look just like it. Only——

EILEEN (*anxiously*): Only what?

HERBERT: Only—yer a bit taller than I thought—like——

EILEEN: Oh—does that matter?

HERBERT: No, of course it doesn't. Besides—I think—well, you look a lot prettier—like——

EILEEN (*delighted*): Oh Herbert—do I?

HERBERT: Yes, yer do. (*Pause.*) Eileen.

EILEEN: Yes, Herbert?

HERBERT (*slowly*): Did yer mean all them things yer said in your letters?

EILEEN (*softly*): Yes, I did.

HERBERT: Do you still—I mean—like—now that you've seen me an' I'm 'ere an' not out there——?

EILEEN (*looking at him*): I do, Herbert—if you do.

HERBERT: Yes, I do. I mean, I'd like us to get married—an'——

EILEEN: And have a home of our own.

HERBERT: Yes, a 'ome of our own. I've thought a lot about that, Eileen.

EILEEN: So have I. Wouldn't it be wonderful?

HERBERT: Yes. But I don't know when that'll be.

EILEEN: No, but we've waited so long, we can wait a bit longer.

HERBERT (*dubiously*): Yes. Some of our chaps say they'll make it all right for us—like—yer know, there'll be 'omes an' jobs. But a lot o' the chaps say it'll be just like last time—that when we've done the fightin' an' there's no more danger—then we can go an' whistle——

EILEEN (*roused*): That's what happened to my Dad. But it won't be like last time.

HERBERT: 'Ow d'yer know?

EILEEN (*with sudden fierceness*): Because we won't let it be, that's why. This is our country, isn't it? You've gone and fought for it. And I've left home and worked for it. We've given years out of our life to keep it safe, haven't we? All right then. You want a steady job, and I want a home of my own. And we're going to get 'em, and nobody's going to stop us this time.

With abrupt change of mood and tone, hesitantly.

Herbert—now that you've seen me—do you think—it'll be all right?

HERBERT: 'Ow d'yer mean—all right?

EILEEN: Do you think—you could love me?

HERBERT (*ashamed of this*): Well—yes-I do, Eileen.

EILEEN (*with relief*): Then that's all that matters.

She looks at him, smiling, and he takes a step towards her, and is clearly about to take her in his arms and kiss her, when MAJOR WEBBER *enters down* R.

WEBBER: Well, well, well! Hello, another visitor, eh?

EILEEN: Yes, this is Hilda's brother, Herbert. He's—my young man.

WEBBER (*heartily*): Say, that's fine. We must have a drink on this.

HILDA *hurries downstairs, putting her head round.*

HILDA (*hurriedly calling*): Come you two, you're wanted upstairs —quick. Yes, both of you.

WEBBER (*puzzled*): What's going on around here?

HILDA (*cheerfully*): You stay there—and you'll see. And when it happens, just keep quiet. Come on, you two, 'urry up. (*She looks upstairs.*) Oh—there's somebody coming. We'll go round the other way.

She hurries downstairs and bustles them off with her through kitchen. WEBBER *stares after them, then gives himself a drink. After a moment,* TONY ACTON *comes cautiously downstairs. He is now dressed in a sports coat and flannel trousers. He looks about him carefully, sees* WEBBER *with the glass in his hand, and cautiously comes down.*

WEBBER (*cordially*): Hello! Come right in.

TONY: Thanks.

WEBBER: My name's Webber—George Webber.

TONY: Mine's Acton.

WEBBER: Have some Scotch?

TONY: No, thanks. But I wouldn't mind some beer if there's any going.

WEBBER: Why not? Help yourself.

TONY: Thanks. (*Takes some beer.*) I'm not supposed to be down here—but—er—I ran out of matches——

WEBBER: I can let you have some matches. Don't need 'em. Got a good lighter. (*Throws some matches on the table.*)

TONY: Thanks. Cheers! (*Drinks.*)

WEBBER: Cheers! (*Drinks, then regards* TONY *curiously while latter is lighting a cigarette.*) Mr. Acton, did you say you're not supposed to be down here?

TONY: Yes.

WEBBER: You mean—downstairs here—where we are?

TONY (*smiling*): That's it. Here.

WEBBER (*rather puzzled*): Well, I'm sorry to hear that, Mr. Acton.

TONY: Don't bother about it, Major. It's of no importance at all.

WEBBER: You're staying here, I guess.

TONY: Well, I'm staying here the rest of to-night—with luck. You live here?

WEBBER: Just arrived this evening.

TONY: Did you? So did I. (*Looks about him, then more confidentially.*) Rum show, isn't it?

WEBBER: Now that's very interesting to me, Mr. Acton. Because I said to myself, "George Webber, you're just being plain stoopid."

TONY: Oh—why did you say that to yourself?

WEBBER: Well, because I couldn't get the hang of things around here. First I thought this, and then I thought that. But I reckon that right now I'm getting things under control—yes, *sir*.

TONY: I wish I could say the same.

WEBBER: You from the factory, Mr. Acton?

TONY: What factory?

WEBBER: Why, the aircraft factory where Lady Farfield and these girls work.

TONY (*astonished*): Lady Farfield—you mean—this woman here——?

WEBBER: She's the only one around here, isn't she?

TONY: I wouldn't know, old boy, I really wouldn't know. I haven't anything under control to-night. If it's the one I mean, I suppose she goes over there occasionally and cuts the cake or presents the prizes—eh?

WEBBER: No, *sir*. She worked a long time at the bench, and now she's a charge hand. The other folks she's asked in work with her—including the foreman.

TONY (*with extreme scepticism*): You wouldn't be pulling my leg by any chance, would you? I think not. Oh no. All right, we've had that. Now ask me what I'm doing.

WEBBER (*rather surprised*): Just what I was wondering. That's why I asked if you were from the factory.

TONY (*smoothly and confidentially*): The answer is No. There's no real money in this war work, old boy. I'm in the Black Market. Doing a nice big deal at the moment in clothes coupons.

WEBBER (*unpleasantly surprised*): Clothes coupons?

TONY: That's the idea. Not forged, y'know. Oh—no, quite genuine. Of course I wouldn't like to say how the fella managed to lay his hands on quarter of a million——

WEBBER (*same tone*): Quarter of a million!

TONY (*confidentially*): And a few over, old boy, quite a few over. But they're outside the deal. The little woman wants a few new outfits—you know how they are.

He winks at WEBBER, *who stares at him aghast. While they are staring at each other*, CAMYON, *still in uniform, comes very*

cautiously downstairs. When he sees only ACTON *and* WEBBER, *he looks relieved, but when* ACTON *sees him,* ACTON *looks embarrassed.*

CAMYON (*rather gruffly*): What are you doing down here?

TONY (*apologetically*): Had to come down, sir. Hadn't any matches.

CAMYON: Hm. I looked into your room—so had to come down to see what you were up to.

TONY: Quite so, sir. Er—this is Major Webber—Group-Captain Camyon.

CAMYON: How d'you do?

WEBBER: Pleased to meet you, Group-Captain. You look as is you've come from overseas.

CAMYON: I have. Only got back yesterday. After four years.

WEBBER: Fine! There must be quite a lot you can tell us that I'd be very glad to know, Group-Captain. Have some Scotch?

CAMYON: No thanks.

WEBBER: It's good Scotch. I was darned lucky to get it.

CAMYON: Oh—it's yours, is it?

WEBBER: Yes, *sir.*

CAMYON: Oh—then I'll change my mind—thanks—and have some. I thought it probably belonged to—er—the house.

As WEBBER *pours out the whisky,* TONY, *who is obviously uncomfortable, strolls with assumed nonchalance away from the table, examining the animals' heads, etc.* WEBBER *sees this as an opportunity to have a private word with* CAMYOM *about him.*

CAMYON (*receiving whisky*): Thanks. I could do with this. Good luck! (*Drinks.*)

WEBBER (*very confidentially*): Group-Captain, you seem to know that young man.

CAMYON: Yes I do. Why?

WEBBER (*carefully*): Well—I'm nothing but a stranger around here, and we've been warned not to interfere—but I feel it's my dooty to tell you that that young man says he's operating the Black Market.

CAMYON (*astonished*): The Black Market!

WEBBER (*gravely*): Yes, *sir*. Illegal trading in clothes coupons—hundreds of thousands of 'em. Boasts of it——

CAMYON: Nonsense! He's my Squadron-Leader, who came back with me. (*Calling sharply.*) Acton.

TONY (*turning and advancing*): Sir!

CAMYON: What the blazes do you mean by talking nonsense about the Black Market to this officer?

TONY (*embarrassed*): Well—sir—we were just chatting——

WEBBER (*amused*): And you were just joshing me, eh? Well, I ought to have known. Okay, Squadron-Leader, don't apologise.

CAMYON: It won't do, though. To begin with, it's bad manners—and it might be dangerous. What's the idea?

TONY (*apologetically*): I'm sorry, sir—but, you see, he began pulling my leg, so I thought I'd better not be too stand-offish—I know how the Americans like a bit of leg-pulling—so I pulled his.

WEBBER (*heartily*): That's all right with me, Squadron-Leader. But—say—I didn't do any leg-pulling. I was only telling you about the folks here.

TONY: I know, And didn't you tell me that Lady Farfield was entertaining a few girl chums from the aircraft factory, where she's just been made a charge hand?

WEBBER (*firmly*): I certainly did.

CAMYON: Oh well, then you did start it, Major, and you can hardly blame him. I might have done the same myself. After all, we British have to prove we have some sense of humour.

TONY: Just what I thought, sir. Couldn't let the old side down, I thought. Had to do something.

CAMYON: Quite. Mind you, Major Webber, this doesn't mean I'm defending these people here. They'd no business to amuse themselves filling you up with all that stuff about being factory hands when in fact they're keeping a houseful of servants and throwing great idiotic parties. I could hear 'em upstairs giggling and running up and down the corridors and screaming their silly heads off.

TONY: So could I, sir. Black show, I thought.

CAMYON: Couldn't be worse. (*To* WEBBER, *who is gaping at*

them.) But don't imagine everybodys' like this over here. You just happen to have struck a bad patch, I imagine, that's all. So have we. It happens not to seem particularly funny to me—for a special reason——

TONY (*seriously*): She slapped his face, you know. I hope you don't mind my mentioning it, sir.

CAMYON: Yes, of course I do, you ass.

WEBBER (*bewildered*): Who slapped your face?

CAMYON: Lady Farfield. She happens to be—er—an old friend——

WEBBER (*cutting in, urgently*): Now wait a minute. Let's try and straighten this out. I guess that old butler showed you in, didn't he?

TONY: He did.

WEBBER: And you listened to him, didn't you?

CAMYON: We couldn't help it.

WEBBER (*firmly*): Well, so did I! And I found out afterwards it was a lot of hooey—yes, *sir.*

CAMYON: Hooey!

WEBBER (*triumphantly*): Nothing else but. The old man's really talking about the past. He's so old he keeps forgetting.

CAMYON *exchanges a startled glance with* TONY.

I was here at supper. There are two of us—a Civil Servant and myself—who are billeted here—and then there are a few folks from the factory—a foreman and a couple of factory girls——

TONY: Hoy, you're not starting that all over again, are you?

WEBBER (*earnestly*): But it's true. I assure you I never was more serious in my life.

CAMYON (*slowly*): I don't know what to make of this.

TONY: Don't want to butt in, sir, but did you notice that little Land Girl on the stairs when we first came in? Very serious type, I thought, and didn't seem to fit in with our notion of the place at all. Been on my mind, that girl. Perhaps we've been all wrong, sir.

WEBBER: Sure you have. And our hostess has been doing a swell job. Given up her old privileges. No class distinctions. Democracy with its sleeves rolled up.

CAMYON: My God, Tony, if we have been wrong, we've made precious idiots of ourselves. Or at least, *I* have.

WEBBER: Don't worry. We'll all be having a good laugh over it soon.

Sound of women's voices—light laughter and chatter—can now be heard from upstairs.

TONY: Listen! They're coming down.

WEBBER (*beaming*): Now you'll see. Just a little bunch of factory folks. Foreman. Kids from the factory in their old clothes. Fighting democracy. You'll see. And get your apology ready—you're going to need it.

They look expectantly towards stairs. There arrives, very impressively, the following procession: first, old KENTON, *who is wearing a scarlet coat, and is carrying a large branched candle-stick. Then follow, in close order,* LADY FRANCES, LOTTA, PAULINE, (*who wears a full loose dress*), EILEEN *and* HILDA, *and they are all wearing dresses—one or two modern, others period—that enhance their respective personalities, and they all look very feminine, romantic, glamorous, and give the impression of being haughtily conscious of this. Behind them comes* KILLIGREW, *carrying his violin, and wearing full evening dress. the jacket of which is too tight for him. Behind him come* SAM *and* HERBERT, *who have been rigged up fancifully and rather sketchily but still impressively as footmen, and carry tray with glasses and a bottle of champagne, etc. The procession moves in slowly, ignoring the men, until the women are grouped round the piano.*

WEBBER (*bowled over*): Boy—oh boy!

TONY (*also bowled over*): Crrr-ikey!

CAMYON (*to* WEBBER, *with furious irony*): Just a little bunch of homely folks! Kids from the factory in their old clothes! Democracy in its shirt-sleeves winning the war!

WEBBER (*earnestly*): I assure you, Grou——

CAMYON (*through his teeth*): Oh—stop acting the goat!

LADY FARFIELD (*across from piano, where ladies are*): Edward—I beg your pardon—Group-Captain Camyon——

CAMYON (*curtly, from fireplace*): Well?

LADY FARFIELD (*with touch of mockery*): As the very sight of

us seems to annoy you so much—and the music may annoy you still more—there's no need for you to stay down here, you know. You have my permission to return to your room.

CAMYON (*curtly*): Thank you, Frances—I beg your pardon, Lady Farfield—but if you've no strong objection—I prefer to stay here. I'm expecting an important telephone call.

LADY FARFIELD: About requisitioning a house, perhaps?

CAMYON: Yes. But don't let me interrupt your—er—music.

LADY FARFIELD (*smiling and playing*): We don't propose to.

They begin singing a Viennese light opera song, just a short snatch of it. During this, PAULINE *can come nearer to* TONY *and smile at him, and finding her irresistible he moves towards her, only to be called back by a stern look and a warning "Acton!" from his chief at the fireplace. As the singing ends.*

LADY FARFIELD (*still idly playing*): Kenton, the champagne.

KENTON: Yes, me lady.

He begins serving the champagne, as the music drifts dreamily on.

CAMYON (*with angry irony to* WEBBER): Just a few little factory girls straight from the benches!

WEBBER: Certainly look a swell bunch—yes, *sir*. Surprised me. Always had a notion your British women didn't care how they looked——

CAMYON (*almost bursting with fury*): Dammit, sir—will you—kindly—drop it. (*Turns away.*)

TONY (*to* WEBBER, *whispering*): Turn it up, old boy. Or Groupie'll go up in flames.

WEBBER: But I tell you——

TONY (*reproachfully*): No, no, old boy. We bought it. Wizard girl there, though.

KENTON (*approaching them*): Champagne, sir?

WEBBER (*taking one*): You bet! Thanks.

KENTON (*to* TONY): And you, sir?

TONY (*taking one, promptly*): Certainly.

CAMYON (*turning, sternly*): Leave that stuff alone, Acton.

TONY: Certainly, sir. (*To* KENTON, *severely, returning glass.*) Certainly not.

KENTON (*to* CAMYON): Champagne, sir?

CAMYON (*grimly*): Yes. (*He takes the glass and flings the contents impressively on the floor. A cry from the girls.*) Now what do you think of that?

KENTON (*sturdily*): Not much, sir. This is the very last bottle in my cellar, and probably the last I'll ever see. No, sir, I don't think much of that.

LADY FARFIELD (*standing up from piano*): All right, Kenton, thank you. We shan't need you any more.

KENTON: Thank you, my lady.

He goes off down L.

LADY FARFIELD (*calling across to* CAMYON): That was unpardonable.

CAMYON (*stiffly*): It was. I'll apologise to your butler if I see him again. After all one can't blame an old servant for the faults of his employer.

LADY FARFIELD (*with irony*): Very considerate of you!

They now play and sing again, preferably something light, charming, mocking. As the music dies down—

LADY FARFIELD: Herbert—cigarettes for the gentlemen.

The embarrassed and grinning HERBERT *comes down with a small tray with twenty cigarettes on it.*

HERBERT: Er—cigarettes?

CAMYON (*sternly*): Come here. And take that grin off your face.

HERBERT: Yes, sir.

CAMYON (*indignantly*): A great healthy chap like you playing the flunkey at a time like this! What have *you* been doing the last few years? Handing round cigarettes and folding table napkins?

HERBERT (*equally indignant*): Me? I've just come back from the Eighth Army. 'Ere, I've 'ad enough o' this.

He puts down the little tray and hurries across to the stairs, but turns as he reaches them.

But don't forget them's my twenty Players. (*He goes upstairs.*)

CAMYON (*to* TONY *and* WEBBER): Eighth Army! Twenty Players! What *is* this?

LADY FARFIELD (*mockingly*): Just a little musical evening. Come on girls.

ACTON *starts to dance with* PAULINE, CAMYON *turns and sees him.* LADY FARFIELD *plays and all sing, applause.*

CAMYON: Acton!

ACTON *leaves* PAULINE. WEBBER *rises and dances with her.*

KILLIGREW (*who has been tuning his fiddle*): Quiet, please!

LADY FARFIELD: Now for some real music. (*With air of hostess with treat.*) Madame Lotta Schulberg, the famous soubrette of the Vienna Volksopera has very kindly consented to sing to us.

Some applause.

WEBBER (*whispering to* CAMYON): She's the cook really.

CAMYON (*with fierce irony*): And you're the Fairy Queen.

WEBBER (*earnestly*): Now—no kidding—I——

CAMYON (*cutting in roughly*): Oh—for God's sake—drop it.

LADY FARFIELD *at the piano with* KILLIGREW *behind her with his violin, the three girls picturesquely grouped round and* LOTTA *in front. She sings a number from light opera. As she finishes the telephone rings.*

TONY: Shall I answer it, sir? (*Moves towards the phone.*)

LADY FARFIELD (*rises*): Please do.

KILLIGREW (*to* LADY FARFIELD): My G string's gone. Have another somewhere upstairs but it may take some finding. So——

He smilingly waves a hand, as if in farewell, as he goes to staircase. Then turns there and calls across to LOTTA.

Any chance of early tea in the morning?

LOTTA (*firmly*): No chance at all.

KILLIGREW: It's about eighteen months since I had any early morning tea. (*Smiling across at* CAMYON.) You've probably had gallons—um?

CAMYON (*angrily*): I never touch the stuff.

As KILLIGREW *vanishes, the telephone rings again.*

EILEEN: We ought to go upstairs and change. Come on, Hilda.

LOTTA: I will go with you—and put these dresses away.

HILDA (*as they go to stairs, turning to* CAMYON): But one day factory girls'll look like queens—and don't you try to stop it.

CAMYON: Who said I wanted to stop it!

HILDA, EILEEN, LOTTA *go upstairs. The telephone rings again.*

LADY FARFIELD (*in large clear tone*): Come along, Pauline, we'll go along to the drawing-room—and let Group-Captain Camyon take his call.

CAMYON (*ironically*): Thank you!

LADY FARFIELD (*looking at him from near door*): But be careful now, Edward. Or I swear I'll never speak to you again.

She sweeps out, with PAULINE. *Telephone rings again.* WEBBER, *who has been holding door open for* LADY FARFIELD, *shuts it and comes in. He,* SAM, TONY *watch* CAMYON, *who after some hesitation goes to telephone.*

CAMYON (*at telephone*): Yes, Group-Captain Camyon here . . . What? . . . Who d'you want to talk to? . . . What? . . . Here . . . Wait—— Gone. (*To the others.*) Some nonsense about a farmer and some fiddles. What is this—a madhouse?

WEBBER (*roaring with laughter*): That'll be Killigrew and his string quartettes. Well, well, well!

CAMYON (*bewildered*): Who's Killigrew—this fiddler chap here?

WEBBER (*still laughing*): Yes. One of your prominent Civil Servants. Ministry of Reconstruction.

CAMYON: Now are you starting all over again——?

WEBBER (*still laughing*): But I've told you the exact truth the whole time. (*To* SAM, *who has now taken off his footman's coat, and is lighting his pipe.*) Sam—you'd better tell him.

SAM: Now tak' it easy, Group-Captain Camyon. This is no madder nor most 'ouses. We're all bit barmy these days any'ow.

WEBBER (*laughing*): I'll say we are.

TONY (*to* WEBBER): That's all right, old boy, but you're not carrying the can. Let's get all this buttoned up.

CAMYON: Now wait a minute. What kind of a footman are you?

SAM: No kind. Don't be daft. Ah'm foreman at factory where we make the new Prestons.

CAMYON: The new Prestons! I was coming over to your place.

SAM: Ah know, Ah know. An' me an' you's met before.

CAMYON (*staring at him*): So we have. I thought I'd seen you somewhere——

SAM: About twelve year since, an' you wor a Squadron-Leader then an' yer come to t'old Kestrel Five factory. Sam Cawthra.

CAMYON: Sam Cawthra—yes, I remember. But what on earth are you doing here?

SAM: Oh we're 'avin' a little party—so we 'ad a bit o' fun wi' yer——

CAMYON: Bit of fun! Now look here, Sam, let's get this straight. Have Lady Farfield and those girls really been working with you?

SAM: Ay, an' good workers an' all. Charge 'and now, Lady Farfield is.

CAMYON: But they looked——

SAM (*cutting in*): They looked as if they'd gone upstairs an' put some fancy clothes on. That's all. And—damn it—yer can't expect 'em to wear mucky overalls an' corduroy pants all the time.

TONY: Sir, we've bought it.

CAMYON: My God—I've made an ass of myself.

SAM: Well, yer not first an' yer won't be t'last.

CAMYON: No, but this is serious. (*Turning to* WEBBER.) I'm sorry, Major Webber.

WEBBER: Think nothing of it. Enjoyed every minute of it. Why, I haven't laughed so much in years—— (*Looks as if he's about to start laughing again.*)

TONY: Easy, old boy. We've had it now.

PAULINE *enters from drawing-room.*

PAULINE (*calmly*): Sorry to intrude. But I'm thirsty.

As she goes to drinks, TONY *and* WEBBER *go too.*

TONY: Of course. Good scheme! What'll you have?

SAM (*taking* CAMYON *downstage*): No, don't worry, there's no real 'arm done.

CAMYON (*quietly but urgently*): No, but you see, we quarrelled before the war—and I was in the right then, and she knew it but wouldn't admit it. And now that she's put me nicely in the wrong, she's never going to look at me again.

SAM: Ah can see yer know nowt about women. It's just when yer in the right that they can't forgive yer. Now that yer in the wrong, all yer 'ave to do is just to say 'ow sorry you are an' what a lot yer think about 'er—an' Bob's yer uncle. (*Moving him towards door down* R.) An' this is yer chance.

CAMYON (*hesitates a second, then bracing*): Thanks, Sam. I'll try.

SAM *makes for the stairs.*

SAM: We'll 'ave to be settin' off 'ome soon. Well, go on. Up the Air Force!

He goes upstairs, leaving PAULINE *and* TONY *obviously wishing to be rid of* WEBBER.

WEBBER (*obviously beginning to settle down*): Well, well! Turned out quite a party after all. Yes, *sir!*

PAULINE (*gravely regarding him*): Major Webber. You're looking very, very tired now. You really are.

WEBBER (*concerned*): Is that so?

PAULINE (*gravely*): Yes, it is. I think you ought to go to bed—and never mind about us.

TONY: Good scheme! You look all in, sir. Probably had a long day.

WEBBER: Well, I have had quite a long confused kinda day. May take me some time, I guess, to get the hang of things in this little neck of the woods.

PAULINE: Major Webber, I think you're very sweet.

WEBBER (*smiling*): Well, that's fine. You're a pretty cute trick yourself, Miss Pauline. And I'll turn in, I guess. Good night.

TONY AND PAULINE: Good night.

WEBBER (*turning on stairs*): I'll get around to it in time.

He goes upstairs.

TONY: Mind you, I know how he feels.

PAULINE: Why do you?

TONY: Well, what with last night——

PAULINE (*sternly*): Were you *drinking?*

TONY: Well—we had a can or two.

PAULINE: Any girls?

TONY: No—no—chaps—just chaps.

PAULINE: Well, pull yourself together, because I want to talk to you seriously. You're not, I hope, the type of officer who is looking forward to nothing after the war but the secretaryship of a second-rate golf club in a decaying society—are you?

TONY: Good Lord—no. Hate golf. And I'm full of plans and ambition and all that—you'd be surprised.

PAULINE: That's settled then. We can talk about your plans afterwards. In the meantime I shall call you Tony and you can call me Pauline.

TONY (*sincerely*): Thanks very much, Pauline.

KENTON (*entering from kitchen*): Beg pardon, miss. But is her ladyship in the drawing-room?

PAULINE: She is, and you mustn't disturb her. There isn't anything more for you to do. Just go straight upstairs to your little room and have one of your interesting dreams.

KENTON: Thank you, miss. I 'ad one last night, miss. I dreamt I took my old aunt, who used to keep the drapers', to the races at Goodwood.

PAULINE: Well, to-night you try and get her into the Royal Enclosure at Ascot.

KENTON (*with a sudden smile—the first*): Thank you, miss. And —good luck!

He goes back into kitchen.

PAULINE (*cool and clear*): Well, Tony, I've decided to take a deep personal interest in you.

TONY: Wizard! Absolutely wizard!

PAULINE: But first, I want to know why you keep staring at me in a puzzled rather than a fascinated manner.

TONY: Well—look here—you *are* the little Land Girl I saw when I first came in, aren't you?

PAULINE: Why? Does it matter?

TONY: It does rather. She completely bowled me over.

PAULINE (*indignantly*): So much for glamour. Look!

She begins hastily pulling off her dress.

TONY (*in alarm*): Hoy! Steady! Whoa!

PAULINE *now shows herself in her Land Girl's uniform. She smoothes her hair back to what it was before.*

PAULINE (*holding dress over her arm*): Well, here you are, idiot. Specimen of the Women's Land Army—Second World War.

TONY (*lost in admiration*): What a girl! You've got everything.

While they gaze at each other, CAMYON *and* LADY FARFIELD *enter from drawing-room.*

PAULINE (*hastily*): I must take this dress upstairs. You can come with me, if you like.

They begin to move towards the stairs.

CAMYON (*with mock severity*): Where are you going, Acton?

PAULINE (*coolly*): I've asked Squadron-Leader Acton to go with me as I'm very nervous at night.

LADY FARFIELD (*laughingly*): Pauline!

TONY: That's right, sir. Nervous type.

CAMYON (*grinning*): Go on. (*As the two youngsters hurry off, he turns to* LADY FARFIELD.) And another thing, Frances, I had a splitting bad headache.

LADY FARFIELD (*coldly*): Well, you shouldn't drink too much.

CAMYON: I haven't been drinking too much. You see, I got rather a nasty little crack on the head a few months ago and though it's healed now, it troubles me at times, and especially after travelling.

LADY FARFIELD (*concerned*): Oh—Edward, why didn't you tell me?

CAMYON: Hadn't a chance to. (*Moves towards her.*) But never mind that. What I really wanted to say was—not only was I wrong to-night, for which I apologise all over again, but also I was badly wrong before the war. I'm sorry.

LADY FARFIELD: I'm not so sure you were.

CAMYON: Oh yes, I was. And please say you forgive me. And don't forget I've already paid heavily for my stupidity.

LADY FARFIELD: How?

CAMYON: By having lost you for all this time. And to-night—when I saw you—at last—you took my breath away.

LADY FARFIELD: I certainly took your breath away—slapping you like that. And probably now that I'm a manual worker I don't know my own strength. I'm sorry Edward.

CAMYON: I asked for it. But please remember, Frances, I've been away overseas for four years, working with men who are wondering all the time about their womenfolk.

LADY FARFIELD (*gravely*): You tell them that we women at home work for them, pray for them, and think of nothing else, deep down, but the time when it'll be over and they're all back. And that's our real life.

CAMYON (*slowly*): I suppose I've no right even to ask, now. But—are you waiting for somebody like that?

LADY FARFIELD (*half-smiling*): No, Edward—not now.

CAMYON (*about to embrace her*): Frances—darling!

LADY FARFIELD: Darling!

Sound of factory party and HERBERT *coming downstairs.*

LADY FARFIELD: Oh damn! They're all coming down. But Edward, there's something I want to hear you say to other people before you talk to me.

As HILDA, EILEEN, SAM *and* HERBERT *come down.*

I suppose you ought to go really, but it seems a pity.

HILDA: Yes, it does. 'Ere, we've got our bikes, but what about 'Erbert?

EILEEN: I've fixed up to borrow one for him here.

HILDA (*to* HERBERT): You see—got somebody to look after you now.

SAM (*to* LADY FARFIELD): Well, thank you very much. Ah've 'ad a good evening, Ah don't know about t'others.

EILEEN (*shy and happy*): We all have. Haven't we, Herbert?

HERBERT (*grinning*): That's right. Except for that footman business.

CAMYON: Sorry about that, Corporal.

HERBERT: No 'arm done, sir. And—er—Lady Farfield, I wish you'd keep them twenty Players —like—just for what you've given me to-night——

LADY FARFIELD (*surprised*): But I haven't given you anything, have I?

HERBERT (*indicating* EILEEN): Well—look what I've got.

EILEEN (*confused but radiant*): Oh—'Erbert!

CAMYON: Quite right, Corporal. Ladies, I seem to have mis-

judged you all. I'm sorry. But you shouldn't have looked so gorgeous.

HILDA (*to* LADY FARFIELD): There! You see, he's nice really.

SAM: Come on.

CAMYON: Good night, Sam, see you at the factory in the morning.

Chorus of good-byes, thank you's, etc., as they all go up to main door. Enter LOTTA R.

LADY FARFIELD: And are you nice really, Edward? (*To* LOTTA.) You need not sit up, Lotta.

LOTTA (*picks up tray*): I know. I go to the kitchen to make some porridge. Always I forget the porridge. Good night (*Exit* LOTTA.)

LADY FARFIELD (*moving to settee*): And now that we've got this place to ourselves at last, let's be quiet and peaceful.

CAMYON (*sitting beside her*): I'm all for it, Frances. I've had quite a day.

LADY FARFIELD: So have I, darling. So let's make the best of it. Just relax and be quiet.

CAMYON: Enjoy out bit of luck. You know I'm not bad tempered really. A peaceful quiet chap when I'm allowed to be.

LADY FARFIELD: Perhaps we're all peaceful quiet chaps when we're allowed to be, darling. (*There is a loud ringing at the front door.*) Oh—my goodness!

Before they can move, door bursts open and three people carrying instruments and scores burst in. An elderly man with a beard, a stout middle-aged woman and a queer-looking young girl.

ELDERLY MAN (*loud rural voice*): Evening, all! This is it, isn't it? Farfield Hall. Mr. Killi—summat or other—asked for us to come. Onny time, he said, an' sooner the better, I thought. So we are here, though I don't know what use young Lucy'll be——

KILLIGREW, *armed with his fiddle and scores, dashes downstairs, while the others stare, amazed.*

KILLIGREW (*in tremendous form*): Hello, hello, hello! Happened to have my head out of the window and saw you arriving in your

gig or trap or whatever it is. Delighted to see you—Mr. er—— (*Consults his notebook.*) Mr. Bramley——

ELDERLY MAN: No.

KILLIGREW: No, of course not. Mr—er—Fraser——

ELDERLY MAN: No.

KILLIGREW: I mean, Mr. Henniman——

ELDERLY MAN: No.

KILLIGREW: Never mind. Delighted to see you. (*Indicating girl.*) Looks a bit young for the Mozart—but we'll manage——

There is now a tremendous sound of lorries arriving, female voices shouting, etc.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY *bursts in, with uniformed girls behind her, carrying files, etc.*

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*in loud official tone*): I'm billeting the whole of my headquarters here. There's nowhere else—and I warned you, Frances.

LADY FARFIELD (*protesting loudly*): Phyllis, you can't all descend on us like this.

COMMODORE PENTWORTHY (*ignoring them, in commanding tones*): All right, Millicent, unload as quickly as possible. Straight up the stairs, girls. Office files and equipment before personal luggage. Come along, girls, sharp now—tell the lorries to clear the doorway as soon as possible——

As she goes on giving loud orders, LADY FARFIELD *and* LOTTA *keep on protesting,* PAULINE *bursts into a scream of laughter, in which* TONY *joins, while* CAMYON *joins* LADY FARFIELD *in protesting. The din outside gets louder. The orchestra plays a gay mocking tune, and the curtain falls.*

THE END