

CONTEMPORARY BRITISH  
DRAMATISTS. VOL. TWENTY-SEVEN

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A Play in Three Acts  
by NOEL COWARD

*(Second Impression)*



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# HAY FEVER

A LIGHT COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY NOEL COWARD



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TO LORN LORAINÉ

# CHARACTERS

JUDITH BLISS

DAVID BLISS

SOREL BLISS

SIMON BLISS

MYRA ARUNDEL

RICHARD GREATHAM

JACKIE CORYTON

SANDY TYRELL

CLARA

*The action of the play takes place in the hall of the BLISSES' house at Cookham, in June.*

ACT I: *Saturday afternoon.*

ACT II: *Saturday evening.*

ACT III: *Sunday morning.*

# ACT I

## ACT I

SCENE: *The hall of DAVID BLISS's house is very comfortable and extremely untidy. There are several of SIMON's cartoons scattered about the walls, masses of highly coloured American and classical music strewn about the piano, and lots of flowers and comfortable furniture. A staircase ascends to a small balcony leading to the bedrooms, DAVID's study and SIMON's room. There is a door leading to the library down R. A service door above it under the stairs. There are French windows at back, and the front door on the L.*

*[When the curtain rises it is about three o'clock on a Saturday afternoon in June.*

*[SIMON, in an extremely dirty tennis shirt and baggy grey flannel trousers, is crouched in the middle of the floor, cutting out squares from cartridge paper.*

*[SOREL, more neatly dressed, is stretched on the sofa, reading a very violently bound volume of poems which have been sent to her by an aspiring friend.*

SOREL: Listen to this, Simon. (*She reads.*) "Love's a Trollop stained with wine—Clawing at the breasts of Adolescence—Nuzzling, tearing, shrieking, beating—God, why were we fashioned so!" (*She laughs.*)

SIMON: The poor girl's potty.

SOREL: I wish she hadn't sent me the beastly book. I must say something nice about it.

SIMON: The binding's very dashing.

SOREL: She used to be such fun before she married that gloomy little man.

SIMON: She was always a fierce *poseuse*. It's so silly of people to try and cultivate the artistic temperament. *Au fond* she's just a normal, bouncing Englishwoman.

SOREL: You didn't shave this morning.

SIMON: I know I didn't, but I'm going to in a minute, when I've finished this.

SOREL: I sometimes wish we were more normal and bouncing, Simon.

SIMON: Why?

SOREL: I should like to be a fresh, open-air girl with a passion for games.

SIMON: Thank God you're not.

SOREL: It would be so soothing.

SIMON: Not in this house.

SOREL: Where's Mother?

SIMON: In the garden, practising.

SOREL: Practising?

SIMON: She's learning the names of the flowers by heart.

SOREL: What's she up to?

SIMON: I don't know.—Damn! that's crooked.

SOREL: I always distrust her when she becomes the Squire's lady.

SIMON: So do I.

SOREL: She's been at it hard all day—she tapped the barometer this morning.

SIMON: She's probably got a plan about impressing somebody.

SOREL (*taking a cigarette*): I wonder who.

SIMON: Some dreary, infatuated young man will appear soon, I expect.

SOREL: Not to-day? You don't think she's asked anyone down to-day, do you?

SIMON: I don't know. Has Father noticed anything?

SOREL: No; he's too immersed in work.

SIMON: Perhaps Clara will know.

SOREL: Yell for her.

SIMON (*calling*): Clara! Clara!...

SOREL: Oh, Simon, I *do* hope she hasn't asked anyone down to-day.

SIMON: Why? Have you?

SOREL: Yes.

SIMON (*crossly*): Why on earth didn't you tell me?

SOREL: I didn't think you'd care one way or another.

SIMON: Who is it?

SOREL: Richard Greatham.

SIMON: How exciting! I've never heard of him.

SOREL: I shouldn't flaunt your ignorance if I were you—it makes you look silly.

SIMON (*rising*): Well, that's done. (*He rolls up the cartridge paper.*)

SOREL: Everybody's heard of Richard Greatham.

SIMON (*amiably*): How lovely for them.

SOREL: He's a frightfully well-known diplomatist—I met him at the Mainwarings' dance.

SIMON: He'll need all his diplomacy here.

SOREL: I warned him not to expect good manners, but I hope you'll be as pleasant to him as you can.

SIMON (*gently*): I've never met any diplomatists, Sorel, but as a class I'm extremely prejudiced against them. They're so suave and polished and debonair.

SOREL: You could be a little more polished without losing caste.

SIMON: Will he have the papers with him?

SOREL: What papers?

SIMON (*vaguely*): Oh, any papers.

SOREL: I wish you'd confine your biting irony to your caricatures, Simon.

SIMON: And I wish you'd confine your girlish infatuations to London, and not force them on your defenceless family.

SOREL: I shall keep him out of your way as much as possible.

SIMON: Do, darling.

[*Enter CLARA. She is a hot, round, untidy little woman.*]

SIMON: Clara, has Mother asked anyone down this week-end?

CLARA: I don't know, dear. There isn't much food in the house, and Amy's got toothache.

SOREL: I've got some oil of cloves somewhere.

CLARA: She tried that, but it only burnt her tongue. The poor girl's been writhing about in the scullery like one o'clock.

SOREL: You haven't forgotten to put those flowers in the Japanese room?

SIMON: The Japanese room is essentially feminine, and entirely unsuited to the Pet of the Foreign Office.

SOREL: Shut up, Simon.

CLARA: The room looks lovely, dear—you needn't worry. Just like your mother's dressing-room on a first night.

SIMON: How restful!

CLARA (*to SOREL*): Have you told her about your boy friend?

SOREL (*pained*): Not boy friend, Clara.

CLARA (*going round, picking up things*): Oh, well, whatever he is.

SIMON: I think Sorel's beginning to be ashamed of us all, Clara—I don't altogether blame her; we are very slapdash.

CLARA: Are you going to leave that picture in the guests' bathroom, dear? I don't know if it's quite the thing—lots of pink, naked women rolling about in a field.

SIMON (*severely*): Nudity can be very beautiful, Clara.

CLARA: Oh, can it! Perhaps being a dresser for so long 'as spoilt me eye for it. (*She goes out.*)

SIMON: Clara's looking tired. We ought to have more servants and not depend on her so much.

SOREL: You know we can never keep them. You're right about us being slapdash, Simon. I wish we weren't.

SIMON: Does it matter?

SOREL: It must, I think—to other people.

SIMON: It's not our fault—it's the way we've been brought up.

SOREL: Well, if we're clever enough to realise that, we ought to be clever enough to change ourselves.

SIMON: I'm not sure that I want to.

SOREL: We're so awfully bad-mannered.

SIMON: Not to people we like.

SOREL: The people we like put up with it because they like us.

SIMON: What do you mean, exactly, by bad manners? Lack of social tricks and small-talk?

SOREL: We never attempt to look after people when they come here.

SIMON: Why should we? It's loathsome being looked after.

SOREL: Yes, but people like little attentions. We've never once asked anyone if they've slept well.

SIMON: I consider that an impertinence, anyhow.

SOREL: I'm going to try to improve.

SIMON: You're only going on like this because you've got a mania for a diplomatist. You'll soon return to normal.

SOREL (*earnestly*): Abnormal, Simon—that's what we are. Abnormal. People stare in astonishment when we say what we consider perfectly ordinary things. I just remarked at Freda's lunch the other day how nice it would be if someone invented something to make all our faces go up like

the Chinese, because I was so bored with them going down—and they all thought I was mad!

SIMON: It's no use worrying, darling; we see things differently, I suppose, and if people don't like it they must lump it.

SOREL: Mother's been awfully restless lately.

SIMON: Yes, I know.

SOREL: Life must be terribly dull for her now, with nothing to do.

SIMON: She'll go back soon, I expect; people never retire from the stage for long.

SOREL: Father will be livid if she does.

SIMON: That won't matter.

*[Enter JUDITH from the garden. She is carrying an armful of flowers and wearing a tea-gown, a large garden hat, gauntlet gloves and goloshes.]*

JUDITH: You look awfully dirty, Simon. What have you been doing?

SIMON (*nonchalantly*): Not washing very much.

JUDITH: You should, darling, really. It's so bad for your skin to leave things about on it. (*She proceeds to take off her goloshes.*)

SOREL: Clara says Amy's got toothache.

JUDITH: Poor dear! There's some oil of cloves in my medicine cupboard. Who is Amy?

SOREL: The scullery-maid, I think.

JUDITH: How extraordinary! She doesn't look Amy a bit, does she? Much more Flossie.—Give me a cigarette.

*[SOREL gives her a cigarette and lights it.]*

Delphiniums are those stubby red flowers, aren't they?

SIMON: No, darling, they're tall and blue.

JUDITH: Yes, of course. The red ones are somebody's name—Asters, that's it. I knew it was something opulent. I do hope Clara has remembered about the Japanese room.

SOREL: Japanese room!

JUDITH: Yes; I told her to put some flowers in it and take Simon's flannels out of the wardrobe drawer.

SOREL: So did I.

JUDITH (*ominously*): Why?

SOREL (*airily*): I've asked Richard Greatham down for the week-end—I didn't think you'd mind.

JUDITH: Mind! How dared you do such a thing?

SOREL: He's a diplomatist.

JUDITH: That makes it much worse. We must wire and put him off at once.

SOREL: It's too late.

JUDITH: Well, we'll tell Clara to say we've been called away.

SOREL: That would be extremely rude, and, anyhow, I *want* to see him.

JUDITH: You mean to stand there in cold blood and tell me you've asked a complete stranger down for the week-end, and that you want to see him!

SOREL: I've often done it before.

JUDITH: I fail to see how that helps matters. Where's he going to sleep?

SOREL: The Japanese room.

JUDITH: Oh, no, he isn't—Sandy Tyrell is sleeping in it.

SIMON: There now! What did I tell you?

SOREL: Sandy—what?

JUDITH: Tyrell, dear.

SIMON: Why didn't you tell us, Mother?

JUDITH: I did. I've talked of nothing but Sandy Tyrell for days. I adore Sandy Tyrell.

SIMON: You've never mentioned him.

SOREL: Who is he, Mother?

JUDITH: He's a perfect darling, and madly in love with me—at least, it isn't me really, it's my Celebrated Actress glamour—but it gives me a divinely cosy feeling. I met him at Nora Trent's.

SOREL: Mother, I wish you'd give up this sort of thing.

JUDITH: What exactly do you mean by "this sort of thing," Sorel?

SOREL: You know perfectly well what I mean.

JUDITH: Are you attempting to criticise me?

SOREL: I should have thought you'd be above encouraging silly callow young men who are infatuated by your name.

JUDITH: That may be true, but I shall allow nobody but myself to say it. I hoped you'd grow up a good daughter to me, not a critical aunt.

SOREL: It's so terribly cheap.

JUDITH: Cheap! Nonsense! What about your diplomatist?

SOREL: Surely that's a little different, dear?

JUDITH: If you mean that because you happen to be a vigorous *ingénue* of nineteen you have the complete monopoly of any amorous adventure there may be about, I feel it my firm duty to disillusion you.

SOREL: But, Mother——

JUDITH: Anyone would think I was eighty, the way you go on. It was a great mistake not sending you to boarding schools, and you coming back and me being your elder sister.

SIMON: It wouldn't have been any use. Everyone knows we're your son and daughter.

JUDITH: Only because I was stupid enough to dandle you about in front of cameras when you were little. I knew I should regret it.

SIMON: I don't see any point in trying to be younger than you are.

JUDITH: At your age, dear, it would be indecent if you did.

SOREL: But, Mother darling, don't you see, it's awfully undignified for you to go flaunting about with young men?

JUDITH: I don't flaunt about—I never have. I've been morally an extremely nice woman all my life—more or less—and if dabbling gives me pleasure, I don't see why I shouldn't dabble.

SOREL: But it oughtn't to give you pleasure any more.

JUDITH: You know, Sorel, you grow more damnably feminine every day. I wish I'd brought you up differently.

SOREL: I'm proud of being feminine.

JUDITH (*kissing her*): You're a darling, and I adore you; and you're very pretty, and I'm madly jealous of you.

SOREL (*with her arms round her*): Are you really? How lovely.

JUDITH: You will be nice to Sandy, won't you?

SOREL (*breaking away*): Can't he sleep in "Little Hell"?

JUDITH: My dear, he's frightfully athletic, and all those hot-water pipes will sap his vitality.

SOREL: They'll sap Richard's vitality too.

JUDITH: He won't notice them; he's probably used to scorching tropical Embassies with punkahs waving and everything.

SIMON: He's sure to be deadly, anyhow.

SOREL: You're getting far too blasé and exclusive, Simon.

SIMON: Nothing of the sort. Only I loathe being hearty with your men friends.

SOREL: You've never been even civil to any of my friends, men or women.

JUDITH: Don't bicker.

SIMON: Anyhow, the Japanese room's a woman's room, and a woman ought to have it.

JUDITH: I promised it to Sandy—he loves anything Japanese.

SIMON: So does Myra.

JUDITH: Myra!

SIMON: Myra Arundel. I've asked her down.

JUDITH: You've—what?

SIMON: I've asked Myra down for the week-end—she's awfully amusing.

SOREL: Well, all I can say is, it's beastly of you. You might have warned me. What on earth will Richard say?

SIMON: Something exquisitely non-committal, I expect.

JUDITH: This is too much! Do you mean to tell me, Simon——

SIMON (*firmly*): Yes, Mother, I do. I've asked Myra down, and I have a perfect right to. You've always brought us up to be free about things.

JUDITH: Myra Arundel is straining freedom to its utmost limits.

SIMON: Don't you like her?

JUDITH: No, dear, I detest her. She's far too old for you, and she goes about using Sex as a sort of shrimping net.

SIMON: Really, Mother——!

JUDITH: It's no use being cross. You know perfectly well I dislike her, and that's why you never told me she was coming until too late to stop her. It's intolerable of you.

SOREL (*grandly*): Whether she's here or not is a matter of extreme indifference to me, but I'm afraid Richard won't like her very much.

SIMON: You're afraid he'll like her too much.

SOREL: That was an offensive remark, Simon, and rather silly.

JUDITH (*plaintively*): Why on earth don't you fall in love with nice young girls, instead of self-conscious vampires?

SIMON: She's not a vampire, and I never said I was in love with her.

SOREL: He's crazy about her. She butters him up and admires his sketches.

SIMON: What about you picking up old gentlemen at dances?

SOREL (*furiously*): He's *not* old!

JUDITH: You've both upset me thoroughly. I wanted a nice, restful weekend, with moments of Sandy's ingenuous affection to warm the cockles of my heart when I felt in the mood, and now the house is going to be full of discord—not enough food, everyone fighting for the bath—perfect agony! I wish I were dead!

SIMON: You needn't worry about Myra and me. We shall keep out of everyone's way.

SOREL: I shall take Richard on the river all day to-morrow.

JUDITH: In what?

SOREL: The punt.

JUDITH: I absolutely forbid you to go near the punt.

SIMON: It's sure to rain, anyhow.

JUDITH: What your father will say I tremble to think. He needs complete quiet to finish off "The Sinful Woman."

SOREL: I see no reason for there to be any noise, unless Sandy What's-his-name is given to shouting.

JUDITH: If you're rude to Sandy I shall be extremely angry.

SOREL: } Now, look here, Mother——

SIMON: } Why you should expect——

JUDITH: } He's coming all the way down specially to be nice to me  
——

[*Enter DAVID down stairs. He looks slightly irritable.*]

DAVID: Why are you all making such a noise?

JUDITH: I think I'm going mad.

DAVID: Why hasn't Clara brought me my tea?

JUDITH: I don't know.

DAVID: Where is Clara?

JUDITH: Do stop firing questions at me, David.

DAVID: Why are you all so irritable? What's happened?

*[Enter CLARA, with a tray of tea for one.]*

CLARA: Here's your tea. I'm sorry I'm late with it. Amy forgot to put the kettle on—she's got terrible toothache.

DAVID: Poor girl! Give her some oil of cloves.

SOREL: If anyone else mentions oil of cloves, I shall do something desperate.

DAVID: It's wonderful stuff. Where's Zoe?

SIMON: She was in the garden this morning.

DAVID: I suppose no one thought of giving her any lunch?

CLARA: I put it down by the kitchen table as usual, but she never came in for it.

SOREL: She's probably mousing.

DAVID: She isn't old enough yet. She might have fallen into the river, for all you care. I think it's a shame!

CLARA: Don't you worry your head—Zoe won't come to any harm; she's too wily.

DAVID: I don't want to be disturbed. *(He takes his tray and goes upstairs; then he turns.)* Listen, Simon. There's a perfectly sweet flapper coming down by the four-thirty. Will you go and meet her and be nice to her? She's an abject fool, but a useful type, and I want to study her a little in domestic surroundings. She can sleep in the Japanese room.

[*He goes off, leaving behind him a deathly silence.*]

JUDITH: I should like someone to play something very beautiful to me on the piano.

SIMON: Damn everything! Damn! Damn! Damn!

SOREL: Swearing doesn't help.

SIMON: It helps me a lot.

SOREL: What does Father mean by going on like that?

JUDITH: In view of the imminent reception, you'd better go and shave, Simon.

SOREL (*bursting into tears of rage*): It's perfectly beastly! Whenever I make any sort of plan about anything it's always done in by someone. I wish I were earning my own living somewhere—a free agent—able to do whatever I liked without being cluttered up and frustrated by the family

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JUDITH (*picturesquely*): It grieves me to hear you say that, Sorel.

SOREL: Don't be infuriating, Mother.

JUDITH (*sadly*): A change has come over my children of late. I have tried to shut my eyes to it, but in vain. At my time of life one must face bitter facts!

SIMON: This is going to be the blackest Saturday till Monday we've ever spent.

JUDITH (*tenderly*): Sorel, you mustn't cry.

SOREL: Don't sympathise with me; it's only temper.

JUDITH (*clasping her*): Put your head on my shoulder, dear.

SIMON (*bitterly*): Your head like the golden fleece....

SOREL: Richard'll have to have "Little Hell" and that horrible flapper the Japanese room.

JUDITH: Over my dead body!

SIMON: Mother, what *are* we to do?

JUDITH (*drawing him forcibly into her arms so that there is a charming little motherly picture*): We must all be very, very kind to everyone!

SIMON: Now then, Mother, none of that!

JUDITH (*aggrieved*): I don't know what you mean, Simon.

SIMON: You were being beautiful and sad.

JUDITH: But I am beautiful and sad.

SIMON: You're not particularly beautiful, darling, and you never were.

JUDITH (*glancing at herself in the glass*): Never mind; I made thousands think I was.

SIMON: And as for being sad——

JUDITH: Now, Simon, I will not be dictated to like this. If I say I'm sad, I *am* sad. You don't understand, because you're precocious and tiresome.... There comes a time in all women's lives——

SOREL: Oh dear!

JUDITH: What did you say, Sorel?

SOREL (*recovering*): I said, "Oh dear!"

JUDITH: Well, please don't say it again, because it annoys me.

SOREL: You're such a lovely hypocrite.

JUDITH (*casting up her eyes*): I'm sure I don't know what I've done to be cursed with such ungrateful children. It's very cruel at my time of life——

SIMON: There you go again!

JUDITH (*inconsequently*): You're getting far too tall, Sorel.

SOREL: Sorry, Mother.

JUDITH: Give me another of those disgusting cigarettes—I don't know where they came from.

SIMON (*giving her one*): Here. (*He lights it for her.*)

JUDITH: I'm going to forget entirely about all these dreadful people arriving. My mind henceforward shall be a blank on the subject.

SOREL: It's all very fine, Mother, but——

JUDITH: I made a great decision this morning.

SIMON: What kind of decision?

JUDITH: It's a secret.

SOREL: Aren't you going to tell us?

JUDITH: Of course. I meant it was a secret from your Father.

SIMON: What is it?

JUDITH: I'm going back to the stage.

SIMON: I knew it!

JUDITH: I'm stagnating, you see. I won't stagnate as long as there's breath left in my body.

SOREL: Do you think it's wise? You retired so very finally last year. What excuse will you give for returning so soon?

JUDITH: My public, dear—letters from my public!

SIMON: Have you had any?

JUDITH: One or two. That's what decided me, really—I ought to have had hundreds.

SOREL: We'll write some lovely ones, and you can publish them in the papers.

JUDITH: Of course.

SOREL: You will be dignified about it all, won't you, darling?

JUDITH: I'm much more dignified on the stage than in the country—it's my *milieu*. I've tried terribly hard to be "landed gentry," but without any real success. I long for excitement and glamour. Think of the thrill of a first night; all those ardent playgoers willing one to succeed; the critics all leaning forward with glowing faces, receptive and exultant—emitting queer little inarticulate noises as some witty line tickles their fancy. The satisfied

grunt of the *Daily Mail*, the abandoned gurgle of the *Sunday Times*, and the shrill, enthusiastic scream of the *Daily Express*! I can distinguish them all

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SIMON: Have you got a play?

JUDITH: I think I shall revive “Love’s Whirlwind.”

SOREL (*collapsing on to sofa*): Oh, Mother! (*She gurgles with laughter.*)

SIMON (*weakly*): Father will be furious.

JUDITH: I can’t help that.

SOREL: It’s such a fearful play.

JUDITH: It’s a marvellous part. You mustn’t say too much against it, Sorel. I’m willing to laugh at it a little myself, but, after all, it *was* one of my greatest successes.

SIMON: Oh, it’s appalling—but I love it. It makes me laugh.

JUDITH: The public love it too, and it doesn’t make them laugh—much. (*She recites*) “You are a fool, a blind, pitiable fool. You think because you have bought my body that you have bought my soul!” You must say that’s dramatic.—“I’ve dreamed of love like this, but I never realised, I never knew how beautiful it could be in reality!” That line always brought a tear to my eye.

SIMON: The Second Act *is* the best, there’s no doubt about that.

JUDITH: From the moment Victor comes in it’s strong—tremendously strong.... Be Victor a minute, Sorel——

SOREL: Do you mean when he comes in at the end of the act?

JUDITH: Yes, you know—“Is this a game?”

SOREL (*with feeling*): “Is this a game?”

JUDITH (*with spirit*): “Yes—and a game that must be played to the finish.”

SIMON: “Zara, what does this mean?”

JUDITH: “So many illusions shattered—so many dreams trodden in the dust!”

SOREL: I'm George now—"I don't understand! You and Victor—My God!"

JUDITH: "Sssh! Isn't that little Pam crying?"

SIMON (*savagely*): "She'll cry more, poor mite, when she realises her mother is a——"

JUDITH (*shrieking*): "Don't say it—don't say it!"

SOREL: "Spare her that."

JUDITH: "I've given you all that makes life worth living—my youth, my womanhood, and now my child. Would you tear the very heart out of me? I tell you that it's infamous that men like you should be allowed to pollute Society. You have ruined my life—I have nothing left—nothing. God in heaven, where am I to turn for help...."

SOREL (*through clenched teeth*): "Is this true? Answer me—is this true?"

JUDITH (*wailing*): "Yes, yes!"

SOREL (*springing at SIMON*): "You cur!"

[*The front door bell rings.*

JUDITH: Damn! There's the bell.

SOREL (*rushing to the glass*): I look hideous!

SIMON: Yes, dear.

[*CLARA enters.*

JUDITH: Clara—before you open the door—we shall be eight for dinner.

CLARA: My God!

SIMON: And for breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner to-morrow.

JUDITH (*vaguely*): Will you get various rooms ready?

CLARA: I shall have to—they can't sleep in the passage.

SOREL: How we've upset Clara.

JUDITH: It can't be helped—nothing can be helped. It's Fate—everything that happens is Fate. That's always a great comfort to me.

CLARA: More like arrant selfishness.

JUDITH: You mustn't be pert, Clara.

CLARA: Pert I may be, but I 'ave got some thought for others. Eight for dinner—Amy going home early. It's more nor less than an imposition.

*[The bell rings again.]*

SIMON: Hadn't you better let them all in?

*[CLARA goes to the front door and admits SANDY TYRELL, who is a fresh-looking young man; he has an unspoilt, youthful sense of honour and rather big hands, owing to a misplaced enthusiasm for amateur boxing.]*

*[CLARA goes out.]*

SANDY (to JUDITH): I say, it's perfectly ripping of you to let me come down.

JUDITH: Are you alone?

SANDY (*surprised*): Yes.

JUDITH: I mean, you didn't meet anyone at the station?

SANDY: I motored down; my car's outside. Would you like me to meet anybody?

JUDITH: Oh, no. I must introduce you. This is my daughter Sorel, and my son Simon.

SANDY (*shaking hands*): How-do-you-do.

SOREL (*coldly*): I'm extremely well, thank you, and I hope you are.

SIMON: So do I.

*[They both go upstairs rather grandly. SANDY looks shattered.]*

JUDITH: You must forgive me for having rather peculiar children. Have you got a bag or anything?

SANDY: Yes; it's in the car.

JUDITH: We'd better leave it there for the moment, as Clara has to get the tea. We'll find you a room afterwards.

SANDY: I've been looking forward to this most awfully.

JUDITH: It is nice, isn't it? You can see as far as Marlow on a clear day, they tell me.

SANDY: I meant I've been looking forward to seeing you.

JUDITH: How perfectly sweet of you. Would you like a drink?

SANDY: No thanks. I'm in training.

JUDITH (*sitting on sofa and motioning him to sit beside her*): How lovely. What for?

SANDY: I'm boxing again in a couple of weeks.

JUDITH: I must come to your first night.

SANDY: You look simply splendid.

JUDITH: I'm so glad. You know, you mustn't mind if Simon and Sorel insult you a little—they've been very bad-tempered lately.

SANDY: It's awfully funny you having a grown-up son and daughter at all. I can hardly believe it.

JUDITH (*quickly*): I was married very young.

SANDY: I don't wonder. You know, it's frightfully queer the way I've been planning to know you for ages, and I never did until last week.

JUDITH: I liked you from the first, really, because you're such a nice shape.

SANDY (*slightly embarrassed*): Oh, I see....

JUDITH: Small hips and lovely long legs—I wish Simon had smaller hips. Do you think you could teach him to box?

SANDY: Rather—if he likes.

JUDITH: That's just the trouble—I'm afraid he won't like. He's so dreadfully un—that sort of thing. But never mind; you must use your influence subtly. I'm sure David would be pleased.

SANDY: Who's David?

JUDITH: My husband.

SANDY (*surprised*): Oh!

JUDITH: Why do you say “Oh” like that? Didn't you know I had a husband?

SANDY: I thought he was dead.

JUDITH: No, he's not dead; he's upstairs.

SANDY: You're quite different from what you were the other day.

JUDITH: It's this garden hat—I'll take it off. (*She does so.*) There. I've been pruning the calceolarias.

SANDY (*puzzled*): Oh?—

JUDITH: I love my garden, you know—it's so peaceful and quaint. I spend long days dreaming away in it—you know how one dreams.

SANDY: Oh, yes.

JUDITH (*warming up*): I always longed to leave the brittle glamour of cities and theatres and find rest in some old-world nook. That's why we came to Cookham.

SANDY: It's awfully nice—Cookham.

JUDITH: Have you ever seen me on the stage?

SANDY: Rather!

JUDITH: What in?

SANDY: That thing when you pretended to cheat at cards to save your husband's good name.

JUDITH: Oh, “The Bold Deceiver.” That play was never quite right.

SANDY: You were absolutely wonderful. That was when I first fell in love with you.

JUDITH (*delighted*): Was it, really?

SANDY: Yes; you were so frightfully pathetic and brave.

JUDITH (*basking*): Was I?

SANDY: Rather!

*[There is a pause.]*

JUDITH: Well, go on....

SANDY: I feel such a fool, telling you what I think, as though it mattered.

JUDITH: Of course it matters—to me, anyhow.

SANDY: Does it—honestly?

JUDITH: Certainly.

SANDY: It seems too good to be true—sitting here and talking as though we were old friends.

JUDITH: We *are* old friends—we probably met in another life. Reincarnation, you know—fascinating!

SANDY: You do say ripping things.

JUDITH: Do I? Give me a cigarette and let’s put our feet up.

SANDY: All right.

*[They settle themselves comfortably at opposite ends of the sofa, smoking.]*

JUDITH: Can you punt?

SANDY: Yes—a bit.

JUDITH: You must teach Simon—he always gets the pole stuck.

SANDY: I'd rather teach you.

JUDITH: You're so gallant and chivalrous—much more like an American than an Englishman.

SANDY: I should like to go on saying nice things to you for ever.

JUDITH (*giving him her hand*): Sandy!

[*There comes a loud ring at the bell. JUDITH jumps.*]

There now!

SANDY: Is anyone else coming to stay?

JUDITH: Anyone else! You don't know—you just don't know. Give me my hat.

SANDY (*giving it to her*): You said it would be quite quiet, with nobody at all.

JUDITH: I was wrong. It's going to be very noisy, with herds of angry people stamping about.

[*CLARA enters and opens the front door. MYRA ARUNDEL is posed outside, consciously well-dressed, with several suit-cases, and a tennis racquet.*]

MYRA (*advancing*): Judith—my—dear—this is divine!

JUDITH (*emptily*): Too, too lovely—Where are the others?

MYRA: What others?

[*CLARA goes out.*]

JUDITH: Did you come by the four-thirty?

MYRA: Yes.

JUDITH: Didn't you see anyone at the station?

MYRA: Yes; several people, but I didn't know they were coming here.

JUDITH: Well, they are.

MYRA: Sorel said it was going to be just ourselves this week-end.

JUDITH (*sharply*): Sorel?

MYRA: Yes—didn't she tell you she'd asked me? Weren't you expecting me?

JUDITH: Simon muttered something about your coming, but Sorel didn't mention it. Wasn't that odd of her?

MYRA: You're a divinely mad family. (*To SANDY*) How-do-you-do? It's useless to wait for introductions with the Blisses. My name's Myra Arundel.

JUDITH (*airily*): Sandy Tyrell, Myra Arundel; Myra Arundel, Sandy Tyrell. There.

MYRA: Is that your car outside?

SANDY: Yes.

MYRA: Well, Judith, I *do* think you might have told me someone was motoring down. A nice car would have been so much more comfortable than that beastly train.

JUDITH: I never knew you were coming until a little while ago.

MYRA: It's heavenly here—after London. The heat was terrible when I left. You look awfully well, Judith. Rusticating obviously agrees with you.

JUDITH: I'm glad you think so. Personally, I feel that a nervous breakdown is imminent.

MYRA: My dear, how ghastly! What's the matter?

JUDITH: Nothing's the matter yet, Myra, but I have presentiments. Come upstairs, Sandy, and I'll show you your room.

[*She begins to go upstairs, followed by SANDY. Then she turns.*]

I'll send Simon down to you. He's shaving, I think, but you won't mind that, will you?

[*She goes off. MYRA makes a slight grimace after her, then she helps herself to a cigarette and wanders about the hall—she might almost play the piano a little; anyhow, she is perfectly at home.*

[*SIMON comes downstairs very fast, putting on his coat. He has apparently finished his toilet.*

SIMON: Myra, this is marvellous! (*He tries to kiss her.*)

MYRA (*pushing him away*): No, Simon dear; it's too hot.

SIMON: You look beautifully cool.

MYRA: I'm more than cool really, but it's not climatic coolness. I've been mentally chilled to the marrow by Judith's attitude.

SIMON: Why, what did she say?

MYRA: Nothing very much. She was bouncing about on the sofa with a hearty young thing in flannels, and seemed to resent my appearance rather.

SIMON: You mustn't take any notice of Mother.

MYRA: I'll try not to, but it's difficult.

SIMON: She adores you, really.

MYRA: I'm sure she does.

SIMON: She's annoyed to-day because Father and Sorel have been asking people down without telling her.

MYRA: Poor dear! I quite see why.

SIMON: You look enchanting.

MYRA: Thank you, Simon.

SIMON: Are you pleased to see me?

MYRA: Of course. That's why I came.

SIMON: Darling!

MYRA: Sssh! Don't shout.

SIMON: I feel most colossally temperamental—I should like to kiss you and kiss you and kiss you and break everything in the house and then jump

into the river.

MYRA: Dear Simon!

SIMON: You're everything I want you to be—absolutely everything. Marvellous clothes, marvellous looks, marvellous brain—Oh, God, it's terrible....

MYRA: I dined with Charlie Templeton last night.

SIMON: Well, you're a devil. You only did it to annoy me. He's far too plump, and he can't do anything but dither about the Embassy in badly-cut trousers. You loathe him really; you know you do—you're too intelligent not to. You couldn't like him and me at the same time—it's impossible!

MYRA: Don't be so conceited.

SIMON: Darling—I adore you.

MYRA: That's right.

SIMON: But you're callous—that's what it is, callous! You don't care a damn. You don't love me a bit, do you?

MYRA: Love's a very big word, Simon.

SIMON: It isn't—it's tiny. What are we to do?

MYRA: What do you mean?

SIMON: We can't go on like this.

MYRA: I'm not going on like anything.

SIMON: Yes, you are; you're going on like Medusa, and there are awful snakes popping their heads out at me from under your hat—I shall be turned to stone in a minute, and then you'll be sorry.

MYRA (*laughing*): You're very sweet, and I'm very fond of you.

SIMON: Tell me what you've been doing—everything.

MYRA: Nothing.

SIMON: What did you do after you'd dined with Charlie Templeton?

MYRA: Supped with Charlie Templeton.

SIMON: Well, I don't mind a bit. I hope you ate a lot and enjoyed yourself—there!

MYRA: Generous boy! Come and kiss me.

SIMON: You're only playing up to me now; you don't really want to a bit.

MYRA: I'm aching for it.

SIMON (*kissing her violently*): I love you.

MYRA: This week-end's going to be strenuous.

SIMON: Hell upon earth—fifteen million people in the house. We'll get up at seven and rush away down the river.

MYRA: No, we won't.

SIMON: Don't let either of us agree to anything we say—we'll both be difficult. I love being difficult.

MYRA: You certainly do.

SIMON: But I'm in the most lovely mood now. Just seeing you makes me feel grand——

MYRA: Is your father here?

SIMON: Yes; he's working on a new novel.

MYRA: He writes brilliantly.

SIMON: Doesn't he? He drinks too much tea, though.

MYRA: It can't do him much harm, surely?

SIMON: It tans the stomach.

MYRA: Who is Sandy Tyrell?

SIMON: Never heard of him.

MYRA: He's here, with Judith.

SIMON: Oh, that poor thing with hot hands! We'll ignore him.

MYRA: I thought he looked rather nice.

SIMON: You must be mad. He looked disgusting.

MYRA (*laughing*): Idiot!

SIMON (*flinging himself on the sofa*): Smooth my hair with your soft white hands.

MYRA (*ruffling it*): It's got glue on it.

SIMON (*catching her hand and kissing it*): You smell heavenly. What is it?

MYRA: Borgia of Rosine.

SIMON: How appropriate. (*He pulls her down and kisses her.*)

MYRA (*breaking away*): You're too demonstrative to-day, Simon.

[*The front door bell rings.*]

SIMON: Damn, damn! It's those drearies.

[*MYRA powders her nose as CLARA crosses to open door.*]

[*RICHARD GREATHAM and JACKIE CORYTON come in. There is, by this time, a good deal of luggage on the step. RICHARD is iron-grey and tall; JACKIE is small and shingled, with an ingenuous manner which will lose its charm as she grows older.*]

RICHARD: This is Mrs. Bliss's house.

CLARA (*off-hand*): Oh, yes, this is it.

RICHARD: Is Miss Sorel Bliss in?

CLARA: I expect so. I'll see if I can find her. (*She goes upstairs, humming a tune.*)

SIMON: Hallo. Did you have a nice journey?

RICHARD: Yes, thank you, very nice. I met Miss Coryton at the station. We introduced ourselves while we were waiting for the only taxi to come back.

MYRA: Oh, *I* took the only taxi. How maddening of me.

RICHARD: Mrs. Arundel! How-do-you-do. I never recognised you.

*[They shake hands.]*

JACKIE: I did.

MYRA: Why? Have we met anywhere?

JACKIE: No; I mean I recognised you as the one who took the taxi.

RICHARD (*to SIMON*): You are Sorel's brother?

SIMON: Yes; she'll be down in a minute. Come out into the garden, Myra

---

MYRA: But, Simon, we can't....

SIMON (*grabbing her hand and dragging her off*): Yes, we can. I shall go mad if I stay in the house a moment longer. (*Over his shoulder to RICHARD and JACKIE*) Tea will be here soon.

*[He and MYRA go off.]*

JACKIE: Well!

RICHARD: A strange young man.

JACKIE: Very rude, I think.

RICHARD: Have you ever met him before?

JACKIE: No; I don't know any of them except Mr. Bliss—he's a wonderful person.

RICHARD: I wonder if he knows you're here.

JACKIE: Perhaps that funny woman who opened the door will tell him.

RICHARD: It was fortunate that we met at the station.

JACKIE: I'm frightfully glad. I should have been terrified arriving all by myself.

RICHARD: I do hope the weather will keep good over Sunday—the country round here is delightful.

JACKIE: Yes.

RICHARD: There's nowhere like England in the spring and summer.

JACKIE: No, there isn't, is there?

RICHARD: There's a sort of *quality* you find in no other countries.

JACKIE: Have you travelled a lot?

RICHARD (*modestly*): A good deal.

JACKIE: How lovely.

[*There is a pause.*]

RICHARD: Spain is very beautiful.

JACKIE: Yes, I've always heard Spain was awfully nice.

RICHARD: Except for the bull-fights. No one who ever really loved horses could enjoy a bull-fight.

JACKIE: Nor anyone who loved bulls either.

RICHARD: Exactly.

JACKIE: Italy's awfully nice, isn't it?

RICHARD: Oh, yes, charming.

JACKIE: I've always wanted to go to Italy.

RICHARD: Rome is a beautiful city.

JACKIE: Yes, I've always heard Rome was lovely.

RICHARD: And Naples and Capri—Capri's enchanting.

JACKIE: It must be.

RICHARD: Have you ever been abroad at all?

JACKIE: Oh, yes; I went to Dieppe once—we had a house there for the summer.

RICHARD (*kindly*): Dear little place—Dieppe.

JACKIE: Yes, it was lovely.

[JUDITH *comes downstairs, followed by SANDY, with his arms full of cushions. She motions him out into the garden, sits down and puts on her goloshes, and then follows him.*

JACKIE: Well!

RICHARD: Russia used to be a wonderful country before the war.

JACKIE: It must have been.... Was that her?

RICHARD: Who?

JACKIE: Judith Bliss.

RICHARD: Yes, I expect it was.

JACKIE: I wish I'd never come.

RICHARD: You mustn't worry. They're a very Bohemian family, I believe.

JACKIE: I wonder if Mr. Bliss knows I'm here.

RICHARD: I wonder.

JACKIE: Couldn't we ring a bell, or anything?

RICHARD: Yes, perhaps we'd better. (*He finds bell and presses it.*)

JACKIE: I don't suppose it rings.

RICHARD: You mustn't be depressed.

JACKIE: I feel horrid.

RICHARD: It's always a little embarrassing coming to a strange house for the first time. You'll like Sorel—she's charming.

JACKIE (*desperately*): I wonder where she is.

RICHARD (*consolingly*): I expect tea will be here soon.

JACKIE: Do you think they *have* tea?

RICHARD (*alarmed*): Oh, yes—they must.

JACKIE: Oh, well, we'd better go on waiting, then. (*She sits down.*)

RICHARD: Do you mind if I smoke?

JACKIE: Not a bit.

RICHARD: Will you?

JACKIE: No, thank you.

RICHARD (*sitting down*): I got this case in Japan. It's pretty, isn't it?

JACKIE: Awfully pretty.

[*They lapse into hopeless silence.*]

[*Enter SOREL, down stairs.*]

SOREL: Oh, Richard, I'm dreadfully sorry. I didn't know you were here.

RICHARD: We've been here a good while.

SOREL: How awful! Please forgive me. I was upstairs.

RICHARD: This is Miss Coryton.

SOREL: Oh!

JACKIE: How-do-you-do.

SOREL: Have you come to see Father?

JACKIE: Yes.

SOREL: He's in his study—you'd better go up.

JACKIE: I don't know the way.

SOREL (*irritably*): Oh, well—I'll take you. Come on. Wait a minute, Richard. (*She takes her to the top of the stairs.*) It's along that passage, and the third door on the right.

JACKIE: Oh, thank you. (*She goes out despondently.*)

SOREL (*coming down again*): The poor girl looks half-witted.

RICHARD: She's shy, I think.

SOREL: I hope Father will find her a comfort.

RICHARD: Tell me one thing, Sorel, did your Father and Mother know I was coming?

SOREL: Oh, yes; they were awfully pleased.

RICHARD: A rather nice-looking woman came down, in a big hat, and went into the garden with a young man, without saying a word.

SOREL: That was Mother, I expect. We're an independent family—we entertain our friends sort of separately.

RICHARD: Oh, I see.

SOREL: It was sweet of you to come.

RICHARD: I wanted to come—I've thought about you a lot.

SOREL: Have you really? That's thrilling.

RICHARD: I mean it. You're so alive and vital and different from other people.

SOREL: I'm so frightened that you'll be bored here.

RICHARD: Why should I be?

SOREL: Oh, I don't know. But you won't be, will you?—or if you are, tell me at once, and we'll do something quite different.

RICHARD: You're rather a dear, you know.

SOREL: I'm not—I'm devastating, entirely lacking in restraint. So's Simon. It's Father's and Mother's fault really; you see, they're so vague—they've spent their lives cultivating their Arts and not devoting any time to ordinary conventions and manners and things. I'm the only one who sees that, so I'm trying to be better. I'd love to be beautifully poised and carry off difficult situations with a lift of the eyebrows——

RICHARD: I'm sure you could carry off anything.

SOREL: There you are, you see, saying the right thing! You always say the right thing, and no one knows a bit what you're really thinking. That's what I adore.

RICHARD: I'm afraid to say anything now, in case you think I'm only being correct.

SOREL: But you are correct. I wish you'd teach Simon to be correct too.

RICHARD: It would be uphill work, I'm afraid.

SOREL: Why, don't you like him?

RICHARD: I've only met him for a moment.

SOREL: Would you like to see the garden?

RICHARD: Very much indeed.

SOREL: As a matter of fact, we'd better wait until after tea. Shall I sing you something?

RICHARD: Please—I should love it.

SOREL: I don't want to really a bit—only I'm trying to entertain you. It's as easy as pie to talk in someone else's house, like at the dance the other night, but here on my own ground I'm finding it difficult.

RICHARD (*puzzled*): I'm sorry.

SOREL: Oh, it isn't your fault; honestly, it isn't—you're awfully kind and responsive. What shall we do?

RICHARD: I'm quite happy talking—to you.

SOREL: Can you play Mah Jong?

RICHARD: No, I'm afraid I can't.

SOREL: I'm *so* glad—I *do* hate it so.

[CLARA *enters, with preparations for tea. SOREL sighs with relief.*

Here's tea.

CLARA: Where's your Mother, dear?

SOREL: Out in the garden, I think.

CLARA: It's starting to rain.

SOREL: Oh, everyone will come dashing in, then. How awful!

RICHARD: Won't the luggage get rather wet, out there?

SOREL: What luggage?

CLARA: I'll bring it in when I've made the tea.

RICHARD (*rising*): Oh, don't trouble; I'll do it now.

SOREL: We ought to have got William up from the village.

CLARA: It's Saturday.

SOREL: I know it is.

CLARA: He's playing cricket.

[RICHARD *opens the front door and proceeds to bring the luggage in.*  
SOREL *rushes to help him.*

SOREL: Do sit down and smoke. I can easily manage it.

RICHARD: Certainly not.

SOREL: How typical of Myra to have so many bags.... Ooh!

[*She staggers with a suit-case. RICHARD goes to her assistance, and they both drop it.*

There now!—we've probably broken something.

RICHARD: This is the last one.... (*He brings in a dressing-case, and wipes his hand on his handkerchief.*)

SOREL: Do you know where to wash if you want to?

RICHARD: No—but I'm all right.

[*Re-enter CLARA, with tea and hot-water jug.*

[*SIMON and MYRA come in from the garden.*

MYRA: Hullo, Sorel, how are you?

SOREL: I'm splendid. Do you know Mr. Greatham?

MYRA: Oh, yes; we've met several times.

SIMON: Come and sit down, Myra.

[DAVID *and* JACKIE *come downstairs.*

DAVID: Is tea ready?

SOREL: Yes; just.

DAVID: Simon, come and be nice to Miss Coryton.

SIMON: We've met already.

DAVID: That's no reason for you not to be nice to her.

MYRA (*firmly*): How-do-you-do.

DAVID: How-do-you-do. Are you staying here?

MYRA: I hope so.

DAVID: You must forgive me for being rather frowsy, but I've been working hard.

SOREL: Father, this is Mr. Greatham.

DAVID: How are you? When did you arrive?

RICHARD: This afternoon.

DAVID: Good. Have some tea. (*He begins to pour it out.*) Everyone had better put their own sugar and milk in, or we shall get muddled. Where's your mother, Simon?

SIMON: She was last seen in the punt.

DAVID: How extraordinary! She can't punt.

SOREL: Sandy Tyrell's with her.

DAVID: Oh, well, she'll be all right then. Who is he?

SOREL: I don't know.

DAVID: Do sit down, everybody.

[*Enter* JUDITH *and* SANDY *from the garden.*

JUDITH: There's going to be a thunderstorm. I felt sick this morning. This is Sandy Tyrell—Everybody——

RICHARD (*shaking hands*): How-do-you-do.

SOREL: Mother, I want you to meet Mr. Greatham.

JUDITH: Oh, yes. You were here before, weren't you?

SIMON: Before *what*, darling?

JUDITH: Before I went out in the punt. There was somebody else here too—a fair girl——(*She sees JACKIE.*) Oh, there you are. How-do-you-do. Sit down, Sandy, and eat anything you want. Give Sandy some bread-and-butter, Simon.

[*Everybody sits down.*]

SIMON (*ungraciously*): Here you are.

SANDY: Thanks.

[*There is a long pause; then MYRA and RICHARD speak together.*]

RICHARD: } How far are you from Maidenhead exactly?

MYRA: } What a pity it's raining—we might have had some tennis——

[*They both stop, to let the other go on. There is another terrible silence.*]

MYRA: } I adore the shape of this hall—it's so——

RICHARD: } The train was awfully crowded coming down——

[*They both stop again, and there is another dead silence, during which*]

THE CURTAIN SLOWLY FALLS.

## **ACT II**

## ACT II

*It is after dinner on the Saturday evening.*

*[Everyone is talking and arguing.]*

*[The following scene should be played with great speed.]*

SIMON: Who'll go out?

SOREL: I don't mind.

SIMON: No; you always guess it too quickly.

JACKIE: What do we have to do?

JUDITH: Choose an adverb, and then——

SIMON: Someone goes out, you see, and comes in, and you've chosen a word among yourselves, and she or he or whoever it is asks you some sort of question and you have to——

SOREL: Not an ordinary question, Simon; they have to ask them to do something in the manner of the word, and then——

SIMON: Then, you see, you act whatever it is——

SOREL: The answer to the question, you see?

RICHARD (*apprehensively*): What sort of thing is one expected to do?

JUDITH: Quite usual things, like reciting "If," or playing the piano——

RICHARD: I can't play the piano.

SIMON: Never mind; you can fake it, as long as it conveys an idea of the word.

JACKIE: The word we've all thought of?

SOREL (*impatient*): Yes, the word we've chosen when whoever it is is out of the room.

JACKIE: I'm afraid I don't quite understand yet.

SIMON: Never mind; I'll explain. You see, someone goes out....

SOREL: I'll go out the first time, just to show her.

JUDITH: It's quite simple—all you have to do is just act in the manner of the word.

SOREL: Look here, everybody, I'm going out.

SIMON: All right; go on.

MYRA: The History game's awfully good—when two people go out, and come back as Queen Elizabeth and Crippen or somebody.

SANDY (*despondently*): I'm no earthly good at this sort of thing.

SOREL: I'll show you, Sandy. You see....

JUDITH: There's always "How, When and Where?" We haven't played that for ages.

SIMON: We will afterwards. We'll do this one first.—Go on, Sorel.

SOREL: Don't be too long. (*She goes out.*)

SIMON: Now then.

JUDITH: "Bitterly."

SIMON: No, we did that last week; she'll know.

DAVID: "Intensely."

JUDITH: Too difficult.

RICHARD: There was an amusing game I played once at the Harringtons' house. Everyone was blindfolded except——

SIMON: This room's not big enough for that. What about "winsomely"?

JACKIE: I wish I knew what we had to do.

JUDITH: You'll see when we start playing.

MYRA: *If* we start playing.

SIMON: Mother's brilliant at this. Do you remember when we played it at the Mackenzies'?

JUDITH: Yes, and Blanche was so cross when I kissed Freddie's ear in the manner of the word.

RICHARD: What was the word?

JUDITH: I can't remember.

MYRA: Perhaps it's as well.

DAVID: What about "drearily"?

JUDITH: Not definite enough.

SIMON: "Winsomely" is the best.

JUDITH: She's sure to guess it straight off.

SIMON (*confidentially to JACKIE*): These games are much too brainy for me.

DAVID: Young Norman Robertson used to be marvellous—do you remember?

SIMON: Yes, wonderful sense of humour.

MYRA: He's lost it all since his marriage.

JUDITH: I didn't know you knew him.

MYRA: Well, considering he married my cousin——

RICHARD: We don't seem to be getting on with the game.

JUDITH: We haven't thought of a word yet.

MYRA: "Brightly."

SIMON: Too obvious.

MYRA: Very well—don't snap at me!

JUDITH: "Saucily." I've got a lovely idea for "saucily."

MYRA (*at SIMON*): I should think "rudely" would be the easiest.

SIMON: Don't be sour, Myra.

JUDITH: The great thing is to get an obscure word.

SIMON: What a pity Irene isn't here—she knows masses of obscure words.

MYRA: She's probably picked them up from her obscure friends.

SIMON: It's no use being catty about Irene; she's a perfect darling.

MYRA: I wasn't being catty at all.

SIMON: Yes, you were.

SOREL (*off*): Hurry up!

JUDITH: Quickly, now! We must think——

JACKIE (*helpfully*): “Appendicitis.”

JUDITH (*witheringly*): That's not an adverb.

SIMON: You're thinking of Charades.

SANDY: Charades are damned good fun.

SIMON: Yes, but we don't happen to be doing them at the moment.

SANDY: Sorry.

JUDITH: “Saucily.”

SIMON: No, “winsomely's” better.

JUDITH: All right. Call her in.

SIMON (*calling*): Sorel—come on; we're ready.

[*Re-enter* SOREL.

SANDY (*hoarsely to* SIMON): Which is it?—“saucily” or “winsomely”?

SIMON (*whispering*): “Winsomely.”

SOREL (*to* JUDITH): Go and take a flower out of that vase and give it to Richard.

JUDITH: Very well.

*[She trips lightly over to the vase, gurgling with coy laughter, selects a flower, then goes over to RICHARD; pursing her lips into a mock smile, she gives him the flower, with a little girlish gasp at her own daring, and wags her finger archly at him.]*

SIMON: Marvellous, Mother!

SOREL (*laughing*): Oh, lovely!... Now, Myra, get up and say good-bye to everyone in the manner of the word.

MYRA (*rises and starts with DAVID*): Good-bye. It really has been most delightful——

JUDITH: No, no, no!

MYRA: Why—what do you mean?

JUDITH: You haven't got the right intonation a bit.

SIMON: Oh, Mother darling, do shut up!

MYRA (*acidly*): Remember what an advantage you have over we poor amateurs, Judith, having been a professional for so long.

JUDITH: I don't like "so long" very much.

SOREL: Do you think we might go on now?

MYRA: Go to the next one; I'm not going to do any more.

SIMON: Oh, please do. You were simply splendid.

SOREL: It doesn't matter. (*To RICHARD*) Light a cigarette in the manner of the word.

RICHARD: I've forgotten what it is.

JUDITH (*grimacing at him violently*): You remember....

RICHARD: Oh, yes.

*[He proceeds to light a cigarette with great abandon, winking his eye and chucking SOREL under the chin.]*

JUDITH: Oh, no, no, no!

MYRA: I can't think *what* that's meant to be.

RICHARD (*offended*): I was doing my best.

JUDITH: It's so *frightfully* easy, and nobody can do it right.

SIMON: I believe you've muddled it up.

RICHARD: You'd better go on to the next one.

JUDITH: Which word were you doing? Whisper——

RICHARD (*whispering*): "Saucily."

JUDITH: I knew it!—He was doing the wrong word. (*She whispers to him.*)

RICHARD: Oh, I see. I'm so sorry.

JUDITH: Give him another chance.

SIMON: No, it's Jackie's turn now; it will come round to him again, I'm afraid.

SOREL (*to JACKIE*): Do a dance in the manner of the word.

JACKIE (*giggling*): I can't.

JUDITH: Nonsense! Of course you can.

JACKIE: I can't—honestly—I....

SIMON (*pulling her to her feet*): Go on; have a shot at it.

JACKIE: No, I'd much rather not. Count me out.

JUDITH: Really, the ridiculous fuss everyone makes——

JACKIE: I'm awfully stupid at anything like this.

SOREL: It's only a game, after all.

DAVID: Come along—try.

JACKIE (*dragging back*): I couldn't—please don't ask me to. I simply couldn't.

SIMON: Leave her alone if she doesn't want to.

SOREL (*irritably*): What's the use of playing at all, if people won't do it properly?

JUDITH: It's *so* simple.

SANDY: It's awfully difficult if you haven't done it before.

SIMON: Go on to the next one.

SOREL (*firmly*): Unless everyone's in it we won't play at all.

SIMON: Now don't lose your temper.

SOREL: Lose my temper! I like that! No one's given me the slightest indication of what the word is—you all argue and squabble——

DAVID: Talk, talk, talk! Everybody talks too much.

JUDITH: It's so surprising to me when people won't play up. After all——

JACKIE (*with spirit*): It's a hateful game, anyhow, and I don't want to play it again ever.

SOREL: You haven't played it at all yet.

SIMON: Don't be rude, Sorel.

SOREL: Really, Simon, the way you go on is infuriating!

SIMON: It's always the way; whenever Sorel goes out she gets quarrelsome.

SOREL: Quarrelsome!

SIMON: Don't worry, Jackie; you needn't do anything you don't want to.

JUDITH: I think, for the future, we'd better confine our efforts to social conversation and not attempt anything in the least intelligent.

SIMON: How can you be so unkind, Mother?

JUDITH (*sharply*): Don't speak to me like that.

JACKIE: It's all my fault—I know I'm awfully silly, but it embarrasses me so terribly doing anything in front of people.

SOREL (*with acidity*): I should think the word was, "winsomely."

SIMON: You must have been listening outside the door then.

SOREL: Not at all—Miss Coryton gave it away.

SIMON: Why “Miss Coryton” all of a sudden? You’ve been calling her Jackie all the evening. You’re far too grand, Sorel.

SOREL: And you’re absolutely maddening—I’ll never play another game with you as long as I live.

SIMON: That won’t break my heart.

JUDITH: Stop, stop, stop!

SIMON (*grabbing JACKIE’s hand*): Come out in the garden. I’m sick of this.

SOREL: Don’t let him take you on the river; he isn’t very good at it.

SIMON (*over his shoulder*): Ha, ha!—very funny. (*He drags JACKIE off.*)

JUDITH: Sorel, you’re behaving disgracefully.

SOREL: Simon ought to go into the Army, or something.

DAVID: You both ought to be in Reformatories.

SOREL: This always happens whenever we play a game. We’re a beastly family, and I hate us.

JUDITH: Speak for yourself, dear.

SOREL: I can’t, without speaking for everyone else too—we’re all exactly the same, and I’m ashamed of us.—Come into the library, Sandy. (*She drags SANDY off.*)

MYRA: Charming! It’s all perfectly charming.

DAVID: I think it would be better, Judith, if you exercised a little more influence over the children.

JUDITH: That’s right—blame it all on me.

DAVID: After all, dear, you started it, by snapping everybody up.

JUDITH: You ought never to have married me, David; it was a great mistake.

DAVID: The atmosphere of this house is becoming more unbearable every day, and all because Simon and Sorel are allowed to do exactly what they

like.

JUDITH: You sit upstairs all day, writing your novels.

DAVID: Novels which earn us our daily bread.

JUDITH: “Daily bread” nonsense! We’ve got enough money to keep us in comfort until we die.

DAVID: That will be very soon, if we can’t get a little peace. (*To MYRA*)  
Come out into the garden——

JUDITH: I sincerely hope the night air will cool you.

DAVID: I don’t know what’s happened to you lately, Judith.

JUDITH: Nothing’s happened to me—nothing ever does. You’re far too smug to allow it.

DAVID: Smug! Thank you.

JUDITH: Yes, smug, smug, smug! And pompous!

DAVID: I hope you haven’t been drinking, dear.

JUDITH: Drinking! Huh! that’s very amusing!

DAVID: I think it’s rather tragic, at your time of life. (*He goes out with MYRA.*)

JUDITH: David’s been a good husband to me, but he’s wearing a bit thin now.

RICHARD: Would you like me to go? To leave you alone for a little?

JUDITH: Why? Are you afraid I shall become violent?

RICHARD (*smiling*): No; I merely thought perhaps I was in the way.

JUDITH: I hope you’re not embarrassed—I couldn’t bear you to be embarrassed.

RICHARD: Not in the least.

JUDITH: Marriage is a hideous affair altogether, don’t you think?

RICHARD: I’m really hardly qualified to judge, you see.

JUDITH: Do stop being non-committal, just for once; it's doubly annoying in the face of us all having lost control so lamentably.

RICHARD: I'm sorry.

JUDITH: There's nothing to be sorry for, really, because, after all, it's your particular "thing," isn't it?—observing everything and not giving yourself away an inch.

RICHARD: I suppose it is.

JUDITH: You'll get used to us in time, you know, and then you'll feel cosier. Why don't you sit down? (*She sits on sofa.*)

RICHARD: I'm enjoying myself very much.

JUDITH: It's very sweet of you to say so, but I don't see how you can be.

RICHARD (*laughing suddenly*): But I am!

JUDITH: There now! that was quite a genuine laugh. We're getting on. Are you in love with Sorel?

RICHARD (*surprised and embarrassed*): In love with Sorel?

JUDITH (*repentantly*): Now I've killed it—I've murdered the little tender feeling of comfort that was stealing over you, by sheer tactlessness! Will you teach me to be tactful?

RICHARD: Did you really think I was in love with Sorel?

JUDITH: It's so difficult to tell, isn't it?—I mean, you might not know yourself. She's very attractive.

RICHARD: Yes, she is—very.

JUDITH: Have you heard her sing?

RICHARD: No, not yet.

JUDITH: She sings beautifully. Are you susceptible to music?

RICHARD: I'm afraid I don't know very much about it.

JUDITH: You probably are, then. I'll sing you something.

RICHARD: Please do.

JUDITH (*rising*): It's awfully sad for a woman of my temperament to have a grown-up daughter, you know. I have to put my pride in my pocket and develop in her all the charming little feminine tricks which will eventually cut me out altogether.

RICHARD: That wouldn't be possible.

JUDITH: I do hope you meant that, because it was a sweet remark. (*She is at the piano, turning over music.*)

RICHARD (*following her*): Of course I meant it.

JUDITH: Will you lean on the piano in an attentive attitude? It's such a help.

RICHARD: You're an extraordinary person.

JUDITH (*beginning to play*): In what way extraordinary?

RICHARD: When I first met Sorel, I guessed what you'd be like.

JUDITH: Did you, now? And am I?

RICHARD (*smiling*): Exactly.

JUDITH: Oh, well.... (*She plays and sings a little French song.*)

[*There is a slight pause when it is finished.*]

RICHARD (*with feeling*): Thank you.

JUDITH (*rising from the piano*): It's pretty, isn't it?

RICHARD: Perfectly enchanting.

JUDITH: Shall we sit down again? (*She re-seats herself on sofa.*)

RICHARD: Won't you sing any more?

JUDITH: No, no more—I want you to talk to me and tell me all about yourself, and the things you've done.

RICHARD: I've done nothing.

JUDITH: What a shame! Why not?

RICHARD: I never realise how dead I am until I meet people like you. It's depressing, you know.

JUDITH: What nonsense! You're not a bit dead.

RICHARD: Do you always live here?

JUDITH: I'm going to, from now onwards. I intend to sink into a very beautiful old age. When the children marry, I shall wear a cap.

RICHARD (*smiling*): How absurd!

JUDITH: I don't mean a funny cap.

RICHARD: You're far too full of vitality to sink into anything.

JUDITH: It's entirely spurious vitality. If you troubled to look below the surface, you'd find a very wistful and weary spirit. I've been battling with life for a long time.

RICHARD: Surely such successful battles as yours have been are not wearying?

JUDITH: Yes, they are—frightfully. I've reached an age now when I just want to sit back and let things go on around me—and they do.

RICHARD: I should like to know exactly what you're thinking about—really.

JUDITH: I was thinking of calling you Richard. It's such a nice uncompromising name.

RICHARD: I should be very flattered if you would.

JUDITH: I won't suggest you calling me Judith until you feel really comfortable about me.

RICHARD: But I do—Judith.

JUDITH: I'm awfully glad. Will you give me a cigarette?

RICHARD (*producing case*): Certainly.

JUDITH (*taking one*): That's a divine case.

RICHARD: It was given to me in Japan three years ago. All those little designs mean things.

JUDITH (*bending over it*): What sort of things?

RICHARD: Charms for happiness, and luck, and—love.

JUDITH: Which is the charm for love?

RICHARD: That one.

JUDITH: What a dear!

RICHARD (*kissing her gently*): Judith!

JUDITH (*jumping*): Richard!

RICHARD: I'm afraid I couldn't help it.

JUDITH (*dramatically*): What are we to do? What are we to do?

RICHARD: I don't know.

JUDITH: David must be told—everything!

RICHARD (*alarmed*): Everything?

JUDITH (*enjoying herself*): Yes, yes. There come moments in life when it is necessary to be honest—absolutely honest. I've trained myself always to shun the underhand methods other women so often employ—the truth must be faced fair and square——

RICHARD (*extremely alarmed*): The truth? I don't quite understand.

JUDITH: Dear Richard, you want to spare me, I know—you're so chivalrous; but it's no use. After all, as I said before, David has been a good husband to me, according to his lights. This may, of course, break him up rather, but it can't be helped; he must be told. I wonder—oh, I wonder how he'll take it. They say suffering's good for writers, it strengthens their psychology. Oh, my poor, poor David!—Never mind. You'd better go out into the garden and wait——

RICHARD (*flustered*): Wait? What for?

JUDITH: For me, Richard, for me. I will come to you later. Wait in the summer-house. I had begun to think that Romance was dead, that I should never know it again. Before, of course, I had my work and my life in the theatre, but now, nothing—nothing! Everything is empty and hollow, like a broken shell.

RICHARD: Look here, Judith, I apologise for what I did just now. I——

JUDITH (*ignoring all interruption*): But now you have come, and it's all changed—it's magic. I'm under a spell that I never thought to recapture again. Go along——(*She pushes him towards the garden.*)

RICHARD (*protesting*): But, Judith——

JUDITH (*pushing him firmly*): Don't—don't make it any harder for me. I am quite resolved—it is my self-appointed Calvary, and it's the only possible way!

[*She pushes him into the garden and waves to him bravely with her handkerchief; then she comes back into the room and powders her nose before the glass and puts her hair into place. Then, assuming an expression of restrained tragedy, she opens the library door, from which she recoils genuinely shocked.*

[*After a moment or two SOREL and SANDY come out rather sheepishly.*

SOREL: Look here, Mother, I——

JUDITH: Sorel, what am I to say to you?

SOREL: I don't know, Mother.

JUDITH: Neither do I.

SANDY: It was my fault, Mrs. Bliss—Judith——

JUDITH: What a fool I've been! What a blind fool!

SOREL: Mother, are you *really* upset?

JUDITH (*with feeling*): I'm stunned.

SOREL: But, darling——

JUDITH (*gently*): Don't speak for a moment, Sorel; we must all be very quiet, and think——

SOREL: It was nothing, really. For Heaven's sake——

JUDITH: Nothing! I open the library door casually, and what do I see? I ask you, what do I see?

SANDY: I'm most awfully sorry....

JUDITH: Sssh! It has gone beyond superficial apologies.

SOREL: Mother, be natural for a minute.

JUDITH: I don't know what you mean, Sorel. I'm trying to realise a very bitter truth as calmly as I can.

SOREL: There's nothing so very bitter about it.

JUDITH: My poor child!

SOREL (*suddenly*): Very well, then! I love Sandy, and he loves me!

JUDITH: That would be the only possible excuse for your behaviour.

SOREL: Why shouldn't we love each other if we want to?

JUDITH: Sandy was in love with me this afternoon.

SOREL: Not real love—you know it wasn't.

JUDITH (*bitterly*): I know now.

SANDY: I say—look here—I'm most awfully sorry.

JUDITH: There's nothing to be sorry for, really; it's my fault for having been so—so ridiculous.

SOREL: Mother!

JUDITH (*sadly*): Yes, ridiculous. I'm getting old, old, and the sooner I face it the better.

SOREL (*hopelessly*): But, darling....

JUDITH (*splendidly*): Youth will be served. You're so pretty, Sorel, far prettier than I ever was—I'm very glad you're pretty.

SANDY: I feel a fearful cad.

JUDITH: Why should you? You've answered the only call that really counts—the call of Love, and Romance, and Spring. I forgive you, Sandy, completely. There.

SOREL: Well, that's all right, then.

JUDITH: I resent your tone, Sorel; you seem to be taking things too much for granted. Perhaps you don't realise that I am making a great sacrifice!

SOREL: Sorry, darling.

JUDITH: It's far from easy, at my time of life, to——

SOREL (*playing up*): Mother—Mother, say you understand and forgive!

JUDITH: Understand! You forget, dear, I am a woman.

SOREL: I know you are, Mother. That's what makes it all so poignant.

JUDITH (*magnanimously, to SANDY*): If you want Sorel, truly, I give her to you—unconditionally.

SANDY (*dazed*): Thanks—awfully, Mrs. Bliss.

JUDITH: You can still call me Judith, can't you?—it's not much to ask.

SANDY: Judith.

JUDITH (*bravely*): There, now. Away with melancholy. This is all tremendously exciting, and we must all be very happy.

SOREL: Don't tell Father—yet.

JUDITH: We won't tell anybody; it shall be our little secret.

SOREL: You are splendid, Mother.

JUDITH: Nonsense. I just believe in being honest with myself—it's awfully good for one, you know, so cleansing. I'm going upstairs now to have a little aspirin——(*She goes upstairs, and turns.*) Ah, Youth, Youth, what a strange, mad muddle you make of things! (*She goes off.*)

[SOREL *heaves a slight sigh, and takes a cigarette.*

SOREL: Well, that's that.

SANDY: Yes.

SOREL: It's all right. Don't look so gloomy—I know you don't love me really.

SANDY (*startled*): I say, Sorel——

SOREL: Don't protest; you know you don't—any more than I love you.

SANDY: But you told Judith——

SOREL (*nonchalantly*): I was only playing up—one always plays up to Mother in this house; it's a sort of unwritten law.

SANDY: Didn't she mean all she said?

SOREL: No, not really; we none of us ever mean anything.

SANDY: She seemed awfully upset.

SOREL: It must have been a slight shock for her to discover us clasped tightly in each other's arms.

SANDY: I believe I do love you, Sorel.

SOREL: A month ago I should have let you go on believing that, but now I can't—I'm bent on improving myself.

SANDY: I don't understand.

SOREL: Never mind—it doesn't matter. You just fell a victim to the atmosphere, that's all. There we were alone in the library, with the windows wide open, and probably a nightingale somewhere about——

SANDY: I only heard a cuckoo.

SOREL: Even a cuckoo has charm, in moderation. You kissed me because you were awfully nice and I was awfully nice and we both liked kissing very much. It was inevitable. Then Mother found us and got dramatic—her sense of the theatre is always fatal. She knows we shan't marry, the same as you and I do. You're under absolutely no obligation to me at all.

SANDY: I wish I understood you a bit better.

SOREL: Never mind about understanding me. Let's go back into the library.

SANDY: All right.

*[They go off.]*

*[After a moment's pause, DAVID and MYRA enter from the garden.]*

DAVID: ... And, you see, he comes in and finds her there waiting for him.

MYRA: She hadn't been away at all?

DAVID: No; and that's psychologically right. I'm sure. No woman, under those circumstances, *would*.

MYRA: It's brilliant of you to see that. I do think the whole thing sounds most excellent.

DAVID: I got badly stuck in the middle of the book, when the boy comes down from Oxford—but it worked out all right eventually.

MYRA (*sitting on sofa*): When shall I be able to read it?

DAVID: I'll send you the proofs—you can help me correct them.

MYRA: How divine! I shall feel most important.

DAVID: Would you like a cigarette, or anything?

MYRA: No, thank you.

DAVID: I think I'll have a drink.

MYRA: Very well; give me some plain soda-water, then.

DAVID (*going to side table*): There isn't any ice—d'you mind?

MYRA: Not a bit.

DAVID (*bringing her drink*): Here you are.

MYRA: Thank you. (*She sips it.*) I wonder where everybody is.

DAVID: Not here, thank God.

MYRA: It must be dreadfully worrying for you, having a houseful of people.

DAVID (*having poured himself out a whisky-and-soda, sits down by her side*): It depends on the people.

MYRA: I have a slight confession to make.

DAVID: Confession?

MYRA: Yes. Do you know why I came down here?

DAVID: Not in the least. I suppose one of us asked you, didn't they?

MYRA: Oh, yes, they asked me, but——

DAVID: Well?

MYRA: I was invited once before—last September.

DAVID: I was in America then.

MYRA: Exactly.

DAVID: How do you mean “exactly”?

MYRA: I didn’t come. I’m a very determined woman, you know, and I made up my mind to meet you ages ago.

DAVID: That was charming of you. I’m not much to meet really.

MYRA: You see, I’d read “Broken Reeds.”

DAVID: Did you like it?

MYRA: Like it! I think it’s one of the finest novels I’ve ever read.

DAVID: There now!

MYRA: How do you manage to know so much about women?

DAVID: I’m afraid my knowledge of them is sadly superficial.

MYRA: Oh, no; you can’t call Evelyn’s character superficial—it’s amazing.

DAVID: Why are you being so nice to me? Have you got a plan about something?

MYRA (*laughing*): How suspicious you are!

DAVID: I can’t help it—you’re very attractive, and I’m always suspicious of attractive people, on principle.

MYRA: Not a very good principle.

DAVID: I’ll tell you something—strictly between ourselves.

MYRA: Do.

DAVID: You’re wrong about me.

MYRA: Wrong? In what way?

DAVID: I write very bad novels.

MYRA: Don't be so ridiculous.

DAVID: And you *know* I do, because you're an intelligent person.

MYRA: I don't know anything of the sort.

DAVID: Tell me why you're being so nice to me?

MYRA: Because I want to be.

DAVID: Why?

MYRA: You're a very clever and amusing man.

DAVID: Splendid.

MYRA: And I think I've rather lost my heart to you.

DAVID: Shall we elope?

MYRA: David!

DAVID: There now, you've called me David!

MYRA: Do you mind?

DAVID: Not at all.

MYRA: I'm not sure that you're being very kind.

DAVID: What makes you think that?

MYRA: You're being rather the cynical author laughing up his sleeve at a gushing admirer.

DAVID: I think you're a very interesting woman, and extremely nice-looking.

MYRA: Do you?

DAVID: Yes. Would you like me to make love to you?

MYRA (*rising*): Really—I wish you wouldn't say things like that.

DAVID: I've knocked you off your plate—I'll look away for a minute while you climb on to it again. (*He does so.*)

MYRA (*laughing affectedly*): This is wonderful! (*She sits down again.*)

DAVID (*turning*): That's right. Now then——

MYRA: Now then, what?

DAVID: You're adorable—you're magnificent—you're tawny——

MYRA: I'm not tawny.

DAVID: Don't argue.

MYRA: This is sheer affectation.

DAVID: Affectation's very nice.

MYRA: No, it isn't—it's odious.

DAVID: You mustn't get cross.

MYRA: I'm not in the least cross.

DAVID: Yes, you are—but you're very alluring.

MYRA (*perking up*): Alluring?

DAVID: Terribly.

MYRA: I can hear your brain clicking—it's very funny.

DAVID: That was rather rude.

MYRA: You've been consistently rude to me for hours.

DAVID: Never mind.

MYRA: Why have you?

DAVID: I'm always rude to people I like.

MYRA: Do you like me?

DAVID: Enormously.

MYRA: How sweet of you!

DAVID: But I don't like your methods.

MYRA: Methods? What methods?

DAVID: You're far too pleasant to occupy yourself with the commonplace.

MYRA: And you spoil yourself by trying to be clever.

DAVID: Thank you.

MYRA: Anyhow, I don't know what you mean by commonplace.

DAVID: You mean you want me to explain?

MYRA: Not at all.

DAVID: Very well; I will.

MYRA: I shan't listen. (*She stops up her ears.*)

DAVID: You'll pretend not to, but you'll hear every word really.

MYRA (*sarcastically*): You're so inscrutable and quizzical—just what a feminine psychologist should be.

DAVID: Yes, aren't I?

MYRA: You frighten me dreadfully.

DAVID: Darling!

MYRA: Don't call me darling.

DAVID: That's unreasonable. You've been trying to make me—all the evening.

MYRA: Your conceit is outrageous!

DAVID: It's not conceit at all. You've been firmly buttering me up because you want a nice little intrigue.

MYRA (*rising*): How dare you!

DAVID (*pulling her down again*): It's true, it's true. If it weren't, you wouldn't be so angry.

MYRA: I think you're insufferable!

DAVID (*taking her hand*): Myra—dear Myra——

MYRA (*snatching it away*): Don't touch me.

DAVID: Let's have that nice little intrigue. The only reason I've been so annoying is that I love to see things as they are first, and then pretend they're what they're not.

MYRA: Words! Masses and masses of words!

DAVID: They're great fun to play with.

MYRA: I'm glad you think so. Personally, they bore me stiff.

DAVID (*catching her hand again*): Myra—don't be statuesque.

MYRA: Let go my hand!

DAVID: You're charming. (*He gets up and stands close to her.*)

MYRA (*furiously*): Let go my hand.

DAVID: I won't.

MYRA: You will!

*[She slaps his face hard, and he seizes her in his arms and kisses her.*

DAVID (*between kisses*): You're—perfectly—sweet.

MYRA (*giving in*): David!

DAVID: You must say it's an entrancing amusement. (*He kisses her again.*)

*[JUDITH appears at the top of the stairs and sees them. They break away.*

JUDITH (*coming down*): Forgive me for interrupting.

DAVID: Are there any chocolates in the house?

JUDITH: No, David.

DAVID: I should like a chocolate more than anything in the world, at the moment.

JUDITH: This is a very unpleasant situation, David.

DAVID (*agreeably*): Horrible.

JUDITH: We'd better talk it all over.

MYRA (*making a movement*): I shall do nothing of the sort.

JUDITH: Please—please don't be difficult.

DAVID: I apologise, Judith.

JUDITH: Don't apologise—I quite understand.

MYRA: Please let go of my hand, David; I should like to go to bed.

JUDITH: I should stay if I were you—it would be more dignified.

DAVID: There isn't any real necessity for a scene.

JUDITH: I don't want a scene. I just want to straighten things out.

DAVID: Very well—go ahead.

JUDITH: June has always been an unlucky month for me.

MYRA: Look here, Judith, I'd like to explain one thing——

JUDITH (*austerely*): I don't wish to hear any explanations or excuses—they're so cheapening. This was bound to happen sooner or later—it always does, to everybody. The only thing is to keep calm.

DAVID: I am—perfectly.

JUDITH (*sharply*): There is such a thing as being too calm.

DAVID: Sorry, dear.

JUDITH: Life has dealt me another blow, but I don't mind.

DAVID: What did you say?

JUDITH (*crossly*): I said Life had dealt me another blow, but I didn't mind.

DAVID: Rubbish.

JUDITH (*gently*): You're probably irritable, dear, because you're in the wrong. It's quite usual.

DAVID: Now, Judith——

JUDITH: Ssshhh! Let me speak—it is my right.

MYRA: I don't see why.

JUDITH (*surprised*): I am the injured party, am I not?

MYRA: Injured?

JUDITH (*firmly*): Yes, extremely injured.

DAVID (*contemptuously*): Injured!

JUDITH: Your attitude, David, is nothing short of deplorable.

DAVID: It's all nonsense—sheer, unbridled nonsense.

JUDITH: No, David, you can't evade the real issues as calmly as that. I've known for a long time—I've realised subconsciously for years that you've stopped caring for me in "that way."

DAVID (*irritably*): What do you mean—"that way"?

JUDITH (*with a wave of the hand*): Just that way... It's rather tragic, but quite inevitable. I'm growing old now—men don't grow old like women, as you'll find to your cost, Myra, in a year or two. David has retained his youth astonishingly, perhaps because he has had fewer responsibilities and cares than I——

MYRA: This is all ridiculous hysteria.

DAVID (*looking at her and not liking her very much*): No, Myra—Judith is right. What are we to do?

MYRA (*furious*): Do? Nothing!

JUDITH (*ignoring her*): Do you love her truly, David?

DAVID: Madly.

MYRA (*astounded*): David!

DAVID (*intensely*): You thought just now that I was joking. Couldn't you see that all my flippancy was only a mask, hiding my real emotions—crushing them down desperately——?

MYRA (*scared*): But, David, I——

JUDITH: I knew it! The time has come for the dividing of the ways.

MYRA: What on earth do you mean?

JUDITH: I mean that I am not the sort of woman to hold a man against his will.

MYRA: You're both making a mountain out of a mole-hill. David doesn't love me madly, and I don't love him. It's——

JUDITH: Ssshhh!—you *do* love him. I can see it in your eyes—in your every gesture. David, I give you to her—freely and without rancour. We must all be good friends, always.

DAVID: Judith, do you mean this?

JUDITH (*with a melting look*): You know I do.

DAVID: How can we ever repay you?

JUDITH: Just by being happy. I may leave this house later on—I have a feeling that its associations may become painful, specially in the autumn  
——

MYRA: Look here, Judith——

JUDITH (*shouting her down*): October is such a mournful month in England. I think I shall probably go abroad—perhaps a *pension* somewhere in Italy, with cypresses in the garden. I've always loved cypresses.

DAVID: What about the children?

JUDITH: We must share them, dear.

DAVID: I'll pay you exactly half the royalties I receive from everything, Judith.

JUDITH (*bowing her head*): That's very generous of you.

DAVID: You have behaved magnificently. This is a crisis in our lives, and thanks to you——

MYRA (*almost shrieking*): Judith—I *will* speak—I——

DAVID: Ssshhh, Myra darling—we owe it to Judith to keep control of our emotions—a scene would be agonising for her now. She has been brave and absolutely splendid throughout. Let's not make things harder for her than we can help. Come, we'll go out into the garden.

MYRA: I will *not* go out into the garden.

JUDITH (*twisting her handkerchief*): Please go—I don't think I can bear any more just now.

DAVID: So this is the end, Judith?

JUDITH: Yes, my dear,—the end.

[*They shake hands sadly.*]

[SIMON *enters violently from the garden.*]

SIMON: Mother—Mother, I've got something important to tell you.

JUDITH (*smiling bravely*): Very well, dear.

SIMON: Where's Sorel?

JUDITH: In the library, I'm afraid.

SIMON (*opening library door*): Sorel, come out—I've got something vital to tell you.

DAVID (*fatherly*): You seem excited, my boy. What has happened?

SOREL (*entering with SANDY*): What's the matter?

SIMON: I wish you wouldn't all look so depressed—it's good news!

DAVID: Good news! I thought perhaps Jackie had been drowned——

SIMON: No, Jackie hasn't been drowned—she's been something else.

JUDITH: Simon, what *do* you mean?

SIMON (*calling*): Jackie—Jackie!

[JACKIE *enters coyly from the garden.*]

She has become engaged—to me!

JUDITH (*in heartfelt tones*): Simon!

SOREL: Good heavens!

JUDITH: Simon, my dear! Oh, this is too much! (*She cries a little*).

SIMON: What on earth are you crying about, Mother?

JUDITH (*picturesquely*): All my chicks leaving the nest. Now I shall only have my memories left. Jackie, come and kiss me.

[JACKIE *goes to her*.

You must promise to make my son happy——

JACKIE (*worried*): But, Mrs. Bliss——

JUDITH: Ssshhh! I understand. I have not been a mother for nothing.

JACKIE (*wildly*): But it's not true—we don't——

JUDITH: You're trying to spare my feelings—I know——

MYRA (*furiously*): Well, I'm not going to spare your feelings, or anyone else's. You're the most infuriating set of hypocrites I've ever seen. This house is a complete feather-bed of false emotions—you're posing, self-centred egotists, and I'm sick to death of you.

SIMON: Myra!

MYRA: Don't speak to me—I've been working up for this, only every time I opened my mouth I've been mowed down by theatrical effects. You haven't got one sincere or genuine feeling among the lot of you—you're artificial to the point of lunacy. It's a great pity you ever left the stage, Judith—it's your rightful home. You can rant and roar there as much as ever you like——

JUDITH: Rant and roar! May God forgive you!

MYRA: And let me tell you this——

SIMON (*interrupting*): I'm not going to allow you to say another word to Mother——

SOREL: } You ought to be ashamed of yourself——

MYRA: } Let me speak—I will speak——

DAVID: } Look here, Myra——

JUDITH: } This is appalling—appalling!

SOREL: } You must be stark, staring mad——

MYRA: } Never again—never as long as I live——

DAVID: } You don't seem to grasp one thing that——

SIMON: } Why are you behaving like this, anyhow?

*[In the middle of the pandemonium of everyone talking at once, RICHARD comes in from the garden. He looks extremely apprehensive, imagining that the noise is the outcome of JUDITH'S hysterical confession of their lukewarm passion. He goes to JUDITH'S side, summoning all his diplomatic forces. At his entrance everyone stops talking.]*

RICHARD (*with forced calm*): What's happened? Is this a game?

*[JUDITH'S face gives a slight twitch; then with a meaning look at SOREL and SIMON, she answers him.]*

JUDITH (*with spirit*): Yes, and a game that must be played to the finish!

SIMON (*grasping the situation*): Zara! What does this mean?

JUDITH (*in bell-like tones*): So many illusions shattered—so many dreams trodden in the dust——

DAVID (*collapsing on to the sofa in hysterics*): Love's whirlwind! Dear old Love's whirlwind!

SOREL: I don't understand. You and Victor—My God!

JUDITH: Hush! Isn't that little Pam crying——?

SIMON (*savagely*): She'll cry more, poor mite, when she realises her mother is a—a——

JUDITH (*shrieking*): Don't say it! Don't say it!

SOREL: Spare her that.

JUDITH: I've given you all that makes life worth living—my youth, my womanhood, and now my child. Would you tear the very heart out of me? I tell you, it's infamous that men like you should be allowed to pollute

Society. You have ruined my life. I have nothing left—nothing. God in heaven, where am I to turn for help....

SOREL (*through clenched teeth*): Is this true? Answer me—is this true?

JUDITH (*wailing*): Yes, yes!

SOREL (*springing at SIMON*): You cur!!!

JUDITH (*rushing between them*): Don't strike! He is your father! (*She totters and falls in a dead faint.*)

[MYRA, JACKIE, RICHARD *and* SANDY *look on, dated and aghast.*

CURTAIN.

## **ACT III**

### ACT III

*It is Sunday morning, about ten o'clock. There are various breakfast dishes on a side table, and a big table is laid down centre.*

[SANDY appears at the top of the stairs. On seeing no one about, he comes down quickly and furtively helps himself to eggs and bacon and coffee, and seats himself at the table. He eats very hurriedly, casting occasional glances over his shoulder. A door bangs somewhere upstairs, which terrifies him; he chokes violently. When he has recovered, he tears a bit of toast from a rack, butters it and marmalades it, and crams it into his mouth. Then, hearing somebody approaching, he darts into the library.

[JACKIE comes downstairs timorously; her expression is dismal, to say the least of it. She looks miserably out of the window at the pouring rain, then, assuming an air of spurious bravado, she helps herself to some breakfast and sits down and looks at it. After one or two attempts to eat it, she bursts into tears.

[SANDY opens the library door a crack, and peeps out. JACKIE, seeing the door move, screams. SANDY re-enters.

JACKIE: Oh, it's only you—you frightened me!

SANDY: What's the matter?

JACKIE (*sniffing*): Nothing.

SANDY: I say, don't cry.

JACKIE: I'm not crying.

SANDY: You were—I heard you.

JACKIE: It's this house. It gets on my nerves.

SANDY: I don't wonder—after last night.

JACKIE: What were you doing in the library just now?

SANDY: Hiding.

JACKIE: Hiding?

SANDY: Yes; I didn't want to run up against any of the family.

JACKIE: I wish I'd never come. I had horrible nightmares with all those fearful dragons crawling across the wall.

SANDY: Dragons?

JACKIE: Yes; I'm in a Japanese room—everything in it's Japanese, even the bed.

SANDY: How awful!

JACKIE: I believe they're all mad, you know.

SANDY: The Blissés?

JACKIE: Yes—they must be.

SANDY: I've been thinking that too.

JACKIE: Do you suppose they know they're mad?

SANDY: No; people never do.

JACKIE: It was Mr. Bliss asked me down, and he hasn't paid any attention to me at all. I went into his study soon after I arrived yesterday, and he said, "Who the hell are you?"

SANDY: Didn't he remember?

JACKIE: He did afterwards; then he brought me down to tea and left me.

SANDY: Are you really engaged to Simon?

JACKIE (*bursting into tears again*): Oh, no—I hope not!

SANDY: You were, last night.

JACKIE: So were you—to Sorel.

SANDY: Not properly. We talked it over.

JACKIE: I don't know what happened to me. I was in the garden with Simon, and he was being awfully sweet, and then he suddenly kissed me, and rushed into the house and said we were engaged—and that hateful Judith asked me to make him happy!

SANDY: That's exactly what happened to me and Sorel. Judith gave us to one another before we knew where we were.

JACKIE: How frightful!

SANDY: I like Sorel, though; she was jolly decent about it afterwards.

JACKIE: I think she's a cat.

SANDY: Why?

JACKIE: Look at the way she lost her temper over that beastly game.

SANDY: All the same, she's better than the others.

JACKIE: That wouldn't be very difficult.

SANDY: Hic!

JACKIE: I beg your pardon?

SANDY (*abashed*): I say—I've got hiccoughs.

JACKIE: Hold your breath.

SANDY: It was because I bolted my breakfast. (*He holds his breath.*)

JACKIE: Hold it as long as you can.

[*There is a pause.*]

SANDY (*letting his breath go with a gasp*): I can't any more—hic!

JACKIE: Eat a lump of sugar.

SANDY (*taking one*): I'm awfully sorry.

JACKIE: I don't mind—but it's a horrid feeling, isn't it?

SANDY: Horrid—hic!

JACKIE (*conversationally*): People have died from hiccoughs, you know.

SANDY (*gloomily*): Have they?

JACKIE: Yes. An aunt of mine once had them for three days without stopping.

SANDY: How beastly.

JACKIE (*with relish*): She had to have the doctor, and everything.

SANDY: I expect mine will stop soon.

JACKIE: I hope they will.

SANDY: Hic!—There!

JACKIE: Drink some water the wrong way round.

SANDY: How do you mean—the wrong way round?

JACKIE (*rising*): The wrong side of the glass. I'll show you. (*She goes to side table.*) There isn't any water.

SANDY: Perhaps coffee would do as well.

JACKIE: I've never tried coffee, but it might. (*She pours him out some.*) There you are.

SANDY (*anxiously*): What do I do?

JACKIE: Tip it up and drink from the opposite side, sort of upside down.

SANDY (*trying*): I can't reach any——

JACKIE (*suddenly*): Look out—somebody's coming. Bring it into the library—quick....

SANDY: Bring the sugar—I might need it again—hic! Oh God!

JACKIE: All right.

[*They go off into the library hurriedly.*

[*RICHARD comes downstairs. He glances round a trifle anxiously; then, pulling himself together, he goes boldly to the barometer and taps it. It falls off the wall and breaks; he picks it up quickly and places it on the piano. Then he helps himself to some breakfast, and sits down.*

[*MYRA appears on the stairs, very smart and bright.*

MYRA (*vivaciously*): Good morning.

RICHARD: Good morning.

MYRA: Are we the first down?

RICHARD: No, I don't think so.

MYRA (*looking out of the window*): Isn't this rain miserable?

RICHARD: Appalling!

MYRA: Where's the barometer?

RICHARD: On the piano.

MYRA: What a queer place for it to be.

RICHARD: I tapped it, and it fell down.

MYRA: Typical of this house. (*At side table*) Are you having eggs and bacon, or haddock?

RICHARD: Haddock.

MYRA: I'll have haddock too. I simply couldn't strike out a line for myself this morning. (*She helps herself to haddock and coffee, and sits down opposite RICHARD.*) Have you seen anybody?

RICHARD: No.

MYRA: Good. We might have a little peace.

RICHARD: Have you ever stayed here before?

MYRA: No, and I never will again.

RICHARD: I feel far from well this morning.

MYRA: I'm so sorry, but not entirely surprised.

RICHARD: You see, I had the boiler room.

MYRA: How terrible!

RICHARD: The window stuck, and I couldn't open it—I was nearly suffocated. The pipes made peculiar noises all night, as well.

MYRA: There isn't any sugar.

RICHARD: Oh—we'd better ring.

MYRA: I doubt if it will be the slightest use, but we'll try.

RICHARD (*ringing and ringing bell*): Do the whole family have breakfast in bed?

MYRA: I neither know—nor care.

RICHARD: They're strange people, aren't they?

MYRA: I think "strange" is putting it mildly.

[*Enter CLARA.*

CLARA: What's the matter?

MYRA: There isn't any sugar.

CLARA: There is—I put it 'ere myself.

MYRA: Perhaps you'd find it for us, then?

CLARA (*searching*): That's very funny. I could 'ave sworn on me Bible oath I brought it in.

MYRA: Well, it obviously isn't here now.

CLARA: Someone's taken it—that's what it is.

RICHARD: It seems a queer thing to do.

MYRA: Do you think you could get us some more?

CLARA: Oh, yes, I'll fetch you some; but mark my words, there's been some 'anky-panky somewhere. (*She goes out.*)

MYRA: Clara is really more at home in a dressing-room than a house.

RICHARD: Was she Judith's dresser?

MYRA: Of course. What other excuse could there possibly be for her?

RICHARD: She seems good-natured, but quaint.

MYRA: This haddock's disgusting.

RICHARD: It isn't very nice, is it?

[*Re-enter CLARA with sugar. She plumps it down.*]

CLARA: There you are, dear.

MYRA: Thank you.

CLARA: It's a shame the weather's changed—you might 'ave 'ad such fun up the river.

[*There comes the sound of a crash from the library, and a scream.*]

What's that? (*She opens the door.*) Come out! What are you doing?

[*JACKIE and SANDY enter, rather shamefaced.*]

JACKIE: Good morning. I'm afraid we've broken a coffee-cup.

CLARA: Was there any coffee in it?

SANDY: Yes, a good deal.

CLARA (*rushing into the library*): Oh dear! all over the carpet!

SANDY: It was my fault. I'm most awfully sorry.

[*CLARA reappears.*]

CLARA: How did you come to do it?

JACKIE: Well, you see, he had the hiccoughs, and I was showing him how to drink upside down.

MYRA: How ridiculous!

CLARA: Well, thank 'Eaven it wasn't one of the Crown Derbys. (*She goes out.*)

SANDY: They've gone now, anyhow.

JACKIE: It was the sudden shock, I expect.

SANDY (*observantly*): I say—it's raining!

MYRA: It's been raining for hours.

RICHARD: Mrs. Arundel——

MYRA: Yes?

RICHARD: What are you going to do about—about to-day?

MYRA: Nothing, except go up to London by the first train possible.

RICHARD: Do you mind if I come too? I don't think I could face another day like yesterday.

JACKIE: Neither could I.

SANDY (*eagerly*): Let's all go away—quietly!

RICHARD: Won't it seem a little rude if we *all* go?

MYRA: Yes it will. (*To SANDY*) You and Miss Coryton must stay.

JACKIE: I don't see why.

SANDY: I don't think they'd mind *very* much if we all went.

MYRA: Yes, they would. You must let Mr. Greatham and me get away first, anyhow. Ring for Clara. I want to find out about trains.

RICHARD: I hope they won't all come down now.

MYRA: You needn't worry about that; they're sure to roll about in bed for hours—they're such a slovenly family.

RICHARD: Have you got much packing to do?

MYRA: No; I did most of it before I came down.

[*Re-enter CLARA.*

CLARA: What is it now?

MYRA: Can you tell me what trains there are up to London?

CLARA: When?

MYRA: This morning.

CLARA: Why?—you're not leaving, are you?

MYRA: Yes; Mr. Greatham and I have to be up by lunch-time.

CLARA: Well, you have missed the 10.15.

MYRA: Obviously.

CLARA: There isn't another till 12.30.

RICHARD: Good heavens!

CLARA: And that's a slow one. (*She goes out.*)

SANDY (*to* JACKIE): Look here; I'll take you up in my car as soon as you like.

JACKIE: All right; lovely!

MYRA: You've got a car, haven't you?

SANDY: Yes.

MYRA: Will it hold all of us?

JACKIE: You said it would be rude for us all to go. Hadn't you and Mr. Greatham better wait for the train?

MYRA: Certainly not.

RICHARD (*to* SANDY): If there is room, we should be very, very grateful.

SANDY: I think I can squeeze you in.

MYRA: Then that's settled, then.

JACKIE: When shall we start?

SANDY: As soon as you're ready.

JACKIE: Mrs. Arundel, what are you going to do about tipping Clara?

MYRA: I don't know. (*To* RICHARD) What do you think?

RICHARD: I've hardly seen her since I've been here.

JACKIE: Isn't there a housemaid or anything?

RICHARD: I don't think so.

SANDY: Is ten bob enough?

JACKIE: Each?

MYRA: Too much.

RICHARD: We'd better give her one pound ten between us.

MYRA: Very well, then. Will you do it, and we'll settle up in the car?

RICHARD: Must I?

MYRA: Yes. Ring for her.

RICHARD: You'd do it much better.

[SANDY *rings the bell.*

MYRA: Oh, no, I shouldn't. (*To JACKIE*) Come on; we'll finish our packing.

JACKIE: All right.

[*They begin to go upstairs.*

RICHARD: Here—don't leave me.

SANDY: I'll just go and look at the car. Will you all be ready in ten minutes?

MYRA: Yes, ten minutes. (*She goes off with JACKIE.*)

SANDY: Righto. (*He rushes out.*)

[CLARA *re-enters.*

CLARA: 'Allo, where's everybody gone?

RICHARD: They've gone to get ready. We're leaving in Mr. Tyrell's car.

CLARA: A bit sudden, isn't it?

RICHARD (*pressing money into her hand*): This is from all of us, Clara. Thank you very much for all your trouble.

CLARA (*surprised*): Aren't you a dear, now! There wasn't any trouble.

RICHARD: There must have been a lot of extra work.

CLARA: One gets used to that 'ere.

RICHARD: Good-bye, Clara. (*He goes upstairs.*)

[CLARA *proceeds to clear away the dirty breakfast things, which she takes out. She returns with a fresh pot of coffee, and meets JUDITH coming downstairs.*

JUDITH: Good morning, Clara. Have the papers come?

CLARA: Yes—I'll fetch them. (*She goes out.*)

[JUDITH *pours herself out some coffee, and sits down.*

[CLARA *re-enters with papers.*

JUDITH: Thank you. You've forgotten my orange juice.

CLARA: No, I 'aven't, dear; it's just outside. (*She goes out again.*)

[JUDITH *turns to the theatrical column of the "Sunday Times."*

[SOREL *comes downstairs and kisses her.*

SOREL: Good morning, darling.

JUDITH: Listen to this. (*She reads*) "We saw Judith Bliss in a box at the Haymarket on Tuesday, looking as lovely as ever." There now! I thought I looked hideous on Tuesday.

SOREL: You looked sweet. (*She goes to get herself some breakfast.*)

[CLARA *reappears, with a glass of orange juice.*

CLARA (*placing it in front of JUDITH*): Did you see that nice bit in *The Referee*?

JUDITH: No—*The Times*.

CLARA: *The Referee's* much better. (*She finds the place and hands it to SOREL.*)

SOREL (*reading*): "I saw gay and colourful Judith Bliss at the Waifs and Strays Matinée last week. She was talking vivaciously to Producer Basil Dean. 'I sooth,' said I to myself, 'where ignorance is Bliss, 'tis folly to be wise.'"

JUDITH (*taking it from her*): Dear *Referee*! It's so unself-conscious.

CLARA: If you want any more coffee, ring for it. (*She goes out.*)

SOREL (*sitting down*): I wish I were sitting on a lovely South Sea island, with masses of palm trees and cocoanuts and turtles——

JUDITH: It would be divine, wouldn't it?

SOREL: I wonder where everybody is?

JUDITH (*still reading*): I wonder... Mary Saunders has got another failure.

SOREL: She must be used to it by now.

[SIMON *comes downstairs with a rush.*

SIMON (*kissing JUDITH*): Good morning, darling.—Look! (*He shows her a newly completed sketch.*)

JUDITH: Simon! How lovely! When did you do it?

SIMON: This morning—I woke early.

SOREL (*rising and craning over JUDITH's shoulder*): Let's see.

SIMON (*over the other shoulder*): I'm going to alter Helen's face; it's too pink.

SOREL (*laughing*): It's exactly like her.

JUDITH: What a clever son I have!

SIMON: Now then, Mother!

JUDITH: It's too wonderful—when I think of you both in your perambulators.... Oh dear, it makes me cry! (*She sniffs.*)

SOREL: I don't believe you ever saw us in our perambulators.

JUDITH: I don't believe I did.

[DAVID *comes downstairs.*

DAVID (*hilariously*): It's finished!

JUDITH: What, dear?

DAVID: *The Sinful Woman.*

JUDITH: How splendid. Read it to us now.

DAVID: I've got the last chapter here.

JUDITH: Go on, then.

[SANDY *rushes in from the front door. On seeing everyone, he halts.*

SANDY: Good morning. (*He bolts upstairs two at a time.*)

JUDITH: I seem to know that boy's face.

DAVID (*preparing to read*): Listen. You remember when Violet was taken ill in Paris?

JUDITH: Yes, dear.—Marmalade, Simon.

DAVID: Well, I'll go on from there.

JUDITH: Do, dear.

DAVID (*reading*): "Paris in spring, with the Champs Elysées alive and dancing in the sunlight; lightly dressed children like gay painted butterflies \_\_\_\_\_"

SIMON (*whispering to SOREL*): What's happened to the barometer?

SOREL (*sibilantly*): I don't know.

DAVID: Damn the barometer!

JUDITH: Don't get cross, dear.

DAVID: Why can't you keep quiet, Simon, or go away!

SIMON: Sorry, Father.

DAVID: Well, don't interrupt again.... (*Reading*) "... gay painted butterflies; the streets were thronged with hurrying vehicles, the thin peek-peek of taxi-hooters——"

SOREL: I love "peek-peek."

DAVID (*ignoring her*): "——seemed to merge in with the other vivid noises weaving a vast pattern of sound which was Paris. Jane Sefton, in her scarlet Hispano, swept out of the Rue St. Honoré into the Place de la Concorde——"

JUDITH: She couldn't have.

DAVID: Why?

JUDITH: The Rue St. Honoré doesn't lead into the Place de la Concorde.

DAVID: Yes, it does.

SOREL: You're thinking of the Rue Boissy d'Anglas, Father.

DAVID: I'm not thinking of anything of the sort.

JUDITH: David darling, don't be obstinate.

DAVID (*hotly*): Do you think I don't know Paris as well as you do?

SIMON: Never mind. Father's probably right.

SOREL: He isn't right—he's wrong!

DAVID: Go on with your food, Sorel.

JUDITH: Don't be testy, David: it's a sign of age.

DAVID (*firmly*): "Jane Sefton, in her scarlet Hispano, swept out of the Rue St. Honoré into the Place de la Concorde——"

JUDITH: That sounds absolutely ridiculous. Why don't you alter it?

DAVID: It isn't ridiculous; it's perfectly right.

JUDITH: Very well, then; get a map, and I'll show you.

SIMON: We haven't got a map.

DAVID (*putting his MS. down*): Now, look here, Judith—here's the Rue Royale—(*He arranges the butter-dish and marmalade-pot.*)—here's the Crillon Hotel, and *here's* the Rue St. Honoré——

JUDITH: It isn't—it's the Boissy d'Anglas.

DAVID: That runs parallel with the Rue de Rivoli.

JUDITH: You've got it all muddled.

DAVID (*loudly*): I have *not* got it all muddled.

JUDITH: Don't shout. You have.

SIMON: Why not let Father get on with it?

JUDITH: It's so silly to get cross at criticism—it indicates a small mind.

DAVID: Small mind my foot!

JUDITH: That was very rude. I shall go to my room in a minute.

DAVID: I wish you would.

JUDITH (*outraged*): David!

SOREL: Look here, Father, Mother's right—here's the Place de la Concorde——

SIMON: Oh, shut up, Sorel.

SOREL: Shut up yourself, you pompous little beast.

SIMON: You think you know such a lot about everything, and you're as ignorant as a frog.

SOREL: Why a frog?

JUDITH: I give you my solemn promise, David, that you're wrong.

DAVID: I don't want your solemn promise, because I *know* I'm right.

SIMON: It's no use arguing with Father, Mother.

SOREL: Why isn't it any use arguing with Father?

SIMON: Because you're both so pig-headed!

DAVID: Are you content to sit here, Judith, and let your son insult me?

JUDITH: He's your son as well as mine.

DAVID: I begin to doubt it.

JUDITH (*bursting into tears of rage*): David!

SIMON (*consoling her*): Father, how can you!

DAVID (*rising*): I'll never attempt to read any of you anything again as long as I live. You're not a bit interested in my work, and you don't give a damn whether I'm a success or a failure.

JUDITH: You're dead certain to be a failure if you cram your books with inaccuracies.

DAVID (*hammering the table with his fist*): *I am not inaccurate!*

JUDITH: Yes, you are; and you're foul-tempered and spoilt.

DAVID: Spoilt! I like that! Nobody here spoils me—you're the most insufferable family to live with——

JUDITH: Well, why in Heaven's name don't you go and live somewhere else?

DAVID: There's gratitude!

JUDITH: Gratitude for what, I'd like to know?

SOREL: Mother, keep calm.

JUDITH: Calm! I'm furious.

DAVID: What have you got to be furious about? Everyone rushing round adoring you and saying how wonderful you are——

JUDITH: I am wonderful, Heaven knows, to have stood you for all these years.

SOREL: Mother, do sit down and be quiet.

SIMON: How dare you speak to Mother like that!

[*During this scene MYRA, JACKIE, RICHARD and SANDY creep downstairs, with their bags, unperceived by the family. They make for the front door.*]

JUDITH (*wailing*): Oh, oh! To think that my daughter should turn against me!

DAVID: Don't be theatrical.

JUDITH: I'm not theatrical—I'm wounded to the heart.

DAVID: Rubbish—rubbish—rubbish!

JUDITH: Don't you say Rubbish to me!

DAVID: I *will* say Rubbish!

SOREL: } Ssshhh, Father!

SIMON: } That's right! Be the dutiful daughter and encourage your father——

DAVID: } Listen to me, Judith——

JUDITH: } Oh, this is dreadful—dreadful!

SOREL: } The whole thing doesn't really matter in the least——

SIMON: } —to insult your mother——

DAVID: } The Place de la Concorde——

JUDITH: } I never realised how small you were, David. You're tiny  
——

*[The universal pandemonium is suddenly broken by the front door slamming. There is dead silence for a moment, then the noise of a car is heard.]*

*[SOREL runs and looks out of the window.]*

SIMON: There now!

SOREL: They've all gone!

JUDITH (*sitting down*): How very rude!

DAVID (*also sitting down*): People really do behave in the most extraordinary manner these days——

JUDITH: Come back and finish your breakfast, Sorel.

SOREL: All right. (*She sits down.*)

SIMON: Toast, please, Sorel.

SOREL (*passing it to him*): Here.

JUDITH: Go on, David; I'm dying to hear the end——

DAVID (*reading*): "Jane Sefton, in her scarlet Hispano, swept out of the Rue Boissy d'Anglas into the Place Vêndome——"

JUDITH: I meant to tell you before, David—I've made a great decision.

DAVID (*amiably*): What is it?

JUDITH: I really am going to return to the stage!

CURTAIN.

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