

Lady, Be Careful!  
A play in three Acts

Owen Barfield

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by Owen Barfield

Edited by J. H. Taylor & L. A. Taylor

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LADY, BE CAREFUL!  
~~AIRSHIPS AND PARTNERSHIPS~~

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A Play in three Acts

by

G. A. L. BURGEON

&

ROGER FOX

Owen Barfield  
28, Menelik Road,  
N. W. 2.

Dep. c. 1096 [Early 1950s]

## CHARACTERS

<u>JANNERY</u>	Senior Clerk in the firm of Hawker & Co.
<u>MARK LIVESEY</u>	Mr. Hawker's nephew and articled clerk
<u>BERT</u>	An office junior
<u>SALLY GARDNER</u>	Niece and ward of Miss E. M. Gardner
<u>RALPH BYNG HAWKER</u>	A Solicitor – sole partner in the firm of Hawker & Co.
<u>ELEONAORA MABEL GARDNER</u>	A client of Hawker & Co.
<u>MR. BRIGHTON</u>	A neighbour of Miss E. M. Gardner
<u>MR. RAIKES</u>	A Civil Servant
<u>BENJAMIN WOLFFE, R.N.V.R.</u>	An artist in private life
<u>MR. GOODENOUGH MR. MACSTOCKER</u>	Directors of a private Company
<u>LADY MOBERLEY</u>	A neighbour of Miss E. M. Gardner's, also client of Hawker & Co.

The time of the Prologue is the present.

The action of the rest of the play takes places in the Spring of 1945.

## PROLOGUE

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*Scene: A London Park. Mark Livesey, a glossy, prosperous-looking, young lawyer, in overcoat & hat with rolled umbrella and dispatch-case is biting his nails & looking at his watch. Sally Gardner enters in a hurry. She is a good-looking, vivacious girl in her early twenties whose voice and manner suggest a certain suppressed energy. She speaks some of her words – especially the longer ones she is not sure of – with a slightly hurried burr.*

SALLY: Am I late, darling? Why don't you answer?

LIVESEY: It was what we call a Leading Question, Mrs. Livesey.

SALLY: You and your beastly legal piejaw! I hate you. You've no business to be peeved with me today. Today of all days!

LIVESEY: What's today?

SALLY: Oh – no day. No day at all.

LIVESEY: Oh dear! We seem to have got off on the wrong foot as usual. Oh Sally, how is it you always seem to get my words all wrong?

SALLY: Bother your rotten old words! I knew I should never have married a poet. A poet and a lawyer! What a mixture! Who ever heard of anything so silly? It's like – it's like – you're incomprehensible.

LIVESEY: Still the same darling old Sally! Age cannot – I mean the years cannot change her. *(He fishes in his pocket and slyly offer her a little packet)*. Do you mean we're incompatible? Or that it's incomprehensible? Or that I'm undependable?

SALLY: *(seizing the packet)* You didn't forget after all!

LIVESEY: How could you possibly have thought I would? You never had any faith, darling. That's the whole trouble between us.

SALLY: *I never had any faith! I like that! (round his neck) Don't you remember? (kissing him) You're such a goofy old tease, that's the real source of the trouble. (She discovers a necklace in the packet). And I thought you had forgotten the day! Oh Mark! I'm ashamed of myself! You absolute pet!*

LIVESEY: I'm glad you like it.

SALLY: Like it! *(round his neck again)*

LIVESEY: And I've got a little something for Aunt Mabel, too. Do you think she'll like it? *(Fishes in his other pocket)* After all, if it hadn't been for her. . .

SALLY: *(inspecting packet No. 2)* Oh yes, Mark! It's just what she's always wanted. Dear Aunt Mabel! I say, it was a queer affair, wasn't it? Just what did come over Aunt Mabel? You're quite right. If it hadn't been for her. . .

LIVESEY: If it hadn't been for that buzz-bomb, perhaps we ought to say.

SALLY: Do you really think it was the bomb, Mark? Ugh! Beastly things! "Pilotless planes" they called them first. Do you remember how the engine stopped and the light went out about five seconds before the bang?

LIVESEY: And the everlasting warnings. First, the 'alert' siren in the distance, then the buzzer in the building, when the brute was nearly overhead, then the roar of the engine getting louder and louder –

SALLY: *(holding her hands to her ears)* Stop it!

LIVESEY: Those "V.1's" did some queer things; but I doubt if they ever did a queerer.

SALLY: Mm – yes – I suppose even the bombs had their good points. We've certainly got to hand it to that one. How clear it all seems! It was the day I got out of the Wrens. D'you remember – I came up to town with Aunt Mabel. . . *(They walk off together).*

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## ACT - I

Scene: A room in the offices of Hawker & Co., 10, Cursitor Place, E. C. 4., the walls lined with dull-looking books, mostly Law Reports. A door R. leads to the rest of the offices and the outside world. In the centre of the back wall another door opens straight into an adjoining room. On the left is Mr. Hawker's "knee-hole" desk, facing the right wall, with his chair behind it. In the left wall, forward of the desk, a window. There are one or two chairs for visitors. On the desk stands an ordinary telephone and also an internal one.

JANNERY is standing in front of the desk, which has a number of letters, envelopes and other papers lying on it. He slits open an envelope, takes out the letter, and begins reading it. LIVESEY, not looking quite so spruce & self-assured as in the Prologue, comes in through the door R.

LIVESEY: Good morning, Jannery. Anything in the post? (*He crosses and looks over Jannery's shoulder*).

JANNERY: No, Mr. Mark, this is the last. There's nothing in the others.

LIVESEY: (*reading*) "Dear Sirs, we cannot understand why we have not yet received the Draft Agreement for which we have been pressing you . . . hm... hm... hm... Unless we receive the same by first post on Wednesday at latest, we shall have no alternative. . . hm... hm... hm." Hulloa! Someone's going to get into trouble over this!

JANNERY: Yes. Me! Mr. Hawker's been prodding me on this three times a day. He keeps telling me to get on with it – never bothers to think of all the *other* things I've got to get on with somehow or other.

LIVESEY: (*raising his voice a little, in mimicry*) "Come on! You can do it. You can, you know!" B. H. is quick himself and expects everyone else to be quick *with* him. He's a go-getter. He has *drive*, Jannery – pep, ginger, gumption – (*to himself, as Jannery goes out, nodding*) *Incisive!*

BERT: (*coming in*) Miss Gardner's here, Sir.

LIVESEY: Oh hell! Ask her to wait. (*after a pause*) The old menace is not due for half an hour. Mr. Hawker hasn't arrived yet. Nor have I! Ask her if she'd like to go out and get a cup of coffee. (*Bert goes out, and he goes on reading the letters*).

BERT: *(returning)* Miss Gardner says she'll go out and get some coffee, Sir.

LIVESEY: *(without looking up)* Good!

BERT: It's Miss S. Gardner, Sir.

LIVESEY: *(excited)* WHAT! You village idiot! Why didn't you—? Stop her – stop her! Call her back! Why the blazes didn't you tell me at first? Quick, Bert! Bring her here!

*(Bert flees. Livesey looks at the door, which re-opens almost at once to admit Sally Gardner.)*

LIVESEY: *(approaching her)* Sally! You little noodle! Why didn't you tell them it was you?

SALLY: Wouldn't they know? Darling! *(They kiss, and then he draws back, keeping hold of her hands and looking at her appreciatively.)*

LIVESEY: I say, what a gimp little – sorry, I mean smashing, hat!

SALLY: Thank you, darling! *(Retiring and turning around)* Do you really like it?

LIVESEY: *(nodding)* Mm! It isn't a hat. It's a – It's a – Note of Interrogation, my dear.

SALLY: I dug it out and re-trimmed it. What's a note of derogation, Mark?

LIVESEY: A question-mark!

SALLY: Don't be such a baby – copying me!

LIVESEY: *(laughs)* I mean a query, dearie. How on earth do you come to be here?

SALLY: I came with Aunt Mabel to pilot her round and pick up the loose nuts and screws. She's coming here to see your uncle very soon. I *had* to dash in first to see you! She doesn't know I'm here: she's looking at violins as usual.

LIVESEY: I wish it was usual for me to be able to look at you! I can hardly believe it yet *(hugging her and twirling her about.)*

SALLY: The Lordships of the Admiralty were very kind and let me come.



LIVESEY: Do you mean that wangle worked – ?

SALLY: (*indignantly*) It wasn't a wangle. You try leaving Aunt Mabel alone –

LIVESEY: I will.

SALLY: (*laughing*) Anyway, I'm out of the Wrens. Little me on my own!

LIVESEY: Sally! (*kisses her*) You puss! Oh, darling, how wonderful! That means we can –

SALLY: But there are so many worries, dear, aren't there? Oh Lor'! what *are* we going to use for money?

LIVESEY: (*pulls out his empty pockets*) I'm no good. What about selling some of your pictures? Have you done any lately?

SALLY: (*skipping about, doing a 'painters ballet'*) Not half! "The most outstanding picture by far in this year's Academy was by that wonderfully talented young lady, Miss Sally Gardner; it's called 'The Wren's farewell to the sea'." Tweet! tweet!

LIVESEY: (*laughing*) Darling! (*Mock magisterial*) How dare you dance in Uncle Byng's sacrosanct chambers? What do you think you are, darling, – a bud of May? (*She makes a face at him*). Don't do that! (*Shaking her*) Rough winds – do shake – the darling – buds – of May! (*She breaks away and turns her back on him, rearranging her hat*). Oh darling, I'm sorry. I was only –

SALLY: (*turning round*) Oh Mark! I *liked* that! You've spoilt it by apologizing. (*pulling herself together, and then gloomily*) If only I could sell some of my rotten old daubs!

LIVESEY: (*gloomily*) For that matter, if only I –

SALLY: (*Approaching him, and speaking in a lowered voice, rather like a child asking for a sweet*) Have you done another of those – another one?

LIVESEY: Don't be greedy!

SALLY: You conceited old owl! I don't want to hear any poems if you don't want to read them. I never asked you to write any!

LIVESEY: Liar! (*Suddenly diffident*) I *have*, as a matter of fact. I hope you'll like it. It's rather pretty, I think.

SALLY: (*eagerly*) Is it, pet? Have you got it with you? Is there time? (*He nods.*) What's it about?

LIVESEY: What's it about? You *minx!* (*Taking a piece of paper from his pocket*) You remember my ringing you up that evening after the 'All Clear' went? (*She nods emphatically*) – just to say Good night?

(*Reads*)           Earth, with old London, eastward sped:  
                      Slow dusked labouring hemisphere:  
                      When lamps were lit, I rang and said:  
                              'Good night, my dear!'

                      I did *not* say: (To loose my skiff  
                      All on a copper lake of queer

(*He picks up the telephone receiver and covers the microphone significantly with his hand.*)

                      Eavesdropping wires! I doubted if  
                              'Twas right, my dear!) :-

(*Talking to the back on his hand over the microphone*)

                      “Good night, drab Nature's jewelled dress,  
                      “Gold of the sun, soft atmosphere,  
                      “Enclasp wave! Good night, Princess!  
                              “Good night, my dear!”

(*Still holding the instrument in his left hand, with his right he raises hers to his lips. Bert comes in and he hastily drops her hand.*)

BERT: Excuse me, Mr. Mark, are you trying to get the switch-board? Your indicator's been down for two or three minutes – but your line's dead for some reason.

LIVESEY: (*confused*) Oh no. I was just – it's all right – I just – I just took the receiver off to have a look at it. (*Replacing it*) It'll be all right now. (*Bert goes out*).

SALLY: (*kissing him*) Darling! (*She takes the paper from him and stuffs it in a businesslike way into her bag.*)

LIVESEY: Like it?

SALLY: (*looking up*) It's lovely! It is a shame your poking yourself away in a fusty old lawyer's office and stuffing your head full of all this nonsense. (*She waves round at the bookshelves*).

LIVESEY: Full? Don't worry. (*tapping his head*) There's still standing room in the gallery, I'm afraid. (*A siren sounds in the distance.*) Hulloo! All Clear! Has there been an Alert on all this time?

SALLY: Has there been an Alert on! And I imagined you worrying yourself sick over little Sally in Bomb Alley!

LIVESEY: Nobody except the Uncle ever takes any notice of the Sirens here now. We've got a buzzer in the building that sounds the Overhead or the Immediate Danger or whatever they call it. When that goes, we all get the wind up and try to pretend we haven't – and the Uncle takes cover.

SALLY: Where?

LIVESEY: Under his desk, they say. (*Declaiming*) "There was a listening fear in his regard!"

SALLY: I wish Aunt Mabel *would* get the wind up sometimes. Anyone's only got to bully or threaten her and she practically passes out. She's as frightened as a mouse of people – can't say boo! to a goose – but buzz-bombs! My dear, she simply refuses to take the *slightest* notice. She won't even come out of the *greenhouse*! And she sleeps at the top of the house between two large windows every night.

LIVESEY: (*sighing*) You women! Is it courage, or just sheer knock-me-down muddle-headedness?

SALLY: (*emphatically*) Courage! Mind you, she *is* muddle-headed as well.

LIVESEY: (*mildly*) I was aware of that, my sweet.

SALLY: She doesn't understand the difference between a flying bomb, an aeroplane, and an airship. Hasn't a clue – just calls them all balloons! She's an absolute dear. And generous! My dear, you'd never believe what she gives away! And lets herself be put upon by all and sundry. She just can't bear to say No! to anyone. But she's a dreadful nansensiker – She –

LIVESEY: Can you *possibly* be trying to say *non-sequitur*? My poor lamb!

SALLY: About everything except music. Once she's got that violin against her neck she looks just like an angel.

LIVESEY: Runs in the family! Well, I think we can take it we've nearly done with these blasted buzz-bombs now, and I must say I'm not sorry. I'm beginning to feel there are some drawbacks about sheltering in London behind a weak heart, while other people do the fighting.

SALLY: You poor darling! Dear, have you asked your Uncle again?

LIVESEY: (*Shaking his head gloomily*) No use. He won't budge an inch. I was wondering whether to ask for a fifth or a sixth share, and he won't hold out hopes of *any* partnership at all – not even a twentieth share. And it's only 3 months now to my Final.

SALLY: The stingy old screw!

LIVESEY: Not stingy, my dear! Incisive!

SALLY: It's the same thing, I expect.

LIVESEY: Not quite. If you want the same thing, there's *thrifty, parsimonious, close-fisted, cheeseparing, pursy* –

SALLY: Shut up!

LIVESEY: Certainly, dear.

SALLY: Mark, what are we doing to *do*?

LIVESEY: Not quite 'screw' somehow. (*Apologetically*) You wouldn't like to call him a *scrub*, I suppose?

SALLY: (*indignantly*) I would, too!

LIVESEY: But hardly, perhaps, a *sorner*? I don't know. . . Why not? Yes. That'll do exactly. An incisive old sorner. Whereas your Aunt, of course – is a three stone banker – or (*rather fatuously pleased with himself*) to be more precise, a stone ginger!

SALLY: (*patiently*) Did you hear my question?

LIVESEY: Yes, dearest, I do *sometimes* listen when you are talking.

SALLY: (*very slightly irritated*) I sometimes think you're just a bag of words!

LIVESEY: Yes, but *what* words, darling! (*She frowns*). (*Sighing*) Plan A having crashed, we just push on with Plan B, I suppose!

SALLY: Darling, are you going to give in without a struggle?

LIVESEY: Well, what can I do? Plan B. That means, you ask your Aunt for the Annuity again. You say she's always giving things away and can't be saying No. Well, now's her chance to do a bit of not-bearing!

SALLY: It's all very well. When I mentioned the gratuity, she got very upset. She likes you all right, but she said two things had happened that made it impossible for her to do anything. I think there were two. Only they seemed to keep getting mixed up with each other and turning into one. First, there was a drain somewhere.

LIVESEY: A drain? (*Listening*) Wait a minute! I think my Uncle Byng's arrived. Do you want to say how-do to him?

SALLY: No fear!

LIVESEY: Then I'll take you out this way.

*(They go out through door back. Immediately the other door opens to admit Mr. Hawker, a man between 50 and 60 with a sharp, intelligent face. While talking, he points with his finger and jabs the air occasionally, and makes other gestures indicative of precise analytical thinking. Through the open door Jannery's voice is heard saying something in a tone of mournful protest).*

HAWKER: (*Looking back through the door just before closing it*) What! *Must*, I'm afraid. Can't be helped. It must go off by to-night's post. (*He shuts the door, hangs up his hat and crosses to his desk, where he sits down and takes up a letter. The telephone rings and he picks up the receiver*). Yes. Put them through. Hawker here! . . . Good morning! . . . No! "Why?" Because I want the purchase-money. . . (*shouting*) I WANT THE PURCHASE MONEY!... Sorry... Well, really, that's *your* headache, you know! . . . I'm afraid so. Good-bye! (*He continues reading. The telephone bell rings again*). Very well. Put him through. Hawker here. Good-morning. Yes. I wrote it myself. . . I dare say it was. I meant it to be! . . . Well, if you don't, I shall do one or all of three things. (a) Apply to strike out, (b) Apply to dismiss, (c) Apply for a committed order. Agree? . . . Well then! . . . No, of course I'm not going to tell you which. . . Oh, nonsense! I say,

why don't you get your man to pay up the costs and have done with it? . . . *(Raising his voice)* Come *on!* Come *on!* You can do it! You can, you know! . . . Ah, I'm glad! I shall be hearing from you then. Good-bye! *(He looks at his watch, frowns, and then picks up a document and begins reading it)*. Tck! Tck! Tck! Tck! What on earth's this? *(Presses buzzer and speaks at desk instrument)*. Ask Mr. Mark to step in.

VOICE: *(from the desk instrument)* Yes, Sir.

LIVESEY: *(entering)* Good morning!

HAWKER: Good morning, Mark. I say, this Right of Way Grant –Gardner to Brighton– that I asked you to draw. It's no earthly use. Where on earth did you take it from?

LIVESEY: Sorry, Uncle. What's wrong with it?

HAWKER: *(reading testily)* Look here – What's all this? “This Deed is made the blank day of blank Between Eleonora Mabel Gardner of the one part and Samuel Moses Brighton of the other part. . . that's all right, but what's all this about “a right of way for the Grantee his heirs executors administrators and assigns, his cognates and his agnates, his manservant and his maidservant, his ox and his ass, *(with rising indignation)* his sewers, seneschals, wadsetters, tacksmen, kerns and gallowglasses, and all persons duly authorised by him to pass and repass –” What the – ! *(The telephone bell rings again)*.

LIVESEY: *(while Hawker is picking up the telephone receiver)* You said to put in everything I could think of!

HAWKER: *(scowling disgustedly)* Wadsetters! Tacksmen! *(Into the telephone)* Yes. Put him through. Hawker here. . . Good morning. . . Yes, well if you don't, I'm afraid the vendor will sell elsewhere. We neither of us want that, do we? . . . No, I can't. . . What? (a) because there's no contract and (b) because I'm his solicitor and not his nanny. Mm. . . Well, we'll leave it at that! Goodbye! *(He replaces the receiver and looks at Livesey enquiringly)*. Well?

LIVESEY: You said, put in everything I could think of, because we should have to charge by length, and there wasn't much in it.

HAWKER: *(sternly)* Is this a joke? *(Livesey does not reply)*. *(Relaxing a little)* Well anyway, you seem to be getting hold of the golden rule of the Profession I've kept rubbing into you. The golden rule of *all* the Professions.

LIVESEY: *(As if reciting)* “If you make a mistake, always pretend you did it on purpose.”

HAWKER: Yes, stick to that and you can't go far wrong. (*Holding out the document to him*) Look, there's another much bigger howler. See if you can't spot it yourself. First page.

LIVESEY: (*Reading and scratching his head*) I can't see –

HAWKER: (*Loudly, half bullying, half encouraging, as if Mark were a slipping horse*) Come on! Come on! You can do it. You can, you know! Come on!

LIVESEY: Good heavens, I've left out the *Habendum*!

HAWKER: That's it. Take it away and do it again. And let me get on. (*As Livesey goes out with the draft, the telephone bell rings.*)

VOICE: (*as before*) Miss Gardner's here, Sir. Miss E. M. Gardner.

HAWKER: (*groaning*) Oh gosh! (*He gets up and walks across the room and back, obviously bracing himself for an ordeal. Finally he returns to his desk, presses the buzzer and speaks at the desk instrument*). Show Miss Gardner in now! (*To himself*) Whew!

BERT: (*opening the door*) Miss Gardner! (*Miss Gardner, a large, good-natured, but vague-looking woman, of probably about 60 years of age, comes in, carrying an extra large and battered-looking handbag. The high pitch of her voice is irritating and sounds silly. Bert goes out closing the door.*)

MISS GARDNER: (*preoccupied about something*) Good morning! (*Half turning*) No, I'd really rather not! (*To Hawker*) Your clerk was *most* kind, but I think if you *don't* mind, I should be happier. . . (*She goes out again. Hawker groans. A kind of collision or scuffle accompanied by a murmured argument is heard outside the door.*)

MISS GARDNER: (*returning with a violin-case under the arm in which she carries the handbag*) I know you won't mind. I'm never really happy with my fiddle out of my sight. (*She lays it carefully on the floor beside her.*)

HAWKER: Good morning, Miss Gardner. Glad to see you. Did you have a comfortable journey up from Kent with no alarms and excursions?

MISS GARDNER: Oh, yes, thank you.

HAWKER: (*Apprehensively*) You'll forgive me, I know. I shall have to keep us down to half an hour.

MISS GARDNER: Yes. I mustn't waste your time.

HAWKER: Is it about the right of way across your garden?

MISS GARDNER: Yes, and then there was – Oh, by the way, I had a letter from Mr. Brighton. (*She opens her handbag and begins searching. Various oddments fall out and she picks them up again and stuffs them back*).

HAWKER: Can't you remember what he said in it?

MISS GARDNER: (*continuing the search*) Yes. I didn't really come to see you about that. He doesn't want to pay anything now. Just the costs.

HAWKER: Oh, doesn't he! You're *giving* it away, as it is, as I keep telling you. What is the Consideration to you?

MISS GARDNER: Oh, dear Mr. Brighton shows me a lot of consideration really.

HAWKER: I mean, what *benefit* do you get out of his having a right of way across the best corner of your garden. What is the *quid pro quo*?

MISS GARDNER: He really ought to pay something, oughtn't he? And I'm really not well off now. But of course that's the Company thing, *Domestic Transport Ltd*. I always said to myself I wouldn't bother you with that. I don't suppose anything could be done anyway. It's been going on for years. Only I felt so sorry for Sally. She wants to get married, you know, oh, yes, of *course* you know! And when I spoke to the man about them, he said I ought to get them valued or something and to go to a solicitor.

HAWKER: The man?

MISS GARDNER: (*Impatient with his stupidity*) Yes. The man at the Bank. He said they ought to be valued properly.

HAWKER: (*Apprehensively*) "They" – er, you mean, er –

MISS GARDNER: (*Tapping her foot*) Yes, yes. The things. They sent me a paper. It's in my bag. (*She starts fumbling in her bag again*).



HAWKER: *(timidly)* Things?

MISS GARDNER: Yes. My shares.

HAWKER: *(anxiously)* Wouldn't it be less confusing if we disposed of your neighbour, Mr. Brighton, first?

MISS GARDNER: How extraordinary! I'm certain it's here somewhere! *(She goes on rummaging vigorously. Somewhere not far off, but not very near, a siren sounds the Alert).*

HAWKER: *(hopefully)* I don't know whether you'd like to go down to the Shelter. There's one in the basement. We could go on talking there quite well, if you prefer.

MISS GARDNER: *(hardly hearing either him or the Siren, in the excitement of the Chase)* Oh no! *(She makes a sudden triumphant dive to the bottom of the handbag and pulls out a document which brings about two thirds of the extremely miscellaneous contents of the handbag with it).* Ah, here it is! *(Disappointed)* Oh bother! It's only the Rates thing!

HAWKER: Shall we finish with Brighton's Right of Way first, Miss Gardner? *(In the distance the engine of a flying bomb has been growing louder. It stops abruptly and is followed by a thud. This happens 2 or 3 times during the ensuing dialogue. Miss Gardner ignores them altogether, but Hawker's face and voice and manner show that he is following every sound).*

MISS GARDNER: Oh yes, that letter! *(She dives for the bag again).*

HAWKER: *(in agony)* No. Never mind the letter! *Please!* You told me what it said. I asked you what the consideration – benefit – was to you.

MISS GARDNER: I can't do without my music.

HAWKER: *(puzzled)* Eh?

MISS GARDNER: My Quartet, you know.

HAWKER: I don't follow. What's that got to do with it?

MISS GARDNER: He says our Quartet practices are a nuisance, and he could stop us.

HAWKER: Nuisance my foot, Miss Gardner! Your house stands well within its own grounds. He's trying to bully you. I know where *I'd* give him a right of way to!

MISS GARDNER: Yes, but the path's got to be changed. That's why I wanted to see you before you start doing the Agreement or Grant or whatever you called it. (*Very seriously*) It mustn't pass so near the thing! If they do, the little door falls open and bangs them on the legs.

HAWKER: (*picking up a plan*) Is "the thing" a summerhouse by any chance?

MISS GARDNER: How do you mean, is the thing a summerhouse?

HAWKER: You said – hm! (*changing his tactics and trying a fresh line of approach*) Has the summerhouse got a little door that falls open and bangs people on the legs?

MISS GARDNER: Yes, I said so.

HAWKER: I think I remember it on the plan.

MISS GARDNER: Of course. The summerhouse is the thing.

HAWKER: How do you mean, the summerhouse is the thing?

MISS GARDNER: (*nodding*) Mm— . . . the summerhouse!

HAWKER: I mean, when you say "the summerhouse is the thing", do you mean it is the thing, simply for the purpose of the path not passing so near it, or for some other reason?

MISS GARDNER: (*getting worried*) Is the summerhouse there simply so as not to have a path near it? No, of course not?

HAWKER: No. You haven't quite understood what I'm asking. What I mean is, when you said "the summerhouse is the thing" – did you mean something *new*?

MISS GARDNER: Oh no. It's an old summerhouse.

HAWKER: Yes, but I'm not talking about the summerhouse. What I want to know—

MISS GARDNER: (*very worried*) *Aren't* we talking about the summerhouse?

HAWKER: Of course we are, *ultimately*. As a matter of fact we're not, we're talking about a right of way – but what I mean is – did you mean – when you said – (*He gives up and relapses into silence*).

MISS GARDNER: (*Kindly*) Do you understand now?

HAWKER: I think so. The summerhouse is the thing, because the thing is the summerhouse?

MISS GARDNER: How do you mean? It's the same thing!

HAWKER: (*with a sickly smile*) The same summerhouse!

MISS GARDNER: There's only one summerhouse. (*With mild reproof*) I should have thought you would have remembered!

(*A buzzer sounds, indicating immediate danger.*)

VOICE: (*through the desk instrument*) The overhead, Sir!

HAWKER: Yes, I heard it, thanks. (*To Miss Gardner*) That was the overhead warning.

MISS GARDNER: (*uninterested*) Oh!

HAWKER: (*wiping his brow*) We seem to be getting mixed. *Can* we just finish with the payment part before we get on to the summerhouse? Will you write and tell Brighton that he must pay as agreed, or shall I?

MISS GARDNER: Yes, I suppose that's what I ought to have done.

HAWKER: Well, will you?

MISS GARDNER: I can't now. I wrote last night and told him he could have it for nothing! Oh, and that reminds me; how long can someone go to prison for getting petrol without coupons?

HAWKER: (*sinking his head on his hands in despair*) What, exactly, are we talking about! (*The loudest thud so far is heard off and he jumps slightly*). Er – Miss Gardner, we sometimes take cover after the buzzer has gone. Especially if they seem to be getting nearer. There's danger from flying glass, you know.

MISS GARDNER: You do just as you like. Don't bother about me. (*Interested*) Where do you go?

HAWKER: (*looking longingly under his desk*) Oh – wherever – somewhere away from the window, you know.

MISS GARDNER: (*jumping up energetically*) I know what I *will* do, though, if you don't mind. I don't want *him* hurt. (*She picks up her violin*). May I? (*She places it on the floor under the desk*).

HAWKER: (*leaning back in his chair and trying to be calmly affable and a little patronizing*) Do you know, you are a very plucky woman, Miss Gardner. You seem more worried about your violin getting smashed than about being killed yourself.

MISS GARDNER: Why should I worry about dying?

HAWKER: Well – most people do, you know. It's likely to be rather a big change, to say the least of it.

MISS GARDNER: Yes, but you see, I know just what it will be like.

HAWKER: (*Pushing away the papers on his desk and turning half round*) Do you really, though? Let's stop talking business, it's not very easy with these infernal things coming over anyway. (*With a last fleeting look under the desk*) You're *quite* sure you wouldn't rather take cover?

MISS GARDNER: Yes, thanks.

HAWKER: Tell me about all this.

MISS GARDNER: Well, I don't know how you think of things. I expect you think of man as a duality – just a soul inside a body, you know. Or perhaps you don't believe in the soul.

HAWKER: Oh, come now!

MISS GARDNER: I'm sorry. People are so funny about these things nowadays. And it's all perfectly clear really. You see, besides the physical body that you see and touch, there are the two other principles, the Astral or Psychica, which in the vehicle of thought and consciousness – and, of course, the passions; and between the two, the Formatrix or Plastica.

HAWKER: Swastika?

MISS GARDNER: *Plastica. (A bell rings off).*

HAWKER: *(Relieved)* Ah! End of the Overhead. No immediate danger for the time being. But the All Clear Siren hasn't sounded yet. *(invitingly)* Yes?

MISS GARDNER: The *Plastica* is the space-time body. It carries the more enduring qualities of the personality, those more connected with the physical organism – abilities, mannerisms, gestures and so forth. In very very ancient times --

HAWKER: One moment, Miss Gardner. We're getting mixed again. I have a feeling I shall get more of a – more of a *grip* on what you're saying, if you'll allow me to ask you questions and confine yourself to answering them.

MISS GARDNER: Certainly, if you like.

HAWKER: *(Quite cheerful now that the danger signal is off)* We were talking about dying. I take it that, when we die, the er – the *Psychica* is separated from the physical and, so to speak, flies away?

MISS GARDNER: Not only when we die. When we go to sleep too. Every time we lose consciousness, in fact.

HAWKER: What about the *Plastica*? *That*, I suppose, is only separated from the body by death?

MISS GARDNER: I wouldn't say that.

HAWKER: *(putting the tips of his fingers together)* Then I am in difficulties. I begin to lose sight of your distinction between the *Plastica* and the – the what's it, which I thought I was just beginning to grasp. Tell me. Is the separation between the *Plastica* and the ordinary physical body effected as easily as in the case of the –

MISS GARDNER: No, it's drasticker. *(Hawker, who has been toying with a pencil, starts and looks up at her sharply, then passes his hand furtively across his brow).*

HAWKER: More drastic, eh? What sort of cause brings it about?

MISS GARDNER: Well, you know, if anyone has a very sudden and terrible shock that sends them unconscious, I don't know, I believe the *Plastica*, or parts of it, may be driven out for a time.

HAWKER: Alone? Or along with the *Psychica*?

MISS GARDNER: Oh, along with the *Psychica*. I once knew a woman who was violently kicked by a horse. Her *Psychica* –

HAWKER: Why kick her? (*hurriedly*) I mean – this talk of the soul (as I call it in my old-fashioned way) slipping in and out of the body while it is still alive – or is it the *mind* we are talking about?

MISS GARDNER: Oh, the mind, surely! Only the *conscious* part of the soul, the mental activities of concentration and reasoning. The *Logistika*, you know!

HAWKER: This talk of the mind slipping in and out of the body while it is still alive makes me feel very uneasy. All sorts of unpleasant possibilities occur to me. Would it, for instance, be possible for the *Psychica* and the *Plastica* – or parts of it – which had come, or been driven, out of *one* body, to get back into *another* body – we'll say by mistake, if you like?

MISS GARDNER: (*smiling reminiscently*) It's strange you should ask me that! I once asked the very same question of a very wise Hindu philosopher. What he said was – (*The telephone bell rings*).

HAWKER: (*Speaking into the telephone*) Tell him I'm engaged. . . Oh, very well, put him through. Hawker here. . . Good morning! . . . Well, it is rather awkward. Yes, I have a client in the room with me. . . Oh well, if you feel you *must* write to-day – (*To Miss Gardner apologetically*) Will you excuse me? (*She nods and leans back in her chair*). Yes. Go one! . . . I see . . . mm! Fell on his shoulder? How could a *tank* fall on his shoulder in a house? . . . Oh, in *there*! You mean the little tank over the – the little tank? . . . I bet it is! . . . Yes. I'm afraid you are. I'd like to see the Tenancy Agreement of course . . . An ordinary 3 years Agreement. Nothing unusual about it. . . Yes. I'm afraid the landlord is liable, you know . . . It *is*, very rotten, but I can't help it. I didn't make the law. . . (*longer pause*) . . . Not unless he's a sucker! Good -b – *What!* His *wife* signed the Agreement . . . *She's* the tenant then? You're sure he didn't sign too? . . . On the contrary, it makes the *whole* difference. It doesn't matter if all the tanks in the house fall in showers on *his* shoulder! He'll just have to put up with it. . . Yes. *Very* lucky! (*laughs*) Well, good-bye! (*Replacing the receiver and turning to Miss Gardner*) I'm sorry! Well, it all sounds to me rather like J. B. Priestley. Let's see, where were we? Oh, yes, you were saying –

MISS GARDNER: He said it was almost impossible, but not *quite*. He said, if two people were stuck together in a confined space and lost consciousness at the same moment and later on – you know – got it back again, then there might be a sort of *exchange* of minds, like you said.

HAWKER: ‘Confined space’ might mean anything. Does it include ordinary rooms?

MISS GARDNER: (*smiling reminiscently again and looking round the room*) I asked him that, too. He said not. They would have to be *pressed very tight* together in some way. Yes. I remember. There was a large chest in the room we were talking in. I remember his pointing (*she points under the desk*) and saying “In there, for instance.”

HAWKER: Oh, I see!

MISS GARDNER: Oh, yes, it’s all coming back to me now. And there was something else he said. He said even *then* it was *most* unlikely to happen – only if the two people had just met in some extraordinary way – if their minds had been intermingling –

HAWKER: (*uneasily*) Intermingling?

MISS GARDNER: *Getting mixed* – in the Logistika, you know.

HAWKER: (*starts to say something, but suppresses it and then makes a move as if to close the interview*) Well, it’s all most interesting. Some day perhaps I shall get mysticer – (*hurriedly*) – more mystical –

(*The buzzer sounds again and almost simultaneously an engine is heard approaching with a steady and rapid crescendo. Hawker gets up and walk about the room with a haggard look*).

HAWKER: (*trembling*) Miss Gardner, I do really think we – you – should take cover, you know. These things are no joke.

MISS GARDNER: No, it’s all right, thanks. (*She crosses to the window to look out and, as soon as her back is turned, Hawker dives under his desk*).

MISS GARDNER: (*from the window*) I was watching one of these balloons passing over our house last night. It was funny. He had a little light burning. It can’t have been to show him where he was going, because it was at the back. (*Excitedly*) Here he comes! I declare! He’s got his light on, too! Even in the *daytime*! (*Surprised and interested*) Oh! he’s put it out!

*(The now terrific noise of the flying bomb's engine suddenly stops, leaving dead silence. At the same moment Hawker, who has crawled out from under the desk and across to behind her, shouts, "For God's sake, woman!" and, clawing her with both hands, pulls her backward on to the floor and under the desk with him. On the way, she just manages to snatch her handbag off the chair on which she had been sitting, and it disappears beneath the desk with them both, as the CURTAIN falls.)*

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## ACT - II

(The afternoon of the following day)

*Scene: The garden of Miss Gardner's house in Kent. R. French windows, open, with a telephone visible on a table inside the room. L. at back, a summerhouse with open front, slantwise to the audience, so that the interior is partly visible and partly invisible. Front L. (in about the same position as the desk in Act I) a garden table with a chair behind it. There is a deck chair in the summerhouse and one or two outside in the garden. Miss Gardner is sitting at the table, on which she has placed her handbag. She has a large piece of sticking plaster on one temple. In front of the table stands Brighton, a heavy, stout, dark man, clearly of foreign extraction. He is in process of losing his temper.*

**BRIGHTON:** *(he speaks with a Central European inflexion)* And I tell you, Miss Gardner, I don't understand all dis one little bit. Ever since two years when my wife and I are coming to our house, you have been zer good and kind neighbour and now you suddenly begin to talk in this quite new way and ask me all kind of questions if I am soon selling my house and about my changing my name many years ago etcetera etcetera. What do you mean by it?

**MISS GARDNER:** *(She speaks now, as throughout the play, in the same high-pitched, silly voice, but her manner is very different and her gestures are strongly reminiscent of Hawker's in Act I.) (Leaning back in her chair and placing the tips of her fingers together and speaking clearly and rapidly)* Let's just run over the facts, Mr. Brighton. About three months ago you asked me to give up a large slice of my garden to improve your property. When I declined, you asked for a right of way over it and, after consulting my solicitor, I agreed, rather reluctantly, to let you have that for two hundred pounds. You came and saw me and cajoled me into coming down to a hundred. Then your wife asked me to tea and, by the time I came away, it had dropped to fifty. Last, you called on me late one evening and, after you had kissed my hand several times and assured me that you and your wife were downtrodden refugees, it disappeared altogether. Correct?

*(Brighton, who is pacing up and down, does not reply.)*

Then you called this afternoon and asked me if the Deed granting the Right of Way would soon be ready. As you again stressed the appeal *ad misericordiam*, I asked you – after making it absolutely clear that you were perfectly at liberty to reply or not, as you chose – certain questions: in reply to which you were good enough to tell me that you came over to this country in 1929, that your name at that time was Breitenstein, and that you were about to sell your house. Very good. I am now asking you – and once again you need not reply unless you wish to –

BRIGHTON: (*holding up his hand, his English deteriorating with his temper*) No prose lectures, please! There's no necessity! *You* don't teach me what I need and what I don't need to do! Thank you very much – without your help I know already quite well! I don't take no fresh cheeks from you. You 'ave given me the promise and you must now keep him.

MISS GARDNER: Bunkum! There's no consideration. *You've* seen to that!

BRIGHTON: Con-seederation?

MISS GARDNER: *Quid pro quo. (Suddenly shouting)* I WANT THE PURCHASE MONEY!

BRIGHTON: (*Mastering himself with difficulty*) Well, if you mean to be a dishonourable, and go back from your word, we will perhaps agree on something reasonable. Yes?

MISS GARDNER: No, Mr. Brighton. I'm sorry, I'm not giving anything away now. £200 is my rock bottom and you can take it or leave it. I couldn't care less. (*Rising*) And now, as I have a lot to do, if you'll excuse me, I'll say Good afternoon.

BRIGHTON: (*furious*) Listen, you silly old women, I certainly will stop your beesly music, dat's all. Fiddle-de-dee, fiddle-de-dee all day and half the night! Fiddle-de-dee then and now – yes – very nice! But always – my God – never!

MISS GARDNER: Listen, you silly old man with – well, we'll leave it at that! You can bring an action for nuisance to-morrow. And good luck to you with it! (*She titters nervously*) Good afternoon, Mr. Breitenstein! Will you go the short way? (*He hesitates*). (*brusquely*) Must – must! I'm afraid! Good afternoon! (*She turns away*).

BRIGHTON: (*shouting, as he goes off behind the summerhouse*) Whatever my actions didn't work, I mean you are a Selfish, and a Nasty, and a Nosy! Hark that!

(*There is a creak, followed by a faint, dull thud from behind the summerhouse and Brighton's voice is heard exclaiming, Ach! Donnerblitz! Again my leg!*)

MISS GARDNER: (*calling over her shoulder*) Good! I know where *I'd* give you a right of way to! (*vexed, as if remembering something*) Tck! Tck! (*She opens the handbag, looks into it and frowns. She opens it as wide as it will go and looks in again. With a sudden moment of impatience, she turns it upside down, emptying all the contents on to the table in a heap, which she at once starts sorting rapidly into four separate heaps, saying as she does so:*)

Scrap! . . . Scrap! . . . Retain! . . . Further consideration probably scrap! Further consideration! . . . Further consideration probably scrap! . . . Retain. . . Scrap! (*She picks up a foolscap envelope, tears out the contents and throws it down again*). Hulloo! Hulloo! What's this? "Domestic Transport Ltd. Notice of Extraordinary General Meeting to be held –" (*She catches her breath and hurriedly picks up the envelope again to scrutinize the postmark*). Oh, my gosh! Three weeks old! Oh Mabel, Mabel – you sucker!

(*While she is engaged in this, the same creak and thud are heard as before and shortly after, Livesey enters, limping slightly, from behind the summerhouse.*)

LIVESEY: (*looking rather warily at her*) Good afternoon, Miss Gardner!

MISS GARDNER: Good afternoon! You're early, young man!

LIVESEY: Yes. I hope not *too* early. The fact is, it's such a broth of an afternoon – the thought of your garden –

MISS GARDNER: (*drily*) Sally's indoors somewhere.

LIVESEY: I was going to say that the thought of your delightful garden was really too much for me.

MISS GARDNER: In fact I'm not *quite* sure if she's up yet.

LIVESEY: Oh!

MISS GARDNER: This is her first day at home, and she's taking it very easy.

LIVESEY: Besides, I thought you might possibly want to give me final instructions.

MISS GARDNER: Not necessary. You are thoroughly seised of all I said on the telephone this morning?

LIVESEY: Oh yes.

MISS GARDNER: (*pointing*) That's the summerhouse. (*Rising and coming forward*) The winding path to the back door round through the shrubbery goes *that way* (*pointing straight into the auditorium*) – round the Muck-heap.

LIVESEY: (*coming forward and staring with her*) Oh yes, I see!

MISS GARDNER: I shouldn't linger there, if I were you! It's on the rich side.

LIVESEY: Fermenting?

MISS GARDNER: *(hesitating anxiously and looking with deliberation round the House)* I think it's coming along quite nicely. . . *(Turning away)* We shall soon know! *(Looking at her watch)* Mm! I shall have to leave this job. I *must* get my letters to the post-office.

LIVESEY: Let me –

MISS GARDNER: Thanks! But I shall have to go inside as well. *(On her way to the house she pauses)* Oh, how uncivil of me not to have asked! How's your uncle after the ... er...?

LIVESEY: Well, he's all right – I think! Hardly a scratch.

MISS GARDNER: That's good! But you look rather dubious. Sure you mean it?

LIVESEY: Oh, nothing really! It's that – the shock, I suppose – he seems a little queer. Sort of. . . vague and woolly, you know.

MISS GARDNER: Mm! Not quite – not quite *himself*, eh? It's a rum go! For my part, I feel like a million dollars. *(She marches off. Livesey follows absently, looking fixedly up at the house. As he goes off, a creak, thud and muffled curse announce, from behind the summerhouse, the arrival of Benjamin Wolffe. He wears a beard rather as an artist than as a naval officer, and his manner shows him a stranger to the premises. He is quite sober, but looks as if he habitually drinks a little more than is good for him.)*

Wolffe: What the bloody hell was that anyway? *(He wanders back to inspect the cause of his suffering, and at the same moment Sally emerges from the house. She is inspired with a great idea.)*

SALLY: *(to herself)* I jolly well will! And they can't stop me! *(Still gloating on her idea, she sniffs the air appreciatively, strolls up to a flowering shrub and, after contemplating it for a while with her back to the summerhouse, suddenly strikes a painter's attitude as though the shrub were an easel and she has a brush and palette in her hands. Wolffe reappears, makes as if to greet her and then stops, smiling to himself. Suddenly he whips out a pencil and sketchbook and begins with professional adroitness to commit her to paper, as, without having seen him, she advances to the shrub, retires to admire the effect and advances again).* Slap it on! A little more vermilion there! Whoa! Steady! Don't lose it! Slap it on again! Steady there! Not too thick, Miss

Gardner! Not too thick! (*She laughs, and then dances about in a ridiculous way, singing: "Dee di diddledy dee di dee!"*)

WOLFFE: (*grinning and putting away sketchbook and pencil*) Look sharp, there, Wren Gardner! You're wanted in the engine-room!

SALLY: (*off balance, and wondering for a moment whether she is back in some crazy version of the Navy*) Why, Benjamin! You old (*a threatening gesture*) – ! Sneaking, that's what it is! I thought I was alone.

WOLFFE: (*taking her hand and squeezing rather than shaking it*) That was the whole effect! You'll do for a dryad.

SALLY: You must have thought I was crackers!

WOLFFE: (*approvingly*) You are: but then so am I. Crazy as a bed-bug, as the Yanks say. But we daubers have to be, don't we?

SALLY: I'm grateful to you for coming, anyway. Had you been there long?

WOLFFE: Just arrived. (*He makes himself at home in a deckchair*).

SALLY: (*finding difficulty in getting to the point, now that the crucial moment has arrived*) It's nice to see you.

WOLFFE: (*unembarrassed*) Wonderful to see *you*, Sally. You ought to have invited me sooner. Enchanting place! Subjects everywhere.

SALLY: It's awfully sweet of you to have come.

WOLFFE: Well, as you said yourself on the phone, I couldn't take the Dover road and not hail an old shipmate: could I now?

SALLY: No. Actually I was released from the Service yesterday. They let me go, to –

WOLFFE: Were you, by Jove? I wish I was. I want to get back to my studio. The cobwebs after six years! And no cute little Wren stewards to clean up. Mm! You used to look pretty ta-ta in uniform, Sally; but in that dress – stunning!

SALLY: Thank you, Ben.

WOLFFE: What do you plan to do with yourself? A holiday in Florence? A week-end in Brighton? Or what?

SALLY: (*innocent and dreamy*) Oh, wouldn't that be lovely! (*Her embarrassing worries return*) No, the tragedy is – the reason I asked you to come – is, I'm flat broke and stony. Or at least. . .

WOLFFE: (*cautiously*) But weren't you the girl with the rich aunt? I thought she had oodles and oodles of the stuff.

SALLY: That's the whole point, Ben. I always thought she *was* rich. But now – well, it seems “was” is just about the word for it. That's why I wanted to ask you to fulfil a promise you made once. She was. But she isn't.

WOLFFE: She was. . . but she isn't. . .

SALLY: Yes, you see, she's indelibly scatterbrained. That is, she was, before she was blown up. When I got home yesterday. . .

WOLFFE: Blown up!

SALLY: Yes: a buzz-bomb. The rescuers said they were just piled up in a heap. Mr. Hawker on top of the fiddle and Aunt Mabel on top of Mr. Hawker. She was awfully pleased about the order. The fiddle wasn't even scratched.

WOLFFE: Poor old girl! Who's Hawker? Her banker? Did her money get blown up too?

SALLY: Don't be silly, Ben, I tell you, this is very serious.

WOLFFE: Well, you never know – inflation's certainly *coming*.

SALLY: No. It's much more sinister than that. I think someone has stripped her. Just stripped her.

WOLFFE: I'm not quite in the picture. She was, but she isn't, because she's been blown up in a sinister way, and stripped. . . I've got it! Lady Godiva!

SALLY: Oh, Ben, stop teasing me! Can't you see what a jam we're in? Some rotten swindler, or the war, or what have you, has taken it all off her. There's a company director for one thing, called Goodenough. . . he's supposed to be coming this afternoon, I believe. . .

WOLFFE: A company director! Is he going to fiddle?

SALLY: I'm sure he's let her down. Then there's a mysterious drain. . .

WOLFFE: Mm. . . that ought to be looked into. (*sniffs*) The whole thing stinks, eh?

SALLY: And I believe it's to do with a horrid little squit called Raikes, who keeps showing up without an appointment.

WOLFFE: Not guilty m'lud! I *had* an appointment. But this Muck Raikes. . . (*looking round him with exaggerated caution*). . . Psst!. . . He's a bit insanitary, is he? What does he do? Clear out the drains?

SALLY: I'm not quite sure – some kind of civil servant anyway, probably. And then she's spent a fortune on her blooming quartet.

WOLFFE: That's the last straw!

Old man Raikes  
In the merry old jakes,  
He called for his fiddlers four. . .

What a racket!

SALLY: Yes. She's crazy on it. She did ever such good work in the war, touring round to people who couldn't get to concerts. Where she found the petrol beats me. I believe Raikes helped her. The cellist's a menace. Old Lady Moberley. I'm not exactly choosy where music's concerned – but really that Moberley woman hasn't a clue! She can't even keep *time*. It's just that Auntie hasn't the heart to say anything to her, you know. Old Lord Moberley was the Corset King, you know, and when he died, her left her. . .

WOLFFE: (*holding his head*) Wait a minute! wait a minute! I'm not altogether keeping up. Could we pause and consolidate? So, one way and another, little Sally comes home from the wars to find the cupboard is bare? (*suspiciously*) I don't see where I come in.

SALLY: Not that it would matter, you see, only Mark's uncle is such an incisive old sornor. He won't give him a partnership, you see: and so, we've absolutely had it, unless I can get a job.

WOLFFE: (*less jauntily*) Mark's uncle?

SALLY: Yes. Didn't I tell you? Mark and I. . . well, never mind! So the point is, I want a job. And you once promised you'd help me, if ever. . .

WOLFFE: Is Mark your brother?

SALLY: (*shrieking with laughter*) Ben, you *are* an old fathead!

WOLFFE: (*serious at last*) Thanks a lot!

SALLY: So then I had my brilliant idea: 'we'll ask old Ben Wolffe,' she said to herself, 'he's a trump: he's sure to have an idea.' And besides, you did promise, didn't you?

WOLFFE: Oh, did I?

SALLY: Yes – you remember? You said, in your expert opinion my paintings were good enough to sell; and you knew lots of people professionally in civvy street, who could use my talent.

WOLFFE: I get it: I pull the strings somewhere, so that you can earn enough to keep Mick.

SALLY: 'Mark,' dear. How splendid you are, Ben! You always were quick as a flash. (*Livesey appears in the summerhouse and stops in surprise.*)

WOLFFE: I just do this for old time's sake, do I?

SALLY: Oh, Ben! I knew you'd agree. (*She kisses him. Livesey makes as if to advance, but hesitates and retreats.*)

WOLFFE: This *is* an enchanting place, and no mistake! Not a dull moment.

SALLY: (*dancing about*) I knew he'd be able to do something. I knew it! I knew it!

WOLFFE: I shake the tree and Mac picks up the fruit. Fine!

SALLY: How *wonderful* to feel free again! (*impatiently*) Oh, why can't *he* be independent? Bless you, Ben. How soon can you start?

WOLFFE: I've just come, damn it!



SALLY: I mean, I don't want a holiday. I want to start earning right away.

WOLFFE: (*disillusioned, and therefore losing interest*) Of course I'd like to help you for old time's sake, young Sally. But whatever I may have said, you must realise that the competition in the commercial world –

SALLY: Oh, Ben, you aren't going back on your word? I didn't think you were that kind of man. (*She looks punctured*).

WOLFFE: (*shrugs*) Sorry. (*He surveys her up and down appraisingly*). Unless. . .

SALLY: (*reanimated*) Unless what?

WOLFFE: (*stroking his beard*) There's always scope for – I shall be needing one myself. . .

SALLY: What, Ben?

WOLFFE: A model.

SALLY: Oh. (*Mark scowls with a look of thunder*).

WOLFFE: Ah, well! Sorry I mentioned it.

SALLY: But Ben, do you think I – ?

WOLFFE: Don't give it another thought. It was the only thing that occurred to me, that's all. Well. . . it's been nice seeing you (*holds out his hand*).

SALLY: If it was only me I was thinking of. . .

WOLFFE: Don't mind me!

SALLY: I wouldn't do it for myself of course; but for someone else. . . as a labour of love. . .

WOLFFE: You mean you'd like the job, Sally? Well, that's fine! The pay's not bad, you know. Better than you could hope for in a draughtman's office – even if I knew of one that could take you.

SALLY: Until you could find me something better. . .

WOLFFE: Yes, of course. Only as a stopgap.

SALLY: All right, I'll do it. Where there's a will, there's a way. I knew I could trust you, Ben. Fancy little me a model! Wow! I could sing. I shan't say a word to. . . *(trails off into silence)*

*(Livesey's weak heart appears to be in grave danger.)*

WOLFFE: I'm glad you thought of me, Sally. You're the sweetest girl I know; and I'd put myself out a lot to help you.

SALLY: You're a dear, Ben. Yes, you are.

WOLFFE: Only when I try: and that's not with everyone. But with you. . . ah!

SALLY: Shall I come to your studio in London, or. . .? *(They stroll out of sight arm in arm. Livesey goes to the end of the summerhouse, to stare after them).*

LIVESEY: *(to himself)* Of all the. . .! *(sorrowfully)* Oh, Sally, Sally! Which of us is the bigger fool. *(Chin on hands, he sits down in still gloom; which is broken by the return of Sally alone, skipping and humming to herself. She stops dead at sight of him).*

SALLY: Crikey!

LIVESEY: Sorry I'm such a shock to you. Don't mind me! Carry on singing.

SALLY: But how did you get here?

LIVESEY: By hearsay.

SALLY: Why on earth didn't you let me know you were coming, you silly great baby?

LIVESEY: I didn't know, till your Aunt rang up 10, Cursitor Place this morning. And then I had to leave at once. She actually gave me a list of trains!

SALLY: Aunt Mabel sent for you?

LIVESEY: I'm here professionally – on business.

SALLY: I thought you looked a bit pompous, old dear! Aren't you going to say something to me?

LIVESEY: Such as?

SALLY: (*rather hurt*) Well! (*almost sarcastically*) You might perhaps tell me *what* business.

LIVESEY: It's hush hush.

SALLY: I see. Then that's that. (*She turns away, knowing when she is not wanted.*)

LIVESEY: (*hurrying after her*) Oh – Sally. . . !

SALLY: (*hopefully*) Yes? (*She notices he is hobbling slightly*). What's wrong with your leg?

LIVESEY: I came in the short way you told me of, and just as I was passing the back of the summerhouse, something seemed to shoot out at me—

SALLY: (*hiding a giggle*) The little back door! Aunt Mabel's pet.

LIVESEY: A back door into a summerhouse! An aid to snoopers, not doubt?

SALLY: (*hurt again*) Why do you say that?

LIVESEY: (*changing the subject after an internal struggle*) What's this – who are these – ?

SALLY: Yes, Mark?

LIVESEY: Aren't there some people coming this afternoon?

SALLY: Yes. Aunt Mabel's quartet.

LIVESEY: (*preoccupied to gain time*) Who are they? I mean, what are their names?

SALLY: Well, there's Lady Moberley –

LIVESEY: Lady Moberley!

SALLY: Why, do you know her?

LIVESEY: Not – you can't mean the *primum* Mobile!

SALLY: What do you mean?

LIVESEY: My blessed innocent, she's the Firm's number one Client.

SALLY: She's awfully rich, isn't she?

LIVESEY: We practically *live* on her. Litigation's all very well; but if *she* took her business away. . . Oh, my prophetic soul! My uncle!

SALLY: (*moving off slowly*) How interesting!

LIVESEY: Oh – Sally –

SALLY: Yes, Mark dear?

LIVESEY: Can I see your latest effort – the one you told me about?

SALLY: (*awakening to another world*) Oh yes! I've been dying to show it to you. That is, I didn't want you to see it, really: something's gone wrong.

LIVESEY: You don't say.

SALLY: Ssh. Someone's coming. (*She peers down the garden*). Who *can* it be?

LIVESEY: (*Becoming conspiratorial, glancing at his watch*) Funny! I thought there was still time before. . . (*He looks over Sally's shoulder*). Good Lord! It's not – it's Goodenough!

SALLY: But you haven't seen the picture yet: how do you know it's good enough?

LIVESEY: (*pointing down the garden*) That man – donkey! – with your Aunt. His name is Goodenough. He's another of our clients. Your Aunt seems to know everybody today.

SALLY: Well, since you came to talk business—

LIVESEY: Not with him! Come on – show me the picture before we get caught up in introductions. (*They go off towards the house, Livesey still preoccupied, not knowing quite where to begin*).

SALLY: There's one thing about it that bothers me. You must give me your advice. . . (*They vanish into the house as Miss Gardner arrives, followed by Goodenough, an individual whose interests are clearly, in the main, commercial*).

MISS GARDNER: Shall we sit in the garden, Mr. Goodenough? It's such a lovely day.

GOODENOUGH: Very good of you to see me like this, Madam, so soon after your accident. I hope you're keeping well?

MISS GARDNER: Yes, thank you. Of course it was a big shock and at first I felt – a little – uncertain of myself. (*She put her hand to her forehead for a moment*). But I'm definitely on my hind legs and barking again now! (*She titters nervously*).

GOODENOUGH: (*A trifle taken aback*) Really! Well, Madam, it's just about those shares of yours in our little private Company, *Domestic Transport Ltd*. I should just like to clear the matter up and I thought if I just called and we just had a few words –

MISS GARDNER: Do sit down, Mr. Goodenough. (*They take deck chair side by side*).

GOODENOUGH: Yes – I thought I could show you the position much better. You see, it's like this – as I tried to explain in my letter. You are the *largest individual* shareholder in this little Company, with 3,000 Ordinary Shares of £1 each nominal. Left you by your father, I think? (*He pauses for a reply which is not forthcoming*). Now you've had no return on this investment for, let's see, six years at least. Just too bad, of course, but nobody's fault, unless Hitler's. Well, your directors have thought often enough of shutting up shop altogether – but it went against the grain. I suppose because we're British.

MISS GARDNER: (*amicably*) I suppose so. (*He looks rather sharply at her*).

GOODENOUGH: But unfortunately things have got no better. Mr. Macstocker, the other director, and I talked it over again just before I wrote you and – though there's little enough of it – we both felt we wanted to take our coats off, spit on our hands, and have one more shot at making it pay. *But* – now I will be quite frank with you, Madam – Macstocker and I both feel that it really is not worth our while doing that, unless it's our own show. The short point is this. We're prepared to make you a reasonable offer for your shares. From our point of view – well, we're doing it with our eyes open. As things are, the shares are not worth the paper they're written on. But money isn't everything and we can't help feeling a sort of obligation to the Founder's family, though I don't know why we should. From your point of view, of course, it's a pure windfall. We are prepared to pay 10/- a share for your holding, Miss Gardner – £1500.

MISS GARDNER: *(holding out her hand)* Let's see yer Balance Sheet!

GOODENOUGH: *(still more taken aback)* I – well – yes – I have got one here. *(Taking it out of his pocket)* I wanted to go through it with you.

MISS GARDNER: *(taking it folded, looking at the endorsement)* This is a Notice of an Extraordinary General Meeting!

GOODENOUGH: Yes. The Balance Sheet's inside. *(He takes the document from her, gets up and stands behind her chair and, opening it, points with his finger)*. You see, on this side, the assets, that is, all the things the Company owns and on the other side –

MISS GARDNER: Thank you! Do sit down, Mr. Goodenough! *(As he does so, Miss Gardner rises and goes to the table. She sits down and flattens out the Balance Sheet on it)*.

*(Livesey appears inside the upstairs window, which is open, standing holding a picture to the light)*.

LIVESEY: It's no use getting out the calipers! I don't care a damn whether it *is* balanced or not! It's got to *look* balanced. That's the only rule of art. Aristotle said –

SALLY: *(off)* Don't swear, darling!

LIVESEY: *(shouting)* I wasn't swearing. I'm simply trying to make you see –

SALLY: *(off)* And don't shout at me!

LIVESEY: *(shouting)* I didn't shout!

SALLY: *(shouting)* You did! I just don't know what's rattled you up today. You're being absolutely *horrid!*

LIVESEY: *(loudly)* Sh-h-h!

SALLY: *(Indignantly)* Why should I shish? Shish yourself! *(The window shuts with a bang)*.

GOODENOUGH: *(looking round at the sky)* Nice to have it quiet again, isn't it? *(To Miss Gardner)* Can I be any hep?

MISS GARDNER: (*without looking up*) No balance on Profit and Loss Account. No reserves. Stock £4750. What does the stock consist of?

GOODENOUGH: (*who betrays signs of extreme discomfort throughout the rest of the interview*) Almost entirely second-hand cars. *Old* ones, you know – oh, very old ones!

MISS GARDNER: Anything written off lately?

GOODENOUGH: (*laughing hollowly*) Ha! I'm afraid not!

MISS GARDNER: Who valued the stock?

GOODENOUGH: The – er – the Directors – in the usual way.

MISS GARDNER: When? Are you trying to *rush* me into selling these shares, Mr. Goodenough?

GOODENOUGH: (*Rising hurriedly*) No no! No no no no no! Of course not! (*Offended*) I see you have quite misunderstood me. It's always the same, when one tries to do the decent thing. Well, there doesn't seem much more to be said, then. You don't mind my saying I think you are being most unwise. There is no question of rushing – but naturally the offer won't remain open indefinitely. In fact I can't guarantee that it will be repeated at all.

MISS GARDNER: (*She titters nervously*) What a pity! I expect I shall be the loser!

GOODENOUGH: (*angrily*) I expect you will. Good afternoon, madam!

MISS GARDNER: Good afternoon! (*They go in at the French windows*).

SALLY: (*Putting her head out of the upstairs window and speaking in an urgent stage whisper*). Aunt Mabel! Mr. Raikes is here. Hulloo! She's gone! (*She closes the window again*).

(*Miss Gardner emerges again from the French window, followed by Raikes, a young man in the early thirties, dressed in a sports jacket and grey flannel trousers with a not very clean collar, all of that peculiar shade of respectable untidiness which betokens the minor civil servant*).

MISS GARDNER: You don't mind doing our business out here? (*She points to her plaster*). I still get headaches rather easily and I need all the fresh air I can get.

RAIKES: (*uneasily*) Well, I must say I'd rather – (*He steps cautiously to the summerhouse and looks in, then back to the French windows and looks in there. Finally he looks up at the other windows, all of which are shut*).

MISS GARDNER: Oh, we shall be quite undisturbed. You know I've no servants.

RAIKES: Very well. Having regard to your injury, I haven't troubled you for some time now –

MISS GARDNER: (*absently*) Yes, of course! You've come about the bribe.

RAIKES: (*sharply*) Now then!

MISS GARDNER: (*over-acting timidity*) Oh dear! Have I said something I shouldn't? Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Raikes. Oh dear! What shall I do? (*She titters almost hysterically*).

RAIKES: I'm here in the matter of the Incentive to Waive Investigation.

MISS GARDNER: Yes, yes, of course!

RAIKES: Well, as I say, it's a long time since the last. It will be £100 this time.

MISS GARDNER: (*Sinking on to a chair*) I can't go on like this! I shall be ruined!

RAIKES: You'll be ruined in you *don't* go on. You know that very well. The judges are down like a ton of bricks on petrol offences. And look how long yours went on! Three years! Gallons and gallons of it.

MISS GARDNER: (*Tearfully*) It was only a little one – a Baby Austin. Besides, it's stopped now.

RAIKES: What difference does that make? It's gaol for a cert. (*He has difficulty concealing a smile at this*). Think of the scandal! The neighbours! (*Histrionically*) Your father's name dragged through the mire! Oh *come* on! We've been through all this so often before.

MISS GARDNER: No, really! There is a limit! Mr. Raikes, suppose I just *can't* pay any more – what will you do?

RAIKES: Now don't you start getting fresh! *You* know well enough!



MISS GARDNER: Yes, but *what!* (*With a feeble attempt at bravado*) I don't believe you dare do anything, really. You're just – what is it? – bluffing.

RAIKES: (*nastily*) Bluffing am I? Either I leave here with a cheque for £100, or your file goes back on the Investigation Rack to-morrow.

MISS GARDNER: (*Looking hard at the summerhouse and speaking a little louder*). It's cruel, Mr. Raikes, *cruel!* (*In a changed, brusque voice*) Thank you! That was all I wanted. (*To Livesey, who comes out of the summerhouse with a notebook and pencil in his hand*). Did you get it all?

LIVESEY: More than enough, Miss Gardner!

RAIKES: Here – where did you come from? I thought I looked– (*Livesey smiles enigmatically and rubs his bruised leg*).

MISS GARDNER: (*to Raikes*) Listen, young man! You'll march straight away from this house and, if you are wise, you won't come within two miles of it for the next five years. If I get a *word* of enquiry from the Ministry – or anyone else – about what we've just been talking about –

RAIKES: (*Sullenly*) All right! I shan't take any action – if you don't.

MISS GARDNER: Wait a minute! I haven't finished. It's not a question of taking no action. If I ever hear another word about all this from your mouldy Department – *or* from anyone else, mark that! – I'm going to assume (never mind whether it's the fact or not) that *you're* responsible. And the next day there'll be two summonses out against you, one under the Prevention of Corruption Act and the other for Obtaining Money with Menaces.

RAIKES: (*looking at her with bewildered awe*) Cher-ristopher! Someone's been feeding her meat!

MISS GARDNER: Come along! *Out* you go! (*She points to the French windows*).

LIVESEY: Don't let the little rat soil the carpet, Miss Gardner! Send him the short way through the garden. (*He steps in front of Raikes, and points. Raikes goes, scowling, behind the summerhouse*). Well, Miss Gardner, I don't think – (*The creak and thud are heard from behind the summerhouse, followed by Raikes's injured voice*).

RAIKES: (*off*) Ow! Stop it! It's undignified!

MISS GARDNER: I really must get that dear little door mended! Now there's just time for one other thing. Would you be so good as to fetch Sally? (*After a moment's surprised hesitation, Livesey obeys. While he is calling off, Miss Gardner hums a little to herself, and advances down centre, sniffing the wind.*)

MISS GARDNER: Gosh! It certainly *is* coming on! (*sniffs*) Shan't need any more this year – (*sniffs*) – fruity (*sniffs*) – it's alive all right! – (*sniffs*) – you can almost feel it working! (*Livesey returns with Sally. Both look perplexed and perhaps a little guilty.*) Ah, there you are! Now, as we have just ten minutes before the quartet arrives –

SALLY: At least twenty, Auntie.

MISS GARDNER: *Ten*, my dear. I've asked Lady Moberley to come ten minutes earlier. (*sitting down behind the table again*) As I was saying. . . (*She stares at them shrewdly.*) Have you two quarrelled?

SALLY: No. At least, not really.

LIVESEY: What reason could we possibly have?

MISS GARDNER: Splendid! Now let's get down to business. Quite frankly, in the past I have allowed myself to fall into rather lax habits regarding certain financial matters. As a consequence –

SALLY: (*stupefied*) Aunt Mabel!

MISS GARDNER: Don't interrupt! Time is short. We must get on. Where was I? Ah, I was going to say that, now Sally is demobbed and Mark has his foot on the ladder – the bottom rung, no doubt, but still the ladder is the ladder – you will have to start seriously thinking about (*she rubs the tips of her fingers together*) – I see you already have. Then perhaps I can shorten this. (*Pausing, then abruptly*) There are three heads here:

SALLY: (*startled*) Oh! Where?

MISS GARDNER: No, no! (*She leans back, places the tips of her fingers together and talks like a judge.*) There are three points here: (a) Does Mark love you? (b) Do you love Mark?, and (c) Can you afford to get married? I am pretty well satisfied as to (a) and (b), so we can cut the cackle and come straight to (c).

SALLY: (*amazed*) Aunt Mabel!

MISS GARDNER: Under (c) the points are (i) What income can he expect and (ii) What income (if any) can *you* expect? Now as to (i), he must of course himself be prepared to provide at least a moiety and, if necessary, the whole of the joint income.

LIVESEY: (*Savagely*) Hear! Hear!

MISS GARDNER: A very proper attitude! That I must leave largely to him – I conclude it depends mainly on his prospects at 10, Cursitor Place. Which are still, so to speak, *in gremio juris*. (*Turning to Sally*) Naturally *your* principal concern –

SALLY: (*earnestly*) Dear! You're looking *dreadfully* tired! Any old time will do for this. *Do* go in and lie down for a little!

MISS GARDNER: Nonsense dear! Naturally *your* principal concern is with point (ii), *viz.* your own post-nuptial income. And, in the events which have happened, that is tantamount to asking if *I* can settle anything on you. Frankly (*settling more comfortably into her chair*) the prospects are not encouraging. At our last interview I made it clear that there were two difficulties here.

SALLY: (*gently*) Not *quite* clear, Auntie!

MISS GARDNER: *Quite* clear! The first concerns my estimated income and the second my estimated expenditure. Taking the second first, I mentioned a certain very heavy and irregular outgoing – a *drain*, I think I termed it – which had been going on over a long period. I am glad to say Mark and I have stopped that up this afternoon. Forget it!

SALLY: (*joyfully*) Oh, thank *goodness!* Then we shan't have any more of that little—

MISS GARDNER: (*holding up her hand like a traffic policeman*) Do you mind letting me finish? My father left me investments sufficient to bring in a comfortable income and even now there would be a substantial margin (*she takes Sally's hand, draws her towards her across the table and kisses her forehead*) for alienation – but for one thing. Unfortunately nearly half the said income was derived from certain shares in a private Company called *Domestic Transport Ltd.* of which he was one of the Founders. About 10 years ago the dividends on these shares began to diminish and for the last six years the Company has not paid me a penny.

SALLY: What a rotten shame! Obviously there's only one thing for it – I must start earning some money.

LIVESEY: (*sarcastically*) Oh, *must* you!

SALLY: (*turning on him*) What do you mean? What's the *matter* with you today? Don't you *want* us to. . . (*She turns away with a sob*).

LIVESEY: (*grimly*) Not *that* way!

SALLY: (*irritated*) Not what way? (*Furiously, as the light dawns on her*) Do you mean – you've – actually – been – SNOOPING?

LIVESEY: If you mean, did I spot the boy-friend, the answer is yes.

SALLY: My God! Are they *all* sneaks? (*turning on Livesey*) So *that's* why you've. . .

LIVESEY: Look here, Sally—

MISS GARDNER: When you two have quite finished!

SALLY: So *that's* why you've been in a gudgeon with me all the afternoon! (*stamping*) Answer! *Is* it?

LIVESEY: If you like to put it that way.

SALLY: Been hugging this inside you all the time you were pretending to look at my picture?

LIVESEY: (*stiffly*) I naturally take rather a serious view –

SALLY: First you eavesdrop; then you distrust me; then you keep it all dark from me; and not content with that, you stalk around after me grinning all over your face outside – and all the time all slimy inside, like a private expiry agent!

LIVESEY: Sally –

SALLY: Never occurred to you to tell me what was up, and have it out with me, like a man?

LIVESEY: Sally, I – I was afraid of offending you.

SALLY: 'Afraid.' Thank you. You've said it. Thank you for telling me the truth for a change, Mr. Livesey. Thanks very much indeed. You – unspeakably miserable, mean, sneaking, weak-kneed, hornswogging, *WORDY* little imitation of a man! Here! (*tugging at her engagement ring*)

Here's the first prize! (*Throwing it on the ground in front of him*) You've earned it. You can keep it. (*She bursts into tears and rushes off*).

MISS GARDNER: She appears to have taken umbrage. What is it all about?

LIVESEY: (*listlessly*) Oh, nothing!

MISS GARDNER: Tell me! (*gently – after a pause*) Come on! Come on! You can, you know!

LIVESEY: Oh well, it was like this. When I was wandering about the garden, not long before the man Raikes came, I heard voices, and before I knew what was happening—

MISS GARDNER: (*looking at her watch and holding up her hand*) One moment: if this is to be a long statement, we shall have to adjourn. Stay to supper, and tell me more afterwards.

LIVESEY: (*moodily*) Oh, thanks. But I don't think I'd better. It's only wasting your time. It's all over. Sally'll take her own way. Oh, I ought to have foreseen it, I suppose. Unless we could have got hold of some money – either she or I. . .

MISS GARDNER: (*placing the tips of her fingers together*) Or both of you. We oughtn't to rule out the third logical possibility altogether.

LIVESEY: (*laughs hollowly*) Anyhow she's thrown me over now! So what's the use?

(*Lady Moberley, a gentle, grey-haired creature, appears in the French windows, carrying a 'Cello case*).

MISS GARDNER: Well, I must see what *I* can do. (*thoughtfully to herself*) I wonder – (*looking up*) Oh, hulloa, Dorothy! (*Lady Moberley crosses to the table*). Very good of you to come early like this, Dorothy. Sit down. What I wanted to put to you – quite shortly – was this. After giving the matter the fullest consideration I have formed the opinion that there is no valid reason why you should go on *dragging* that passage in the Third Movement of the Karminsky for ever – when a comparatively slight concerted effort would, I am convinced, suffice to correct it.

LADY MOBERLEY: Mabel! What on *earth* do you mean? Besides, it's *you* who don't keep time, dear!

MISS GARDNER: (*holding up her hand*) Wait! It will save time if I tell you that I have asked both Helen and Nora and both of them agree with me. The weight of the evidence is definitely against you.

LADY MOBERLEY: Mabel! Whatever's the matter with you?

MISS GARDNER: I want just to run through the passage with you before the others come.

LADY MOBERLEY: I might have done, if you had asked me in an ordinary, nice way. Flinging all that rigmarole at me the moment I arrive! (*On the verge of tears*) It's so unkind! I never heard you speak like that to *anyone* before!

MISS GARDNER: Well, we'll leave it at that. It's the music that matters – or isn't it? (*keenly*) Come on, Dorothy! (*Lady Moberley, sniffing slightly, begins to undo her 'Cello case*). No time for that! They'll be here in a minute. We'll sing it.

LADY MOBERLEY: That would be no use!

MISS GARDNER: Must – *must*, I'm afraid! Just go up in the summerhouse. The resonance will help me to hear you above my own voice. There's nothing in your part. Simply "Pom teedle eedle larty teedle oom!" over and over again. It's playing against the viola that muddles you up. Get right with the first violin once and for all and you'll be able to stand up to the viola. Now, you start up and, when you've got going a bit, so that the rhythm is in your bones, I'll come in with the first. (*Lady Moberley sniffs*). (*Energetically*) Come on! You *can*, you know! (*She titters nervously, encouragingly singing*) "Pom teedle eedle larty teedle oom! Pom teedle eedle larty teedle oom!"

LADY MOBERLEY: (*feebly*) Pom teedle eedle larty teedle oom! Pom teedle eedle larty teedle oom! Pome teedle – (*The telephone bell rings*).

MISS GARDNER: (*holding up her hand, as she listens*) Just a moment! Mark, answer the telephone, there's a good boy!

LIVESEY: (*within, at the telephone*) What?. . . Yes, I know you are! Eh?. . . I don't understand. Yes, *of course* I'll be in good time to-morrow. . . Gone home, has he? Oh dear, oh dear! Did he really?. . . WHAT! My God! He *can't* have done!. . . Yes, rather! I'll be there.

MISS GARDNER: Don't ring off, Mark!

LIVESEY: (*Into the telephone*) Hold on! Miss Gardner wants to speak.

MISS GARDNER: (*to Lady Moberley*) Don't let the rhythm drop! Go on! (*singing*) Pom teedle eedle larty teedle oom! (*She moves towards the window, still singing*).

LADY MOBERLEY: (*feebly*) Pom teedle eedle larty teedle oom! Pom teedle eedle larty teedle oom! Pome teedle --- (*She gradually subsides in self-conscious embarrassment*).

MISS GARDNER: (*at the telephone*) Gardner here! I want an appointment with Mr. Hawker at 3 o'clock to-morrow. . . Gone home, has he?. . . Can't *concentrate*?. . . Nonsense! He'll be as right as a trivet after a night's sleep! I shall come at 3 o'clock unless you ring me during the morning. (*She replaces the receiver and steps out into the garden*). Silly old fusser! Now, come on, Dorothy! What did you want to stop for? (*Sings*) Pom teedle eedle larty teedle oom! . . .

LADY MOBERLEY: Pom teedle eedle larty teedle oom! Pom teedle etc.

(*After about 10 seconds*)

LADY MOBERLEY: Pom teedle eedle etc. *ad lib*

MISS GARDNER: Ta-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra – Come *on!* Come *on!* You can do it! You can, you know! Ta-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra – Come *on!* Come *on!* Ta-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra-ra . . .

(*Miss Gardner sings on, strongly accentuating a beat here and there, to keep Lady Moberley up to time. Livesey, looking on, gradually catches her enthusiasm and he and Miss Gardner standing one on each side, beat time encouragingly at Lady Moberley, emphasising the same beat at the same points. It soon comes easier to Lady Moberley, too, and her head begins to wag from side to side, as she abandons herself with lyrical zest to the rhythm. The upstairs window opens and Sally's tear-stained face appears. In the French windows the two other members of the Quartet arrive, carrying their instruments, and stand looking on in amazement, as the CURTAIN falls.*)

## A C T – III

### Scene I

(The afternoon of the following day)

*Scene: Another room in Hawker & Co's offices. It is the one which opened out of the room in Act I, of which it is a looking-glass version. There is the same door (the other side of it) back centre and the rest is much the same, except that everything, including the desk, is on opposite sides. It shows the marks of recent bomb damage and the window in particular is without glass and covered half with "SX" board and half with semi-transparent material. The catch of the door Back is broken so that it stands just ajar. Jannery enters Left, showing in Goodenough and Macstocker. The latter is a wholly colourless individual, except that, the moment he opens his mouth, it is obvious that he started from Glasgow.*

JANNERY: Would you mind waiting in here, Gentlemen? Mr. Hawker will be along in a few minutes, I expect.

GOODENOUGH: This is Mr. Macstocker – my co-director.

JANNERY: Pleased to meet you, sir!

GOODENOUGH: In here, eh? I thought *that* was his room in there (*pointing to door Back*).

JANNERY: So it *was*. At present it's half a ruin and half a warehouse for smashed furniture.

MACSTOCKER: Aha.

GOODENOUGH: Was the furniture *badly* smashed?

JANNERY: Not all of it, Sir. The blast did some very queer things. Some things it didn't even hurt. Others it smashed to bits. We've got one big, tall, heavy cupboard like a wardrobe. It stripped the door off and cleaned out the shelves, and yet if left the outside framework as sound as a bell.

MACSTOCKER: Aha. (*Jannery goes out*).

GOODENOUGH: Yes – well, as I was saying. I've quite given up the idea of buying in those shares since I saw her yesterday. I don't somehow fancy she'll play ball.



MACSTOCKER: Aha.

GOODENOUGH: So the whole point is to get the sale to the other Company put through as quickly as possible. We shan't do nearly as well, of course.

MACSTOCKER: Aha.

GOODENOUGH: (*Wistfully*) It was a snip, Mac. But there's no help for it. We must just count our blessings. We're damn lucky to *have* another Company to sell out to.

MACSTOCKER: (*making notes*) How do you spell the buying Company? It's an awful queer name—

GOODENOUGH: *Ezyterms, Ltd.* – E-Z Y Terms.

MACSTOCKER: And we've got *all* the shares there, any road?

GOODENOUGH: Yes. (*as the door opens*) Ah, here he is!

*(Hawker comes in, carrying a small brief bag, stuffed very full by the look of it. He, like Miss Gardner, has a piece of sticking-plaster over one temple. There is a rather wild look about him, suggested both by his dress and by the restlessness of his eyes. He is singing to himself, in German, one of Schubert's Lieder, but stops abruptly as he catches sight of them).*

HAWKER: Good morning, Gentlemen!

GOODENOUGH: Good morning, Mr. Hawker. (*Looking at his watch*) Look! I'd like to hold the General Meeting first (I see it's past the official time) and go into any details after, if you don't mind. I shan't be really happy till we've got the Resolution passed. Do you see any objection?

HAWKER: (*looking all round the room*) No! I don't see any objection. (*The telephone bell rings*). Excuse me, Gentlemen! Hulloo! Hulloo! Yes. It's me here! . . . What? Oh, sorry – Mr. Hawker speaking. . . Yes. . . eh? Oh, but you can't do that! . . . I don't know – you just can't! . . . Oh dear, how very perturbing! . . . I shall have to, I shall have to issue a thing, that's all . . . One of those things you do issue . . . a Summons, yes, that's what I said. But I say, have you – have you – er, have you – Hulloo! Hulloo! Oh, he's rung off! (*Turning to Goodenough*) Sorry, Gentlemen!

GOODENOUGH: Oh, we quite understand. Well, I suggest we start the Meeting now.

HAWKER: Yes. I think it would be much better. (*importantly*) *Much* better!

GOODENOUGH: Then I call upon the Secretary to read –

MACSTOCKER: Eh – just a minute, Goodenough! There's a point occurs to me: Oughtn't we to read the Notice Convening the Meeting?

GOODENOUGH: (*impatiently*) *Is* it necessary? I know they do it at the big Company Meetings like I. C. I. and Woolworths (*looking round*), but this is not quite the same!

MACSTOCKER: What do *you* say, Mr. Hawker?

HAWKER: (*cautiously*) Not *quite* the same – but the principle's the same, you know.

MACSTOCKER: Aha. A Company meeting's a Company meeting.

GOODENOUGH: Very well! Go on, Mac. *You're* the Secretary.

MACSTOCKER: I haven't brought mine. Have ye got your copy handy, Mr. Hawker?

HAWKER: (*glad to be efficient*) Of course. I took it home with me to look at last night. (*He gets up and opens his bag and starts rummaging. Various objects come out in the process, including 3 golf-balls, which roll across the floor, and a pair of braces*).

GOODENOUGH: All right, here's mine!

HAWKER: (*politely*) No, no! I'd rather you used mine. (*He goes on rummaging*). I'm absolutely *sure* I put it in.

GOODENOUGH: Why of earth – Mr. Hawker, *please* don't waste any more time! They're exactly the same. I do want to get *on*!

HAWKER: (*emerging, flushed, from the bag*) Very well! I know it's there.

GOODENOUGH: Go on, Mac. (*The telephone bell rings*).

HAWKER: Excuse me, Gentlemen! Hulloo! Hulloo! The what? I'm not quite sure if I – just remind me . . . Oh yes, Brighton from Gardner. Yes, it's coming back to me. I promised to ring

you, didn't I? About my client's Right of Tootle . . . What's that? . . . I didn't say anything about music. I don't know what you're laughing at. . . Easement of *noise*? . . . No, I *don't* think it's a Wind Quartet. What's all this got to do with the Root of Title? Oh, you'd better come and look at the Title Deeds. It's there somewhere . . . Right of Tootle, yes, that's what I said! Good-bye! – I say – wait a minute, though! Wait a minute! Didn't she ring me up about this the other day? I know there was *something* – Yes – I say, I'm most frightfully sorry – I forgot to tell you – the whole thing's off! Well, Bye-bye! (*Turning to the other two*) Well, Gentlemen, can we go on? Let's see – we were just –

MACSTOCKER: (*Reading rapidly*) "Notice is hereby given that an Extraordinary General Meeting of Domestic Transport Ltd will be held at the Company's Registered Office at 10, Cursitor Place, London, E. C. 4. on the 15th day of April 1945 at 2 o'clock in the afternoon for the purpose of considering and, if thought fit, passing the following Resolution that the offer of *Ezyterms Ltd* to purchase the whole of the Company's Assets including stock and goodwill as a going concern be accepted forthwith." (*He hands the Notice to Hawker*).

GOODENOUGH: Thank you, Mac. If you agree, then, I'll put the Resolution formally.

HAWKER: (who has turned over the Notice and is looking at the Balance Sheet) "Balance Sheet!" Funny! Last time we had these figures before us, I seem to remember their looking different – much larger somehow. (*Goodenough and Macstocker exchange bewildered glances*).

GOODENOUGH: Well, but surely the whole point is, we agreed to put them at the 1941 value, to – er – to avoid raising expectations among Ordinary Shareholders, which might not be fulfilled.

MACSTOCKER: Aye, and the Excess Profits Tax, Man!

GOODENOUGH: (*looking round and grinning*) There don't seem to be many Ordinary Shareholders here. They've all had notices?

MACSTOCKER: Aha.

HAWKER: Who *are* the Ordinary Shareholders?

GOODENOUGH: (*patiently*) Don't you remember, we agreed it was just as well you shouldn't know?

HAWKER: Just as well. Much better, in fact. *Much* better!

GOODENOUGH: Look here, I *insist* on getting on with the Meeting. We'll take the Minutes as read. I'm going to put the Resolution. The Resolution before the Meeting is –

MACSTOCKER: Eh – just a minute, Goodenough!

GOODENOUGH: (*impatiently*) Oh!

MACSTOCKER: There's a point occurs to me – have ye got a Quorum? Eh, Mr. Hawker?

HAWKER: (*returning suddenly from abstraction*) Have I got the Quorum? My dear fellow! (*cunningly*) You don't suppose I was going to risk taking *that* home in my bag! (*He presses the buzzer and speaks into the desk instrument*). Ask Mr. Jannery to bring in the Quorum! *He'll* understand.

GOODENOUGH: (*rising to his feet in agitation*) Look here, Mr. Hawker. I'm not quite sure if you are joking – (*The door opens and Miss Gardner bustles in, like a large whirlwind*).

MISS GARDNER: Am I very late? Have you started?

MACSTOCKER: What! The Meeting?

HAWKER: How sweet of you to come! Shall I ring for tea straight away? Yes. Our baker's cream buns are really very –

MISS GARDNER: (*ignoring him*) Well, go on, Gentlemen, from wherever you'd got to.

GOODENOUGH: I was just going to put the Resolution from the Chair.

MISS GARDNER: (*affably*) Oh yes. Go on!

GOODENOUGH: The Resolution before the Meeting is, "That the offer of *Ezyterm Ltd.* to purchase the whole of the Company's assets including stock and goodwill as a going concern be accepted forthwith." Those in favour —

MISS GARDNER: Aren't you going to tell us the price?

GOODENOUGH: Good lord! Did I leave that out? Thank you, Madam! (*Hurriedly*) The agreed price is £3,500.

MISS GARDNER: (*whistles*) 5/- in the £ for the Ordinary Shareholders!

GOODENOUGH: Yes. Of course, it's a rather disappointing figure. It was a question of finding someone –

MISS GARDNER: Look here, gentlemen, shall we try and cut this short? I suggest we drop the Meeting (*she titters nervously*). The Resolution won't be passed now I'm here, as I think you know. The short point is, I've got 3,000 shares, and *you* want them. It may be you ought to *have* them – at the right price. That depends entirely on the value of the stock. I've been looking at the old Balance Sheets back to 1935. (*to Goodenough*) Have you disposed of any stock since 1941?

GOODENOUGH: (*sullenly*) About two cars, I think.

MISS GARDNER: Right. In my opinion the true value of the stock is – shall we say – thirty times the amount shown in the current Balance Sheet. The chances are that in two years' time it will have doubled itself again. You can have my shares for £15 apiece, Gentlemen.

MACSTOCKER: Forty-five thousand pounds!!

GOODENOUGH: You're joking of course, Madam. What can you do with the shares if we don't buy them? You can't run the Company yourself.

MISS GARDNER: I can vote you out and find someone who will. Apart from that, I fancy my shares have a certain *nuisance* value. What do you say, Mr. Hawker?

HAWKER: (*half to himself, testily*) Everybody keeps asking me what I say! (*Sulkily*) Yes!

MISS GARDNER: (*to Goodenough and Macstocker*) Well?

GOODENOUGH: (*angrily*) Is this a meeting of the Royal Astronomical Society or serious business people? We might just consider going to £10,000.

MISS GARDNER: Well, at least we've got a move on. Look here! I'm not unreasonable. I'll knock £5,000 off my figure.

GOODENOUGH: £20,000 is my absolute limit.

MISS GARDNER: Ah, now you're talking turkey! (*She titters nervously*) Don't let's be childish, gentlemen, haggling like a lot of second-hand clothes wallahs. We'll split the difference. £30,000. That's my rock bottom. (*Preening, and spreading, herself*) The largest individual shareholder's rock bottom, gentlemen!

MACSTOCKER: Aha.

MISS GARDNER: Look at your E. P. T. Standard! Look at your tax-loss carried forward!  
*(louder)* Come on! Come on! You can do it! You can, you know! Quite easily! *(turning suddenly on Macstocker)* Can't you?

MACSTOCKER: *(dazed, his mouth open)* Aha.

GOODENOUGH: *(sotto voce to Macstocker, who remains totally devoid of expression)* We'd better close, Mac. The stock's worth a lot more than that. *(turning to Miss Gardner)* Look; it's robbery – but it's a deal at that figure.

MISS GARDNER: *(to Hawker)* Will you ask Mark to come in a minute.

HAWKER: *(pressing switch and speaking to the desk instrument)* Ask Mr. Mark to step in.

*(Jannery enters)*

JANNERY: Mr. Mark's not here, sir.

HAWKER: *(surprised)* Isn't he? Why? Where's he gone?

JANNERY: I don't know, sir.

MISS GARDNER: *(disappointed)* Oh, never mind! It's only that I rather wanted him to know what we're doing. I was going to ask him to witness the Agreement. *(to Goodenough and Macstocker)* I think we may as well get it signed up straight away, don't you? *(She opens her bag, extracts a folded paper, closes the bag with a snap, and hands the paper to Goodenough).* O.K.?

GOODENOUGH: *(glancing at it, and then bewildered)* I don't understand!

MACSTOCKER: *(looking over Goodenough's shoulder)* Och, but it's got the price in, £30,000, and we've only just arrived at it!

MISS GARDNER: Yes, but I had a pretty good idea what we should arrive at. *(Goodenough gets out his pen to sign).* Just a minute, Mr. Goodenough. There's a point occurs to me: oughtn't it to have a 6d stamp on it? Mr. Jannery, will you oblige us.

JANNERY: Certainly, Madam! (*He hurries out*).

MACSTOCKER: We used to say women and children first, but I'm thinking the women know just fine how to tek care of themselves the day!

(*Jannery returns with a stamp, which he affixes to the Agreement. During the ensuing dialogue it is signed by Goodenough, Macstocker and Miss Gardner in turn, witnessed by Jannery*).

MISS GARDNER: Mr. Hawker will hold the Agreement on behalf of all parties. (*Looking round*) Is that agreed?

GOODENOUGH: Yes. I think that's the best arrangement. What do you say, Mr. Hawker?

HAWKER: (*very absently*) Aha. (*collecting himself*) Certainly. Certainly I will. And it *is* the best arrangement. Oh, much the best! Much the best! Much the b—

GOODENOUGH: (*staring at Hawker*) Well then, Mac. I think that's about all we can do here. Shall we be getting along?

MACSTOCKER: Aha. (*They go out like men in a dream. Jannery opens the door for them and follows*).

MISS GARDNER: Mr. Hawker, I asked to see you at 3 o'clock. I think it's about that now. There's something I want to say to you of a rather personal nature. I'm sure you won't mind.

HAWKER: Oh no! (*bleating*) It's much the best! Much the best. Much the b—

MISS GARDNER: (*sharply*) Stop it! You're not looking at all well! I'm afraid you must be very much overworked, with this busy practice of yours.

HAWKER: How *very* sweet of you! But it's only that bomb. It won't last. I haven't been quite myself the last few days. Sort of intermingled—

MISS GARDNER: That's the point, Mr. Hawker, you haven't been yourself, you know! For instance – I couldn't help feeling you might have shown yourself rather more – well – wide-awake over those shares of mine! (*to herself, indignantly*) The shysters!

HAWKER: (*half to himself*) Let's see! What was the thing there? Oh yes! (*louder, with something approaching his old manner, but rather as if reciting a lesson learned by heart*) – er –

Miss Gardner, I'm not a *member of Domestic Transport Ltd.*, you know. I act for them, and their Registered Office is here for convenience, but that's just a coincidence. *I don't know who the shareholders are. Oh no! Not me! Fancy your turning out to be one! Isn't it exciting?*

MISS GARDNER: You don't think that a sharper man would have got wind of it somehow? (*He makes no reply*). You know, as an old client, I should be so much easier in my mind if I could feel that a more active – a *younger* man was growing up into the business.

HAWKER: Mm! (*There is a pause*).

MISS GARDNER: Now Mark. . . By the way, I happened to be seeing Lady Moberley last night. I suppose it's a good twenty-five years now, since I introduced her to you?

HAWKER: Quite that.

MISS GARDNER: Has the connection proved a useful one, I wonder.

HAWKER: Useful! This practice is *built* on old Mobe— her late husband's estate.

MISS GARDNER: She was saying how different you seemed this morning, when she called. Not nearly so – *incisive* was the word she used. (*Pause*) Mr. Hawker, don't you think you *should* take Mark into partnership, as soon as he is out of his Articles?

HAWKER: You don't know what you're asking. Will he be able to pay for it?

(*The light dims a little*).

MISS GARDNER: (*rather dreamily*) Mr. Hawker, I once met an old solicitor who was interested in the problem of Destiny. He believed that the relation between a Solicitor and his clients is a very special one.

HAWKER: He did?

MISS GARDNER: Much more subtle and – and *penetrating* than would appear from their surface dealings.

HAWKER: I have never felt that more strongly than I do at this moment.

(*The light dims a little*).



MISS GARDNER: Mr. Hawker – *won't* you take Mark into partnership? (*Softly – almost sotto voce*) Come on! Come on! You can do it! You can, you know!

HAWKER: (*very slowly*) Very well, Miss Gardner – if you *strongly* advise it.

MISS GARDNER: That's excellent. And – I know you won't mind. I'm so unbusinesslike – and I'm trying to turn over a new leaf – you won't mind just jotting down a note that it's agreed? (*He shrugs his shoulders, takes a piece of paper and begins to write*). I think he should have a third (*softening*) – well, say, a *fourth* share, don't you?

(*The light dims a little*).

HAWKER: (*writing*) I don't think at all, Miss Gardner! (*leaning back and putting his hand to his head*) I believe I'm past it. My resistance is gone. I think what you think! (*With a rather ghastly laugh*) What you said yesterday – I say to-day!

MISS GARDNER: Mr. Hawker, what's the matter? You look really ill!

HAWKER: (*looking at the signed paper, as he hands it to her*) Yes, I'm a lot poorer than I was a minute ago.

MISS GARDNER: Mr. Hawker – you look *dreadful*! What do you feel? Tell me!

(*The light dims a little*).

HAWKER: (*slowly and very dreamily – staring intently at her*) Miss Gardner, I feel a – a – a – hopeless, overwhelming longing – to be *just where you want me*!

MISS GARDNER: (*gasping, in horror*) OH! . . . . *Really!!*

HAWKER: (*continuing in the same tone*) And what's more – (*Suddenly jumping to his feet and shouting*) you witch! I'M GOING TO GET THERE!

(*The light reverts to normal. She jumps up, screaming. He chases and catches hold of her. But she twists away and runs out through the door Back, with him after her. From beyond it there comes a noise of clambering over falling furniture, ending in a specially loud crash – and then dead silence. Jannery and Bert rush in through door L.*)

JANNERY: Mr. Hawker! What's the matter? What on earth's happening? (*They all go out through door Back*). (*Off*) Good God! There's no-one here!

A VOICE: They must have jumped out of window!

JANNERY: Don't be silly! It's shut! Can't you see, man? The cupboard! It's fallen over both of them together! Bert, ring up a doctor – the nearest you can find! Come on, Harris! We've got to get them out!

*(Bert dashes out of the door and across to door L. as the STAGE darkens).*

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## Scene II

(The morning of the following day)

Scene: *The same as the last except that the desk has been moved from R. to L. so that it is now in the same position as the desk in Act I. Hawker with a piece of sticking plaster on both temples, strides in at door L. and across to the other side, where he hangs up his hat. As he turns to go back to his desk, the telephone bell rings.*

HAWKER: *(groans)* Here they come! *(He goes to his desk and picks up the receiver, standing in front of desk, while he speaks)*. Hawker here! Yes, but you've nothing to worry about. There's nothing in writing. . . I wasn't quite myself. . . Of course I shan't. I've told you there's no need to worry. . . (a) because I'm not bound to (b) because I don't choose to – that's good enough for them! Goodbye! *(He replaces the receiver and walks round the desk. Just as he is sitting down, the telephone bell rings again)*. Hawker here! . . . did I? When? . . . I wasn't well. . . I just said the first thing that came into my head. . . No, I won't! . . . Yes but, it was without prejudice. . . (a) because I'm not bound to (b) because I don't choose to! Good-bye! *(Slams down the receiver and picks up a letter. The telephone bell rings again)*. My God! Another one! *(He snatches up the receive in a fury of temper)*. Hawker here. . . it was without prejudice. . . (a) I'm not bound to (b) I don't want – Oh, it's you! hul-loa, darling! . . . Of course I do! I've got the tickets – two stalls! *(with increasing sentimental distress, the longish pauses suggesting that his caller has plenty to say)* . . . Oh! darling! . . . Oh! . . . Oh – don't say that! . . . But it was a mistake, darling! It thought you were a solicitor! . . . But it was a mistake, darling! . . . Oh!! *(Livesey comes in – he has a black eye)*. *(In his ordinary voice)* Well, I shall ring you again this afternoon to see if you have changed your mind – I must ring off now, I'm afraid. Good-bye!

LIVESEY: Good morning, Uncle Byng! Hulloo, you've changed your desk round since yesterday!

HAWKER: (*not looking him in the face*) Suits me better this way. Where did you get to yesterday afternoon?

LIVESEY: I'm sorry, Uncle. I had some very important private business to attend to. (*He fingers his eye tenderly*). But how are you?

HAWKER: Oh, quite well, thanks! I was only stunned. "Slight concussion" the doctor said. Miss Gardner was much the same, I hear.

LIVESEY: I'm glad it's no worse.

HAWKER: (*still not looking up*) Look here, Mark, are you going to try and hold me to this – Partnership Agreement? (*He waits for a reply*). You know very well I didn't know what I was doing when I signed. I can hardly even remember it. Besides, I'm beginning to doubt if you'll make a success of this profession. Your resistances are poor. You give way too easily. You're not tough enough.

LIVESEY: (*dully*) I know.

HAWKER: I'm not sure you wouldn't do better to stick to poetry. Words are all you really care about. In the *real* world, it's—

LIVESEY: I know— *incisiveness* that counts. (*feeling his biceps lovingly*) Perhaps I'm beginning to improve a little – in some ways.

HAWKER: You give way too easily. You gave way to me just now—too quickly, I mean, of course. You're too *afraid*. You must learn to stand up to people. You must *fight*.

LIVESEY: What – *again!* Very well – just whatever you say, Uncle!

HAWKER: Why in the name of thunder should I make you a present of a quarter-share in the practice, built up from nothing with the sweat of my brow? Just for a bit of blackmail? That's what it amounts to.

LIVESEY: Don't call it a present—

HAWKER: What else could a Deed of Partnership be?

LIVESEY: Call it an *appanage*. After all, I *am* your nephew.

HAWKER: Words again! Call it what you like. You want to think of deeds, not words.

LIVESEY: I *am* thinking of a Deed, Uncle Byng.

HAWKER: Why should I make you an *appanage* of £5,000?

LIVESEY: (*startled*) £5,000! (*losing heart again*) Why indeed! Forget it, Uncle!

HAWKER: (*the wind rather taken out of his sails*) It's worth at least that. (*Virtuously*) It's not so much myself I'm thinking of. It's my children. If it wasn't for them, you could have it – and welcome. Think over what I –

VOICE: (*from the desk instrument*) Miss Gardner here, Sir. (*Livesey jumps*).

HAWKER: (*speaking towards the instrument*) Ask her to wait a minute. And ask Mr. Jannery to bring in the Annuity Deed. (*Turning to Livesey*) Well, I think we'd about finished, hadn't we? Hulloo! Knocked your eye? (*laughing more confidently*) Put your own fist in it, more likely!

LIVESEY: (*stupefied*) The Annuity Deed!

HAWKER: Yes. I got Jannery to do it. For some reason she wanted it kept very dark. She hasn't even told the Annuitant yet.

LIVESEY: The Annuitant!

HAWKER: Her niece. Do you know her? Oh yes, of course you do. I forgot.

LIVESEY: (*very gloomily*) As a matter of fact, since the day before yesterday I as good as don't.

HAWKER: Well, stay and say how do you do to them. (*Pressing switch and speaking towards the desk instrument*) Show Miss Gardner in!

(*Miss Gardner enters, carrying her handbag, followed by Sally. Like Hawker, she now has sticking plaster on both temples. Jannery follows, hands a document to Hawker, and goes out again. Greetings are exchanged except between Sally and Mark, who pointedly ignore each other, and eventually all are seated.*)

HAWKER: Well, Miss Gardner, you are here to execute this Deed granting an Annuity of £800 a year to this fortunate young Lady.

SALLY: (*shrieks with delight*) Oh! Auntie! And you never told me!

MISS GARDNER: Oh dear, need we go into all that? The doctor says I am to try and forget the last week. *Try* indeed! I thought you were going to arrange it all so that this thing comes to just about as much as the other thing – you know – the £30,000 dear Mr. Goodenough gave me! Isn't that right? I suppose I ought to have taken a more active part in it all!

HAWKER: No. That's quite right. Thanks to – er – Mr. Goodenough, if you do sign this Deed, your income will be no *less* than it was a week ago. I simply want to satisfy myself that you fully understand— (*He stops and listens*).

WOLFFE'S VOICE: (*off*) What do you mean – touched me in a hostile fashion? Do I look as though he kissed me?

MISS GARDNER: There! Then what's all the fuss about? Come along! (*She begins rummaging in her bag*).

WOLFFE'S VOICE: (*off*) Trespass to my person be damned: he slugged me.

SALLY: What are you looking for, Auntie?

WOLFFE'S VOICE: (*off*) Assault? Hell! It was battery: it was grievous wounding: it was mayhem!

MISS GARDNER: The thing, dear!

WOLFFE'S VOICE: (*off*) I'll get him penal servitude for life!

MISS GARDNER: I know it's somewhere!

WOLFFE'S VOICE: (*off*) Look here, I want to see a lawyer, not a halfwit!

HAWKER: (*going indignantly to the door*) What *is* all this noise? I must ask you. . .

WOLFFE'S VOICE: Now we're getting somewhere. (*Wolffe, heavily bandaged about the head, thrusts his way in*). I want to bring an action for damage.

HAWKER: I'm engaged. You'll have to wait, sir.

WOLFFE: But if I wait, I shall get my temper back!

SALLY: Ben!

LIVESEY: My gosh!

WOLFFE: *(to Livesey)* You! What the blazes are you doing here? Beaten me to it, eh? But *(perplexed)* – how did you know I was coming here?

LIVESEY: I didn't. I work here.

WOLFFE: You work here? Is this the only solicitor in the world – and I have to come here!

SALLY: Ben! What has happened to you?

HAWKER: *(to Livesey)* Do you know this man?

WOLFFE: Not much. But he will.

MISS GARDNER: *(anxious about Wolffe's head)* How perturbing! Was it a balloon? Mr. Hawker, I...

HAWKER: *(holding up his hand)* I must insist on silence. One at a time, please!

SALLY: Ben, you've had an accident.

WOLFFE: Let him *(pointing at Livesey)* prove that! I say it was deliberate mayhem.

HAWKER: This is very serious.

WOLFFE: I'm glad there's someone who can see that.

SALLY: Ben, you poor man, tell us what happened.

WOLFFE: I shall reserve that for my lawyer. *(marching to the door)*

LIVESEY: (*stepping in his path*) Don't be hasty, Mr. Wolffe. You may land yourself in more trouble than you suppose.

WOLFFE: If you touch me again, I've got three witnesses.

SALLY: *Mark!* It can't be you, who – ?

WOLFFE: Why can't it? I've got a cast-iron case of mayhem against him. (*again making to go*) As you will hear soon enough from my lawyer.

HAWKER: Now can't we settle this amicably? I infer from the preceding conversation that you – Mr. Wolffe? – and Mr. Livesey here have been engaged in an affray –

LIVESEY: (*helpfully*) Wouldn't it be a chance medley, Uncle?

SALLY: But he can't have: Mark has a weak heart.

LIVESEY: It wasn't an affray: it was conducted quite privately.

WOLFFE: You're his uncle, are you? Nepotism! Corruption! Same everywhere! I knew it!

LIVESEY: Perhaps if Sally and Miss Gardner would be so extraordinarily kind. . .

MISS GARDNER: (*reluctant to be shuffled off*) Must we go? But I'm finding it so exciting! Was it a real fight?

SALLY: I refuse to budge. Ben is a dear friend of mine. I don't know how you could be such a brute and a hypocrite, Mr. Livesey. Weak heart, indeed!

HAWKER: (*sitting down and sinking his head in his hands*) Oh, give me buzz bombs any day!

WOLFFE: My dear Sally! You're a person of integrity: and more – deep human sympathy. Dear Sally! You have a right to know what happened. The plain facts are these —

HAWKER: (*Telephone bell rings. Hawker picks it up*). Hawker here. . . Oh, yes, My dear Lady Moberley!

WOLFFE: There was I painting calmly in my studio, when this —this rapparee, this hooligan, this gangster— without invitation, without so much as a by-your-leave, a complete stranger to me —

HAWKER: May I please enjoin silence (*into the telephone*) No, no, I beg your pardon, not *you*, Lady Moberley: There's a chance medley, I mean a slight altercation going on here at the moment, but never mind. Yes?

WOLFFE: I shouldn't be surprised if the first charge oughtn't be housebreaking. Anyway he marches into my studio rather like a dentist into an open mouth – without even so much as an appointment, mark you – and proceeds to utter the most slanderous defamations.

LIVESEY: I said nothing that was actionable, and anyway there were no witnesses.

HAWKER: (*without looking up from the telephone; laughing in a pleased, knowing, negating sort of way, which contrives at the same time to be rather half-hearted*) Ha-ha-oh-no! We can't allow this, you know, Lady Moberley. Ha-ha-oh-no. I'm afraid not.

MISS GARDNER: What was the defamation about?

WOLFFE: Miss Gardner's name was mentioned; and naturally, as an officer and a gentleman, I could not but –

MISS GARDNER: *My name?*

WOLFFE: (*to Miss Gardner*) Who are you, anyway?

SALLY: Ben, I should have introduced you. This is my Aunt Mabel. (*The introduction is effected, from which Livesey is cold-shouldered*).

HAWKER: (*into the telephone*) How much did you say? *Five thousand pounds?* No, really, Lady Moberley. . . ! (*wagging his head, and laughing delightedly, as before*).

WOLFFE: I've heard so much about you, Miss Gardner.

MISS GARDNER: Oh, really? Probably from friends who come to my house to avail themselves of my little chamber –

HAWKER: (*into the telephone*) *WHAT!*

MISS GARDNER: – chamber-music rehearsals. They're really *only* rehearsals, you know.

SALLY: Was it me Mr. Livesey said something unpleasant about, Ben?



HAWKER: (*into the telephone*) But I just said the first thing that came into my head!

WOLFFE: I prefer after all not to discuss it, Sally dear. The facts speak for themselves, surely.

HAWKER: (*still at the telephone*) Like talking to a *what*, Lady Moberley? A *woman*! Really! This is very interesting. Excuses me; one moment, please –

SALLY: (*loudly*) I *insist* on hearing what Mr. Livesey said.

HAWKER: (*looking up, his hand over the microphone*) Really! I *must* have silence! Mark, couldn't you possibly. . . ? (*he prods at the inner room*).

SALLY: (*taking Wolfe by the arm and leading him off, with a little hitch of her shoulders at Livesey. Miss Gardner scurries with her, and Livesey gloomily follows*). Please accept our apologies, Mr. Hawker. Mr. Livesey ought to have more manners.

HAWKER: (*into the telephone*) Are you there, Lady Moberley? I'm so sorry. I've managed to get rid of my callers now. One moment. I'll switch on the desk instrument, so as to have my hands free. (*He clicks a switch and lays down the hand microphone*). (*speaking to the desk microphone*) Can you hear me?

LADY MOBERLEY'S VOICE: (*from the desk instrument*) Perfectly.

HAWKER: Fine! Now! I've got a pencil. If you'll just read over to me. . .

LADY M.'S VOICE: I should like to try and explain a little first. It may seem rather strange to you. You see, Mabel Gardner is a very dear old friend. Only somehow. . . lately. . . she's. . . It's not that she's *offended* me. Don't think that! Not the least bit in the world. Only I have been feeling lately that, at bottom, she is really much more able to stand on her own feet than I once thought. She has made me feel that the work will be pushed – and pushed with vigour. Without my help, if you know what I mean. She really has *quite* a strong will, you know.

HAWKER: (*sympathetically*) Yes, I do know. Go on!

LADY M.'S VOICE: I find the second part harder to say! Mr. Hawker, I can't tell you what our talk in your office yesterday morning meant to me! First, there was your quite wonderful *sang froid* when that flying bomb passed so near. The last we're to have, they say. It was a lesson to me – it was a support, an inspiration!

HAWKER: Well, we didn't like the things of course, but (*modestly*) we could take them, you know – we could take them!

LADY M.'S VOICE: But that wasn't the really big thing, dear Mr. Hawker. I shall never forget it – never! I came away from that business interview feeling I hadn't been talking to a solicitor at all! None of that hard— Such patience! Such *sweetness*! . . . Do you know I felt as I went through that door, my dear? I felt I'd been talking to a *woman*!

HAWKER: You couldn't have paid me a higher compliment, ma'am.

LADY M.'S VOICE: Oh, but you mustn't think of this little gift as an empty compliment. Of *course* you spurn it in that light!

HAWKER: *Spurn* is – ha – a strong word, Lady Moberley.

LADY M.'S VOICE: No! Be honest! You see, I can read your mind like a book! You naughty *kind* man! I want my money to bear fruit in *humanity*, Mr. Hawker. When I found, in the *same* human being, one day the cold, incisive edge of the masculine intellect – and, the next, the loving ample, *broody* warmth of the feminine. Where I found cosmos *and* – let's see, what's the other thing?

HAWKER: Chaos?

LADY M.'S VOICE: I think not. Where I found cosmos *and* the other thing, together – there, I said to myself, is the seed-bed of creativeness – there is true genius! There, at any rate, is a good place for *this* little bit of my money.

HAWKER: You are making things very difficult for me, dear lady.

LADY M.'S VOICE: Ah! I can see you're not going to disappoint me! Will the Codicil do as it stands?

HAWKER: Just read it out to me once more while I jot it down in shorthand. Never mind the opening part.

LADY M.'S VOICE: "I revoke the legacy of £5,000 given in my said Will to Eleonora Mabel Gardner to assist her in her work of promoting and improving the performance of chamber music in the counties of Kent, Surrey and Sussex."

HAWKER: (*writing*) Yes?

LADY M.'S VOICE: "In lieu thereof I give and bequeath free of death duties the sum of £5,000 to my friend Ralph Byng Hawker, Solicitor. In all other respects I confirm my said Will."

Will it do as it stands? Or does it want altering?

HAWKER: It's fine, Lady Moberley. Just *fine*! I couldn't have done it better myself. Don't *touch* it – except of course to sign it.

LADY M.'S VOICE: Oh, *thank* you!

HAWKER: How about witnesses?

LADY M.'S VOICE: There's only the maid here.

HAWKER: She'll do for one. (*after a moment's pause*) I know what – why not ask your Doctor to look in?

LADY M.'S VOICE: Are they specially good witnesses?

HAWKER: Couldn't have a better! They're so used to it, you see. Every sensible man makes his will, as soon as he puts himself in their hands.

LADY M.'S VOICE: Oh, *thank* you!

HAWKER: I don't know how to thank *you*, Lady Moberley. It's not so much the money, of course. I'm thinking of your overwhelmingly kind words to me. (*hurriedly, as he hears a confused noise, a heavy thump, and shouting off*) Well, good-bye! I shall write to you of course. Don't forget the doctor! (*He switches off the instrument and leans back in his chair*). Whew! £5,000! Just for talking to her like a sister! By Jove! It'd pay for Mark's partnership! Hm! If only that boy had more gumption – a more *go* in him! If only he could be a bit more aggressive!

(*The door opens, and Miss Gardner totters in in great distress.*)

MISS GARDNER: Oh, dear!

(*Jannery and Bert appear L. and, to Hawker's amazement, hasten over R. without a word.*)

MISS GARDNER: Yes – in there!

HAWKER: (*gaping*) What the – ?

MISS GARDNER: (*sitting down*) Oh, dear!

HAWKER: (*going to investigate*) What's going on in here?

*(He is met by Jannery in reverse. He and Bert carry across the stage and out L. the limp form of Wolffe. Livesey follows, licking his knuckles. Behind him, her hand to her mouth in amazement, Sally. Hawker gapes in silence, till Jannery and Bert, with Wolffe, are out of sight).*

SALLY: (*dancing*) He did it again! He did it again! Oh, Mark, are you hurt?

LIVESEY: (*grimly*) It was a pleasure.

SALLY: Oh, darling, you're wonderful! Ugh! the things he said! (*She throws herself about his neck*). How could I have been such a fool?

LIVESEY: You could hardly be expected to know, darling.

HAWKER: Mark, have you taken leave on your senses?

LIVESEY: (*with injured innocence*) You said I must fight!

HAWKER: Since when have you been dealing with my clients in this –

LIVESEY: Not a client, Uncle. A skate. A wadsetter – tacksman!

HAWKER: Good lord! (*He hurries out*).

SALLY: Oh, Mark! How's your heart?

LIVESEY: Fine. Never felt better. In fact, I think that's what I needed to strengthen it.

SALLY: What could have made me so blind? I always thought he was so nice.

LIVESEY: Oh, Ben's all right. But not for little girls like Sally, that's all.

SALLY: You old cave-man! You masterful – *Shriek!* (*hugging him*) Darling, I don't know what I'd do without you. I'll never, never try and get a job – or anything – without asking you first.

LIVESEY: It was all my fault, Sally.

SALLY: Oh no, darling, it was all *my* fault.

LIVESEY: No, darling. I assure you. I was at fault – I should have –

SALLY: Only why didn't you *tell* me?

LIVESEY: I never do anything rational, when you're around, darling.

SALLY: Oh, Mark! Pet! (*It all ends in a muddled, and then a harmonious, kiss*).

MISS GARDNER: Ahem! It's very warm in here.

(*Hawker re-enters, looking very worried*).

HAWKER: (*muttering*) Must have been a real haymaker. Never thought he had it in him. (*sternly*) Mark, this is very serious. Although he doesn't appear to be fatally injured, if that young man chooses to take action, we shall be in very serious trouble.

LIVESEY: Don't worry about Ben, Uncle. I'll deal with him. I can deal with anything. Given a chance. . . (*looking round affably*) Does anyone here want knocking down? *And*, of course, picking up and dusting again!

MISS GARDNER: (*rummaging in her bag*) I never asked you how you were, Mr. Hawker.

HAWKER: Well, I can't complain. (*reflecting and brightening*) No, I *can't* complain. I'm feeling *very* well. And you?

SALLY: What are you looking for, Auntie?

MISS GARDNER: My fountain pen, dear. It's here somewhere. (*To Hawker*) Oh – thank you – ah! (*She pulls out the fountain-pen, which brings with it a ball of wool, that rolls across the floor, unwinding as it goes*). I'm *quite* myself again!

HAWKER: (*rubbing his hands*) Splendid!

MISS GARDNER: (*to everyone*) Yes. You know, it seems silly, but I almost feel as though that second bump had done me good. I slept better last night. (*Smiling brightly*) I think my brain's less active!

HAWKER: (*not smiling*) I'm relieved to hear it. Well, well! We must get on, I suppose. (*Opens the door and calls to Jannery, who enters*) Oh, Jannery, you'd better witness this, I think. You'll get on better here, Miss Gardner. (*He rises and motions her to his chair*).

JANNERY: (*flattening out the document on the desk in front of her and pointing*) If you'll just write your name there, Madam, your ordinary signature, you know. No, not there – There! Opposite seal. (*She signs her name*).

MISS GARDNER: Is that all right?

JANNERY: Now will you please place your finger on the seal and say (*mumbling it rather*) "I deliver this as my act and deed."

MISS GARDNER: Is that part of it? (*Nervously*) I'm sure I shall get it wrong! (*She stands up very straight and stiff, jabs her finger down on the document and shuts her eyes tight*). "I did a very nice act indeed!" (*They all laugh*). I knew I should get it wrong!

SALLY: (*Kissing her*) It couldn't have been better, darling! You never spoke a truer word! (*Jannery takes away the document and goes out*).

HAWKER: Well, there we are, ladies! (*Looking round*) This is really something of a family occasion, isn't it? I think we might look ahead and – er – (*laying his hand on Livesey's shoulder*) When the time comes for Mark and me to sign *our* Deed –

LIVESEY: (*startled*) Uncle!

HAWKER: – as per agreement, Miss Gardner!— we shall probably be too busy to think of celebrating. And I have an idea (*looking at Sally*) that there's another kind of partnership not very far off too. I think – (*going to a cupboard and taking down glasses*) – Yes, I think that the occasion calls for a – for a – come on, Mark! you're the one for words – a *potion*?

LIVESEY: Yes, or a – or a – (*he is at a loss*)

HAWKER: Come on! Come on! You can do it! You can, you know! (*He begins pouring*).

LIVESEY: (*exultantly*) A *posset*, Nuncle, a *posset* or *stoup* – er – even possibly a *jorum*!

SALLY: What's a *jorum*?

LIVESEY: It's an old Romance word meaning "Just exactly what's needed" (*Putting his arm round her*) – and as much more as you fancy. Much the same as a *quorum*, darling – only not so dry! (*He suddenly releases her*). Uncle Byng, wait! I have it! (*He nips out L. They gape after him, look from one to another, then fall back amazed. Livesey returns with a rather dazed Wolfe*). Name your poison, old man: just to show there's no ill feeling.

WOLFFE: But I *do* feel ill!

SALLY: Mark means: no *gudgeon*, Ben.

WOLFFE: Sounds fishy to me! Oh well. . . Gin. Gin'll do me, old man.

LIVESEY: No umbrage, no rancour, no *grudge*, old man!

WOLFFE: Why should there be? Never nurse a grudge over a dame, old man. All the best! (*He uplifts his glass. Sally looks from him to Livesey, and takes their hands*).

C U R T A I N

T H E E N D