

A (5) Henry, Morris, Monica and Garry

HENRY and MORRIS enter up right, followed by MONICA. HENRY is rather dapper and neat. His age is about forty. MORRIS is a trifle younger, tall and good-looking and a little grey at the temples.

HENRY *(moving down right of the settee, below it)* There's a strange young man sitting on the stairs.

GARRY What's he doing?

HENRY Crying.

MORRIS *(moving down right behind the armchair)* What have you been up to, Garry?

GARRY I haven't been up to anything. I merely told him what I thought of his play.

HENRY I'm glad to see you haven't lost your touch.

MONICA *(moving to the sideboard)* Sherry, Morris?

MORRIS Thanks.

MONICA Henry?

HENRY Is it the same sherry you always have?

MONICA Yes.

HENRY *(sitting at the right end of the settee)* No, thanks. *MONICA moves down and hands sherry to MORRIS.*

GARRY Why not? What's the matter with it?

HENRY Nothing much, it's just not very nice.

GARRY You ought never to have joined the Athenaeum Club, Henry, it was disastrous.

HENRY I really don't see why.

MONICA *goes to the sideboard and pours herself a sherry.*

GARRY It's made you pompous.

HENRY It can't have. I've always been too frightened to go into it.

MORRIS *..drinks..* Henry's quite right about the sherry, it's disgusting.

GARRY If anybody complains about anything else, I shall go out of my mind. *(He puts his glass on the centre table.)* This studio's been like a wailing wall all the morning.

MORRIS *(sitting on the upstage arm of the chair)* Well, Liz is back.

GARRY *(crossing above the settee to MORRIS)* Liz is back! Oh, Morris, how sweet of you to let me know. I really must try to get in touch with her. *(He crosses below the settee to left.)*

A (5) Henry, Morris, Monica and Garry

MORRIS What's the matter with the old boy, Monica? He seems remarkably crotchety.

MONICA (*moving above the centre table with her drink*) Liz went for him a bit and then I told him he over-acted; he really has had rather a beastly time and then that dotty young man on top of everything.

MORRIS Never mind, Garry - God's in his heaven - all's right with the world - I've got some lovely bad news for you.

GARRY What?

MORRIS Nora Fenwick can't come to Africa.

GARRY Why not?

MORRIS She's broken her leg.

GARRY (*exasperated*) Well, really!

HENRY It isn't actually so terribly important.

GARRY Oh, dear me, no, it couldn't matter less! It merely means that I've got to spend the entire voyage out rehearsing a new woman in six different character parts. (*He sits at the left end of the settee.*) How did the silly bitch do it? **MONICA** *leans against the piano.*

MORRIS She fell down at Victoria Station.

GARRY She'd no right to be at Victoria Station! Who can we get?

HENRY Morris wants Beryl Willard, but I don't think she's quite right.

GARRY (*cupping his ear*) Morris wants who?

HENRY Beryl Willard.

GARRY (*dangerously*) So Morris wants Beryl Willard, does he?

MORRIS Why not? She's extremely competent.

GARRY (*rising and moving above MORRIS*) I agree! I quite agree! Beryl Willard is extremely competent. Beryl Willard has been extremely competent, man and boy, for forty years. **MORRIS** *tries to interrupt.* In addition to her extreme competence, she has contrived, with uncanny skill, to sustain a spotless reputation for being the most paralysing, epoch-making, monumental, world- shattering, God-awful bore that ever drew breath! (*He turns up stage a little.*)

MORRIS Now really, Garry, I don't see how you can call the poor little thing a bore.

GARRY The poor little thing, to begin with, is vast! **MORRIS** *tries to interrupt again.* And I will explain one thing further - it is this. (*He puts his hand on MORRIS shoulder.*) No prayer, no bribe, no threat, no power, human or divine, would induce me to go to Africa with Beryl

A (5) Henry, Morris, Monica and Garry

Willard. I wouldn't go as far as Wimbledon with Beryl Willard. *(He crosses above the settee to down left.)*

MONICA What he's trying to say is that he doesn't care for Beryl Willard.

MORRIS All right, she's out. Whom do you suggest?

HENRY *(rising and moving to GARRY)* Just a minute, if you're going to start one of those casting arguments, I'm going. I've got to catch a plane for Brussels, I just wanted to let you know that you can't have the Mayfair Theatre for the French play in the autumn.

GARRY Why not?

HENRY Because Robert's got it for the whole season, starting in September.

GARRY Why did you let him? You knew I wanted it.

HENRY The Forum is very much nicer and the capacity's bigger.

GARRY It's a conspiracy! You've both of you been trying to get me into that under-heated morgue for years.

MORRIS It's being done up and redecorated.

GARRY It'll have to be rebuilt brick by brick before I set foot in it. *MORRIS rises, goes up right, puts his glass on the sideboard and then moves down above the armchair.*

HENRY *(moving up right)* Arrange it later, will you, Morris? He's obviously in one of his states this morning. I can't stop now.

GARRY *(moving up left)* What are you going to Brussels for anyhow?

HENRY *(turning)* Business. Nice, ordinary, straightforward business. Nothing to do with the theatre at all. I can't wait to get there. Goodbye, Sweetie. Try to be a little more amiable when I come back. Goodbye, Monica. Goodbye, Morris... By the way, you might ring up Joanna, she's all alone. *MONICA finishes her drink and puts the glass on the piano.*

MORRIS Oh, I have. I'm taking her to the opening at His Majesty's tomorrow night.

HENRY Fine - goodbye. *HENRY exits up right.*

MONICA *(moving towards GARRY)* Do you want me anymore? *MORRIS moves below the right end of the settee. GARRY is looking at him.*

GARRY Why, what are you going to do?

MONICA I'm going to write to Beryl Willard and ask her to come and live with you. *She crosses below GARRY and exits down left. MORRIS laughs and sits at the right end of the settee.*

GARRY *(moving down below the left end of the settee)* So you're taking Joanna to the opening at His Majesty's tomorrow, are you?

A (5) Henry, Morris, Monica and Garry

MORRIS Yes, why?

GARRY Why not! Why not indeed?

MORRIS What on earth do you mean?

GARRY I think I'll come too.

MORRIS All right, that'll be grand. I've got a box, there's lots of room.

GARRY Why have you been looking so mournful lately?

MORRIS I haven't been looking in the least mournful.

GARRY Oh yes, you have; Liz has noticed it and so have I.

MORRIS Well, you're both quite wrong. I'm perfectly happy.

GARRY (*sitting at the left end of the settee*) Oh, Morris!

MORRIS What the devil's the matter?

GARRY You like Joanna, don't you?

MORRIS Of course I do, she's a darling.

GARRY I wouldn't describe her as a darling exactly but then I don't see very much of her. I gather that you do.

MORRIS What are you getting at?

GARRY People are beginning to talk, Morris.

MORRIS (*with an edge on his voice*) What about?

GARRY About you and Joanna.

MORRIS Rubbish!

GARRY It's perfectly true and you know it.

MORRIS I don't know anything of the sort.

GARRY Are you in love with her?

MORRIS In love with Joanna? Of course I'm not.

GARRY Are you preparing to be? I can generally tell when you're about to embark on one of your emotional rampages.

MORRIS Well, I like that, I must say. What about you?

GARRY Never mind about me, nobody could accuse me of being emotional.

A (5) Henry, Morris, Monica and Garry

MORRIS Couldn't they just! Look at Sylvia Laurie! You carried on like a maniac over her for weeks. All that sobbing and screaming.

GARRY That was years and years ago.

MORRIS Never mind when it was. It was! And if that wasn't emotional I should like to know what is. You wore us all to shreds.

GARRY I notice that you've very adroitly turned the conversation into an attack on me.

MORRIS Now listen, Garry, what's the idea of...?

GARRY Do you swear to me that you haven't had an affair with Joanna?

MORRIS I'm damned if I'll be cross-questioned like this.

GARRY Have you or haven't you?

MORRIS Mind your own business.

GARRY Good God, if this isn't my business nothing is. If you're fooling about with Joanna on the side and Henry finds out, do you realize what it will mean?

MORRIS I refuse to go on with this conversation.

GARRY You can refuse until you're blue in the face, you're going to listen to me.

MORRIS *(rising)* I'm not. *(He makes a move towards the arch up right.)*

GARRY *(rising)* Morris! *(He grabs MORRIS by the right arm, and turns him round.)* It's true then, is it?

MORRIS Leave me alone.

GARRY Oh, my God, this really is serious. Please, please, sit down. *(He pushes him down on to the right end of the settee.)*

MORRIS I've no intention of submitting to one of your famous finger-wagging tirades - I'm sick to death of them.

GARRY *(moving to right of the settee and shaking his finger in MORRIS's face)* Now, Morris - many years ago, before you were so sick to death of them, *(he sits in the armchair)* you might just as well admit, they helped you considerably.

MORRIS Of course I admit it, so what?

GARRY We've never lied to each other about anything really vital to us, have we?

MORRIS No.

GARRY And it would be rather foolish, after all those turbulent years, to start now, wouldn't it?

MORRIS All right, all right, but nobody has, as far as I can see.

GARRY I'm not going to ask you any more questions. I am however going to make you see one thing clearly and it's this. You, Henry, Monica, Liz and I share something of inestimable importance to all of us, and that something is mutual respect and trust. God knows it's been hard-won. We can look back on years and years of bloody conflict with ourselves and with each other. But now, now that we're middle-aged we can admit, with a certain mellow tranquillity, that it was well worth it. Here we are, five people closely woven together by affection and work and intimate knowledge of each other. *(He rises.)* It's too important a set-up to risk breaking for any outside emotional reason whatsoever. *(He moves above the settee to left.)* Joanna is alien to us. She doesn't really belong to us and never could. Henry realizes that perfectly well, he's nobody's fool, and to do him justice he has never tried to force her on us. But don't you believe for one minute that Joanna isn't a potential danger, because she is! She's a hundred per cent female, exceedingly attractive and ruthlessly implacable in the pursuit of anything she wants. If she could succeed in wreaking havoc among all of us, I am quite certain she would leave no stone unturned. She's a scalp-hunter, that baby, if ever I saw one. *(He sits on the settee.)* And all I implore you is this. Be careful!

MORRIS But I haven't the least intention of...

GARRY You needn't say anything now – but be careful! Is that clear?

MORRIS Quite. *(He rises and moves up right to the sideboard.)* I think I'll have a little more sherry.

GARRY I think I will, too. It's delicious.

MORRIS *(filling one glass)* Here you are. *(He puts the glass on the centre table.)*

GARRY *(glancing at his watch and rising)* Good heavens, it's after one. I forgot to ring up for a table. *GARRY moves left of the settee to the telephone.*

MORRIS *(moving to the sideboard and pouring a sherry for himself)* There's no need, we can always go upstairs.

GARRY No, we can't, upstairs smells of potted shrimps. It won't take a minute to ring up. *(He dials a number.) MORRIS drinks, then sits on the upstage arm of the chair. (GARRY speaks into the telephone with a radiant smile.)* Oh, I'm so sorry - it's the wrong number. *(Then he turns and grins at MORRIS.)* How foolish of me. I'm always doing that lately.

He is dialling again as -

The curtain falls.