

Please Enjoy the Following Sample

- This sample is an *excerpt* from a Samuel French title.
- This sample is for **perusal only** and may not be used for performance purposes.
- You may not download, print, or distribute this excerpt.
- We highly recommend purchasing a copy of the title before considering for performance.

For more information about licensing or purchasing a play or musical, please visit our websites

www.samuelfrench.com

www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk



A Rise in the Market

A Comedy

by Edward Taylor

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

New York Hollywood London Toronto

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that *A RISE IN THE MARKET* is subject to a Licensing Fee. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, the British Commonwealth, including Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. In its present form the play is dedicated to the reading public only.

The amateur live stage performance rights to *A RISE IN THE MARKET* are controlled exclusively by Samuel French, Inc., and licensing arrangements and performance licenses must be secured well in advance of presentation. PLEASE NOTE that amateur Licensing Fees are set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. When applying for a licensing quotation and a performance license please give us the number of performances intended, dates of production, your seating capacity and admission fee. Licensing Fees are payable one week before the opening performance of the play to Samuel French, Inc., at 45 W. 25th Street, New York, NY 10010.

Licensing Fee of the required amount must be paid whether the play is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged.

Stock licensing fees quoted upon application to Samuel French, Inc.

For all other rights than those stipulated above, apply to: Film Rights, Ltd., 101 Southbank House, Black Prince Road, Albert Embankment, London SE1 7SJ England.

Particular emphasis is laid on the question of amateur or professional readings, permission and terms for which must be secured in writing from Samuel French, Inc.

Copying from this book in whole or in part is strictly forbidden by law, and the right of performance is not transferable.

Whenever the play is produced the following notice must appear on all programs, printing and advertising for the play: "Produced by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc."

Due authorship credit must be given on all programs, printing and advertising for the play.

No one shall commit or authorize any act or omission by which the copyright of, or the right to copyright, this play may be impaired.

No one shall make any changes in this play for the purpose of production.

Publication of this play does not imply availability for performance. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are *strongly* advised in their own interests to apply to Samuel French, Inc., for written permission before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of *A RISE IN THE MARKET* *must* give credit to the Author of the Play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production. The name of the Author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type.

CHARACTERS:

SIR CLIVE PARTRIDGE:

A senior member of the British Common Market Commission

LADY GILLIAN PARTRIDGE:

His wife

SIMON PROUT:

An executive with the British Embassy in Paris

ERNEST KIBBLE:

A senior clerk at the Embassy

ASTRID:

A translator with the Common Market Commission in Brussels

LOUISE MULLER:

An expatriate American, married to a French businessman

JACQUES BERRI:

President of the Common Market Commission. A Belgian

The action of the play takes place in a luxurious penthouse flat in Paris.

ACT I

(The curtain rises on the elegant lounge area of a penthouse flat in Paris. It is early on a spring evening.)

(On stage-right, an archway leads to the entrance hall and front door. The rear wall has two bedroom doors. The rear stage-left corner is angled to give a balcony, with full-length glass sliding doors. The stage-right corner is angled to provide a small recess, where a door leads into the bathroom. The stage-left wall has a door to the dining-room, and an arched passageway to the kitchen.)

(Voices are heard in the hall. They are those of PROUT and PARTRIDGE, who now enter the lounge. Both are smartly but soberly suited, as befits government executives working abroad: but SIR CLIVE PARTRIDGE's suit is the more expensive, and so is the man inside. At the moment, though, he's in a bad temper.)

PARTRIDGE. How can they lose a blasted suitcase between Bonn and Paris?

PROUT. The Germans are usually so efficient.

PARTRIDGE. Efficient? Hah! The Germans I know couldn't organize a booze-up in a beer-hall!

PROUT. This is the lounge, sir.

PARTRIDGE. Anyway, it was a French plane, so I imagine it's their fault. Scruffy bunch – all they care about is tips. Chap expected one for wheeling an empty trolley – said it wasn't his fault my suitcase was lost. Bloody French are as bad as the blasted Belgians!

PROUT. You were in Bonn for the Assembly?

PARTRIDGE. Yes, I was main speaker on International Friendship. So this is where you're putting me up?

PROUT. I hope you'll be comfortable. As you know, the Embassy has a regular flat for VIP visitors, but that's being repaired and redecorated.

PARTRIDGE. Repaired?

PROUT. Yes, we had a British musical group there last month – they were star guests at the Paris Festival. I'm afraid they caused some damage.

PARTRIDGE. One of these damn pop groups, I suppose.

PROUT. No, it was the Windermere String Quartet. They'd hoped to get the Bach award, but at least they got the Mozart.

PARTRIDGE. Sounds as though they got Brahms and Liszt.

PROUT. I had to find this place in a hurry. But I think it has everything you need.

PARTRIDGE. Drinks?

PROUT. Yes, I've had the cabinet stocked up.

PARTRIDGE. Well, pour me a large Scotch.

PROUT. Of course, sir. (*Under subsequent dialogue, PROUT goes to the drinks cabinet and obliges. PARTRIDGE takes a look round the lounge before sitting down.*) And there's plenty of food in the kitchen. We've taken the place as a going concern. The owner had to go abroad suddenly, on business. Soda, sir? Or water?

PARTRIDGE. Don't be facetious, man.

(*PROUT crosses to him with the neat whisky.*)

PROUT. Bit of luck, actually. Well, partly luck and partly me moving rather swiftly. Accommodation's always difficult in Paris – but with tomorrow's conference, it's frankly impossible.

PARTRIDGE. Place filling up with foreigners, I suppose.

PROUT. I happened to meet this chap in the United Nations Club at the weekend. French businessman – sudden problem with one of his foreign companies – had to dash off in a hurry.

PARTRIDGE. Aren't you drinking?

PROUT. Thank you no, sir. I don't. Well, very rarely. Sometimes a port at Christmas – for the Queen's speech, you know.

PARTRIDGE. Well, pour yourself a Scotch and I'll drink it for you. In face, you can use my glass.

PROUT. Oh ... er ... thank you. (*PROUT takes PARTRIDGE's empty glass, and refills it.*) Anyway, he wanted to let his flat, furnished, so I grabbed it. Gave him a British Embassy cheque for three months in advance, and got the keys. Oh, I'll let you have them

now, while I think of it. I had a copy made, as I gather Lady Partridge is joining you.

PARTRIDGE. Yes, she's coming from Rome.

(PROUT hands a pair of keys to PARTRIDGE.)

PROUT. I'm required to keep one key for the Embassy. I believe you're off on Saturday, sir.

PARTRIDGE. Yes – working-party in Luxembourg. A hundred delegates will be flying in from all parts of Europe.

PROUT. What is the subject?

PARTRIDGE. Congestion of Common Market airspace. But look here – what is the British Embassy doing about my suitcase?

PROUT. They're ringing the airline every hour. And our Mr. Kibble is buying you new socks and underwear. He should be here with them shortly.

PARTRIDGE. I could have done without personal problems. This conference is very important.

PROUT. Indeed, sir, and everyone's rooting for you in tomorrow's election. We all want to see a British President of the Commerce Commission. And you'll be proposed by the retiring President?

PARTRIDGE. So I understand. Monsieur Berri is a puritan – places great value on morality and temperance. Pour me another Scotch, will you?

PROUT. Of course, sir. *(PROUT takes PARTRIDGE's glass and complies.)* It's a tradition that the Conference always elects the President's nominee.

PARTRIDGE. Certainly. He's been impressed by my work for the Purity League.

PROUT. So are we all, sir.

PARTRIDGE. I was active in keeping obscene films out of Britain, you know. Had to sit through hundreds of 'em. Some several times.

PROUT. And you've also distinguished yourself in European matters. I believe you proposed the rules about Common Market eggs?

PARTRIDGE. Certainly. They're required to come in five different grades, at not less than a billion eggs a week.

PROUT. Is that legally binding?

PARTRIDGE. Absolutely.

PROUT. And aren't you sorting out the Milk Mountain?

PARTRIDGE. I have already done so.

PROUT. What exactly was the problem there?

PARTRIDGE. Lot of damn nonsense. The French hill-farmers had trouble with their milk-yield – the cows don't like being milked on the slant. They marched into Paris.

PROUT. The cows?

PARTRIDGE. The farmers. We trebled the milk subsidy so they could make a fat living out of not much milk. Then all the farmers in Europe started breeding more cows to get the subsidy – greedy devils. We thought of getting them sterilized.

PROUT. The farmers?

PARTRIDGE. The cows. We finished up with a huge milk surplus. Monsieur Berri dumped it in my lap last week.

PROUT. Nasty.

PARTRIDGE. I've found the answer – we're selling it cheap to the Russians. The stuff started moving yesterday, in a fleet of refrigerated lorries.

PROUT. Monsieur Berri must be pleased.

PARTRIDGE. He will be. He's calling here tonight to hear the outcome.

PROUT. Monsieur Berri's coming here?

PARTRIDGE. And it seems I'll be greeting him in the clothes I travelled in.

PROUT. I'm sure my colleague will be here soon with some fresh things. Perhaps you'd like to see round the flat, Sir Clive? (*PROUT starts moving around, opening doors and indicating things: apparently under the impression that PARTRIDGE is following. But PARTRIDGE remains sitting heavily in his chair.*) You have two bedrooms ... both with beds, of course ... I think you'll find this balcony rather pleasant ... self-locking door, for security ... (*PROUT turns the catch, and slides the balcony door open.*) Shall I leave it open? It's rather a pleasant evening ... from here you can see the Embassy, just over the road ... I hope you'll regard that as a convenience ...

PARTRIDGE. It's certainly built like one.

PROUT. This door leads to the dining-room ... ah, and you have a useful device here ... (*PROUT opens a small, safe-like, door: halfway up the stage-left wall.*) My businessman friend has a shredder, to destroy any sensitive papers – precaution against industrial espionage. Put confidential waste in here and it's automatically shredded on its way to the rubbish incinerator in the basement ...

(*PROUT closes the shredder door.*)

PARTRIDGE. (*Standing up.*) I'm going to have a bath.

PROUT. (*Continuing*) ... the kitchen is through there ...

PARTRIDGE. I have to bath in the kitchen?

PROUT. No, no, of course not, Sir Clive. The bathroom is over here ... allow me to start running it for you ... I expect you'll want to undress ...

PARTRIDGE. That is my habit, yes. Bedroom through here, you say.

(*PARTRIDGE goes into the stage-right bedroom, nearest the bathroom, leaving the door half-open. PROUT enters the bathroom, continuing his commentary.*)

PROUT. The Ambassador felt I'd done rather well to find this place in a hurry. The great thing with a lived-in flat is, you can be sure everything's working smoothly.

(*PROUT has turned on the bathroom taps, and we hear simultaneously a hostile hissing and spurting from them, and a fierce rumbling and banging from the kitchen boiler.*)

PARTRIDGE. (*From the bedroom.*) Good God, what's that? World War Three?

PROUT. (*Shouting from bathroom.*) Seems to be a little trouble with the boiler, sir. Probably an air-lock. (*Both noises stop: PROUT has turned the taps off. From bathroom:*) Give it a moment to disperse. Hasn't been used for a day or two. This Continental plumbing

sometimes works better if you surprise it. Now then. *(Both noises start again: PROUT has turned the taps on. The kitchen boiler is thundering alarmingly. Then the noises stop, as PROUT turns the taps off. PROUT emerges from the bathroom, en route for the kitchen.)* It shouldn't be doing that, sir. I think I'd better have a look at the heater.

(As PROUT reaches the kitchen, the front-door bell rings.)

PARTRIDGE. *(Calling from bedroom.)* Is that the front-door? My wife's not due yet.

PROUT. It's all right, Sir Clive, it's probably my colleague from the Embassy.

PARTRIDGE. Well, you deal with it – I'd like a bit of privacy.

(The bedroom door is closed from within by PARTRIDGE. PROUT crosses and goes out to the hall. We hear him opening the front door, and talking to the visitor, who speaks English with a slight Belgian accent. This is ASTRID, an attractive intelligent girl in her early twenties. She is in determined mood.)

PROUT. Oh ... Lady Partridge? Do come in – we weren't expecting you yet.

ASTRID. Sir Clive is here?

PROUT. Yes, he arrived a few minutes ago. I'm from the British Embassy, Simon Prout ... *(By now, PROUT and ASTRID have entered the lounge.)* I'll tell Sir Clive you're here, Lady Partridge.

ASTRID. Please do. But I am not Lady Partridge.

PROUT. I'm sure he'll be ... you're not? Oh well, I'm sorry, I don't think Sir Clive will be able to see you. He can't see anyone this evening.

ASTRID. Then tell him to put his glasses on. He'll certainly want to see me.

PROUT. I don't think you quite understand ...

(As PROUT starts to speak. PARTRIDGE opens the bedroom door and comes out, wearing an exotic kimono – having removed his suit, which he is carrying on a hanger, together with his shirt.)

PARTRIDGE. I must say, your friend's got a funny taste in dressing-gowns. I feel like Suzie Wong. Any chance of getting this suit quick-cleaned, d'you think ... *(As he sees ASTRID, PARTRIDGE's jaw drops. He appears stunned, and suit and shirt fall to the floor.)* Good God, what are you doing here?

ASTRID. We have to have a talk.

PARTRIDGE. Talk? Now? We can't ... I mean ... look ...

(As PARTRIDGE boggles, the boiler starts to rumble ominously again. Alarmed, PROUT moves off to investigate, stumbling over PARTRIDGE's clothes as he does so. PROUT picks up suit and shirt and puts them on a chair.)

PROUT. Er ... I'd better go and sort out that boiler, sir. Can't think what's the matter. Monsieur Muller didn't say he had trouble with his pipes ...

(PROUT hurries into the kitchen, closing the door behind him. During the next few minutes, there are intermittent rumbles from the boiler, with periods of silence in between.)

PARTRIDGE. For God's sake, Astrid, you're not supposed to be in Paris, you're supposed to be in Brussels! My wife will be here any minute!

ASTRID. All right, who is she?

PARTRIDGE. My wife? She's the woman I'm married to ... vague person, writes poetry ... you know who my wife is!

ASTRID. Not your wife – the woman you have been seeing! All over Europe! At the opera ... the races! Friends have been telling me “Your Clive has a new woman ... young, beautiful” ... who is she? Not your wife – her I can live with.

PARTRIDGE. That's more than I can ... I mean, of course you can't live with her! ... you mustn't even meet her! What's the matter with you? You've always been happy with our scheme.

ASTRID. Now I find out you are more scheming than I thought! The flat in Brussels – all right! The good times together when you are there – all right! The rest of the time you are with your wife who does not understand you, no boom-boom and straight off to sleep – all right!

PARTRIDGE. Keep your voice down, for heaven's sake!

ASTRID. But a third woman, who you take out and flirt with, that is not all right! That is all wrong!

PARTRIDGE. I don't know what you're talking about! I may have attended the odd social function with my secretary ...

ASTRID. Not your secretary – her with the flat shoes and canvas knickers! Everyone has seen you with a glamorous woman!

PARTRIDGE. Nonsense, I don't know any glamorous women – except for you, of course.

ASTRID. You think it is just a game, our affaire! You think it does not matter! For me, it is serious!

PARTRIDGE. If my wife finds out, for me it'll be worse than serious. It'll be tragic!

ASTRID. I will show you how serious it is for me ...

PARTRIDGE. In fact, if *anyone* finds out! You know I'm up for President tomorrow. A hint of scandal and my chance is gone!

(ASTRID has produced a small bottle of tablets from her pocket.)

ASTRID. Two of these tablets will kill me in five minutes! Always I have then ready, in case you desert me!

PARTRIDGE. This chap Berri's a puritan of ... what!? Have you taken leave of your senses, girl? Give those to me!

(PARTRIDGE closes with ASTRID, to try and grab the tablets, but she holds them away from him, at the same time striving to unscrew the cap.)

ASTRID. The time has come! Now I will take them! You let me down! I cannot trust you!

(The boiler is quiet and PROUT emerges from the kitchen looking pleased with himself. But his smile disappears as he discovers PARTRIDGE and ASTRID struggling, and hears the last few words. He rushes to assist.)

PROUT. What's happening? Are you all right, sir? I thought you knew this person! I'll call the police!

(PARTRIDGE has succeeded in wresting the tablets from ASTRID: and the two are now separated, facing each other like wrestlers, panting from the struggle.)

PARTRIDGE. No! No ... it's all right, Prout ... everything's under control ... *(To ASTRID.)* Look, my dear ... calm down ... I'll cooperate. Let's talk this over rationally.

PROUT. But who is this lady? And what are those tablets?

PARTRIDGE. Ah ... er ... who is she? Tablets? You know her, Prout, this is ... er ... tablets, yes ... this is my doctor. Yes. And she's rather cross with me, because I haven't been taking my tablets.

PROUT. Oh, I see. I didn't know you took tablets, sir. Something wrong?

PARTRIDGE. No, nothing ... yes, of course something's wrong. My back. Pain. A martyr to it. Sometimes my life's unbearable. But this lady helps me with ... er ... relieving exercises.

(During the above, PARTRIDGE has located a likely part of his back, and is now holding it ruefully.)

PROUT. A bad back, I am sorry. You must have been doing too much. Work, I mean. How will you manage at tomorrow's conference? Shall I order a wheelchair?

PARTRIDGE. Thank you, Prout, that won't be necessary. My doctor will look after me – won't you, darl ... doctor. You'll see I don't miss the Presidency. As President, I shall spend more time in Brussels.

(ASTRID is weighing up his blandishments, as the boiler resumes its rumbling.)

PROUT. Oh Lord, there it goes again. Excuse me, sir. I hope this doesn't mean you'll be short of hot water ...

(PROUT hurries into the kitchen once more. PARTRIDGE puts the tablets on a table and adopts a conciliatory tone to ASTRID.)

PARTRIDGE. My dear Astrid, you mustn't kill yourself! It could

be fatal! This must be all a misunderstanding. There's no other woman in my life.

ASTRID. You swear it? There's no other woman in your life?

PARTRIDGE. I suppose my wife's a sort of woman. But we agreed she didn't count.

ASTRID. You were seen escorting a girl with red hair! At the opera ... at the races ...

PARTRIDGE. Red hair? On her head?

ASTRID. Also in other places!

PARTRIDGE. Other places?

ASTRID. Nightclubs ... restaurants ... you were seen everywhere!

PARTRIDGE. I don't recall escorting a red-haired woman. It must have been coincidence ... someone who happened to be in the same place ...

ASTRID. I can quote dates!

PARTRIDGE. Look, let's not wash our dirty linen in front of our friend from the Embassy, my dear. Let's talk this over in the other room.

ASTRID. Very well, I will give you a little time to explain yourself. But not a lot of time!

PARTRIDGE. Too damn right! My wife will be here in an hour!
(During the above, PARTRIDGE ushers ASTRID towards the bedroom, and follows her in. He pauses at the door and calls to PROUT.) Prout, my doctor is giving me an examination in the bedroom – we're not to be disturbed.

(PROUT calls back from the kitchen where he has temporarily pacified the boiler, and feels he has diagnosed the problem.)

PROUT. Very good, sir. I think I know your trouble. Your input's too active and your stopcock's too slack. *(PARTRIDGE disappears into the bedroom and closes the door. PROUT emerges from the kitchen, wiping his hands – having, he hopes, completed his plumbing. As he does so, the front-door bell rings, and he goes out to the hall and opens the door. He is heard talking to the new arrival, ERNEST KIBBLE, an elderly member of the embassy staff, who is somewhat vague.)* Ah, Kibble, you got the clothes.

KIBBLE. I hope these things are suitable – it was rather short notice.

PROUT. Sir Clive will be grateful for anything. I'll let him have them at once.

KIBBLE. Er ... might I come in, Mr. Prout? I have some rather alarming news.

PROUT. Can't it wait?

KIBBLE. I think not, Mr. Prout, it's extremely urgent.

PROUT. Oh, very well.

KIBBLE. Thank you, Mr. Prout.

(During ensuing dialogue, PROUT and KIBBLE enter the lounge. KIBBLE is carrying a large brown-paper parcel, which he forgets to put down – holding it, instead, first under one arm and then the other.)

PROUT. Sir Clive will want this place to himself as soon as possible. He's involved in some delicate discussions.

KIBBLE. Yes, I'm sure.

PROUT. His wife will be here shortly, and then he's entertaining Monsieur Berri.

KIBBLE. The President of the Commerce Commission?

PROUT. That's right. They won't be disturbed here. It's lucky I got this flat from my friend Muller, eh?

KIBBLE. Er ... well, yes and no.

PROUT. What d'you mean, 'yes and no'?

PARTRIDGE. Er ... yes, they will be disturbed ... and no, it isn't lucky you got this flat.

PROUT. What's that supposed to mean?

KIBBLE. The police came to the Embassy, Mr. Prout, asking about Monsieur Muller.

PROUT. Monsieur Muller? My good friend Muller, who owns this flat?

KIBBLE. That's right – Monsieur Max Muller. Only it seems he doesn't own the flat.

PROUT. He doesn't own the flat?

KIBBLE. It belongs to his wife. Monsieur Muller had no right to let it.

PROUT. Good grief! How did they know he *had* let it?

KIBBLE. They didn't. They came to ask if we knew where Monsieur Muller was.

PROUT. Monsieur Muller had to go abroad. He wanted to sort out some business.

KIBBLE. Er, no. He wanted to stay out of jail.

PROUT. Jail?

KIBBLE. It appears he's been involved in some dubious activities. He was facing arrest in a currency case. Now he's disappeared.

PROUT. But ... why did the police come to the Embassy?

KIBBLE. They'd heard he was a friend of yours.

PROUT. Muller's not a friend of mine! I only met him twice!

KIBBLE. We told the police you'd only met him through leasing this flat. And they told us it wasn't his to let.

PROUT. Not his flat?

KIBBLE. Apparently it's owned by his wife – the police mentioned her name ... what was it now? ... oh yes, Madame Muller. A Transatlantic person.

PROUT. You mean, she comes from America?

KIBBLE. That's right. Today.

PROUT. What?

KIBBLE. She comes from America today. She's been there on holiday.

PROUT. She's coming here?!

KIBBLE. I expect so. It's her home, you see. She owns it. That's why I thought I should warn you. There could be some confusion.

PROUT. Confusion? There'll be an execution! The Ambassador will kill me! Sir Clive sharing a flat with a crook's wife? And his own wife? And Monsieur Berri calling? Kibble, this could finish my career! I'm ruined.

KIBBLE. Well, we all have our troubles, Mr. Prout. I've got those twinges in my back again.

PROUT. (*In desperation.*) I don't believe it! I simply don't believe it!

KIBBLE. It's true. Just between the shoulder blades – the bit you can't reach.

PROUT. I don't believe there's a woman living here! There'd have been signs ... clothes, knick-knacks ...

(PROUT charges into the unoccupied stage-left bedroom to look around.)

KIBBLE. It comes right up from the base of the spine. Of course, they don't give you proper shirt-tails these days.

(From the bedroom, we hear sounds of PROUT searching, then opening a wardrobe and getting a nasty shock.)

PROUT. *(Off)* Oh, My God!

KIBBLE. And then the Ambassador won't let us wear cardigans on duty. I could have arthritis for all he cares.

(PROUT emerges from the bedroom, looking crestfallen.)

PROUT. There's a wardrobe full of women's clothes. And a jar of cold cream on the dressing table!

KIBBLE. I'm afraid cold cream does no good at all. For one thing, I can't rub it in.

PROUT. Kibble, what are you drivelling about? I tell you, some wretched woman's going to arrive and embarrass Sir Clive!

KIBBLE. No, surely, *I told you* that.

PROUT. Don't quibble, Kibble! What can we do? Muller's wife will be here any minute!

KIBBLE. I mean, that's why I ... oh no, not just yet, Mr. Prout. It seems Mrs. Muller arrives on the eight o'clock plane.

PROUT. Thank God! That gives us time to sort something out! Any ideas?

KIBBLE. I find it quite hard to think at the moment. These back pains in my back, you know.

PROUT. Well, I can help you there. Sir Clive has back-trouble himself – his doctor's given him some pills to ease the pain. I could have a word ... ah no, there they are.

(PROUT has spotted ASTRID's tablet-bottle on the table. He picks it up and unscrews the top.)

KIBBLE. Oh. D'you think they'd do the trick?

PROUT. Worth a try, eh? You may get a surprise!

KIBBLE. Oh well ... what is it they say? Kill or cure! *(KIBBLE at last puts down his brown-paper parcel, to receive the tablets.)* This back trouble ruins my life.

PROUT. With a bit of luck, these'll put an end to it.

KIBBLE. Mind you, I'm not all that keen on pills. One doesn't want to become dependent.

(PROUT is tipping pills into his own hand.)

PROUT. Two should do the trick ... well, perhaps three to make sure.

KIBBLE. *(Cheerful)* D'you know, Mr. Prout, the pain's gone now. I think I got it from carrying that parcel. I shan't need the pills after all.

(PROUT tips the pills back, replaces the cap, and puts down the bottle.)

PROUT. Well, it's up to you, Kibble. They're there if you want them. Look, Sir Clive's only staying here for two days. If we could keep Madame Muller away that long, the problem's solved.

KIBBLE. But how can you do that?

PROUT. D'you know exactly where Max Muller's gone?

KIBBLE. No. I thought you'd know.

PROUT. Well, I don't. Perhaps you can find out through the Embassy. Or the police.

KIBBLE. I'll try, Mr. Prout.

PROUT. Good man. I'll stay here, intercept Madame Muller the minute she arrives, and say her husband wants her to join him at once.

KIBBLE. An excellent idea. It's that kind of thinking that makes you an executive.

PROUT. Thank you.

KIBBLE. What a pity you can't do that.

PROUT. It's just a question of ... what? Why can't I do it?

KIBBLE. You can't stay here, Mr. Prout – the Police Inspector wants you back at the Embassy. To tell him about Mr. Muller.

PROUT. But I can't! Not now! My career's at stake! I'll see him tomorrow! I can't possibly come to the Embassy now!

KIBBLE. Then he'll be over here, asking you questions in front of Sir Clive.

PROUT. I'll come to the Embassy now. We've got two hours – I can spare the police ten minutes. God knows why this had to happen just when everything was running smoothly.

(Suddenly the kitchen boiler produces further alarming rumbles.)

KIBBLE. Apart from losing Sir Clive's luggage.

PROUT. And that infernal boiler! What's it doing now? The taps aren't even running!

KIBBLE. Ah, I've heard that noise before. My Aunt Elsie's boiler made a noise like that. We didn't let it worry us. Uncle George said he'd fix it when his leg was better.

PROUT. And did he?

KIBBLE. No – in the end he didn't need to.

PROUT. It stopped of its own accord?

KIBBLE. In a way, yes. It blew up.

PROUT. Good grief!

KIBBLE. Uncle George said afterwards we should have loosened the valve-tappets.

PROUT. Valve-tappets? D'you know where to find them?

KIBBLE. I think so.

PROUT. Well then, for God's sake, let's do it! Quick!

(PROUT hurries KIBBLE into the kitchen.)

KIBBLE. Of course, this may be a different model. Aunt Elsie lived in Saffron Walden.

(PROUT and KIBBLE are in the kitchen, dealing with the boiler, which will produce diminishing rumbles during the next few

minutes. As they close the kitchen-door behind them, the door of the stage-right bedroom opens, and PARTRIDGE emerges with a penitent ASTRID.)

ASTRID. I'm sorry, Poochy ... I am too hasty ... always I jump to the wrong confusion ...

PARTRIDGE. It's all right, my dear, I understand how you felt. Besides, I should have remembered sooner about my wife.

ASTRID. What made her dye her hair red?

PARTRIDGE. Who know what makes women do anything? I just got home and found she had red hair. She kept it red for several weeks. Then she went back to blonde again.

ASTRID. Does she often change her colour?

PARTRIDGE. Constantly. She dyes her hair at the drop of a hat. That's why it slipped my mind when you first mentioned it.

ASTRID. And I thought my Poochy was with another woman.

PARTRIDGE. *(Laughing it off.)* And all the time I was with my wife!

ASTRID. Now Poochy, you know I don't mind your seeing your wife. I object only with women you might make love to.

PARTRIDGE. Yes, yes, my sweet. Well, I'm glad you don't mind my seeing my wife – but I don't think we should let my wife see you. And her plane gets in at seven-thirty. So ...

ASTRID. Oh Poochy, then we have an hour. We could go to bed, yes?

PARTRIDGE. Er, we couldn't go to bed, no. Er ... the sheets aren't aired. And you know I hate to rush these things. Besides, there's this idiot here from the Embassy. We have to be discreet. Tomorrow I have an election.

ASTRID. Tomorrow is too late. I shall be back in Brussels.

PARTRIDGE. No, no, you must be back in Brussels tonight. If you go now, you can catch the early plane.

ASTRID. But Poochy, it's been weeks ...

(ASTRID is now affectionate, and slides her hand inside PARTRIDGE's kimono, to caress his chest. PARTRIDGE is torn between lust and anxiety as the kitchen door opens, the boiler

Hungry for More?

THIS IS A SAMPLE OF THE SCRIPT

Buy the **full script** and explore other titles

www.samuelfrench.com

www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk



[Breaking Character]

An Online Resource for Theatre Makers



Titles are subject to availability depending on your territory.