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SF PERUSALS

TIME AND THE CONWAYS

A Play in Three Acts

by J. B. Priestley

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The Good Companions

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Boynton Priestley was born on 13th September 1894 in Yorkshire. After leaving school at sixteen, he worked in a wool office, but was determined to become a writer, with his spare time spent buying books and writing. His first published article was "Secrets of the Rag-Time King" which appeared in London Opinion in 1912.

His writing success allowed him to enter the theatre world, working on *The Good Companions* and his first solo play *Dangerous Corner*. Some of his best-known plays include: *Time & The Conways, I Have Been Here Before, An Inspector Calls* and *When We Are Married*.

TIME AND THE CONWAYS

Produced at the Duchess Theatre, London, on 26th August 1937, with the following cast of characters:

CONWAYS: MRS CONWAY	Barbara Everest
ALAN	Raymond Huntley
MADGE	Molly Rankin
ROBIN	Alexander Archdale
HAZEL	Rosemary Scott
KAY	Joan Forbes-Robertson
CAROL	Eileen Erskine
OTHERS: JOAN HELFORD	Helen Horsey
ERNEST BEEVERS	Mervyn Johns
GERALD THORNTON	Wilfred Babbage

The play was produced by Irene Hentschel.

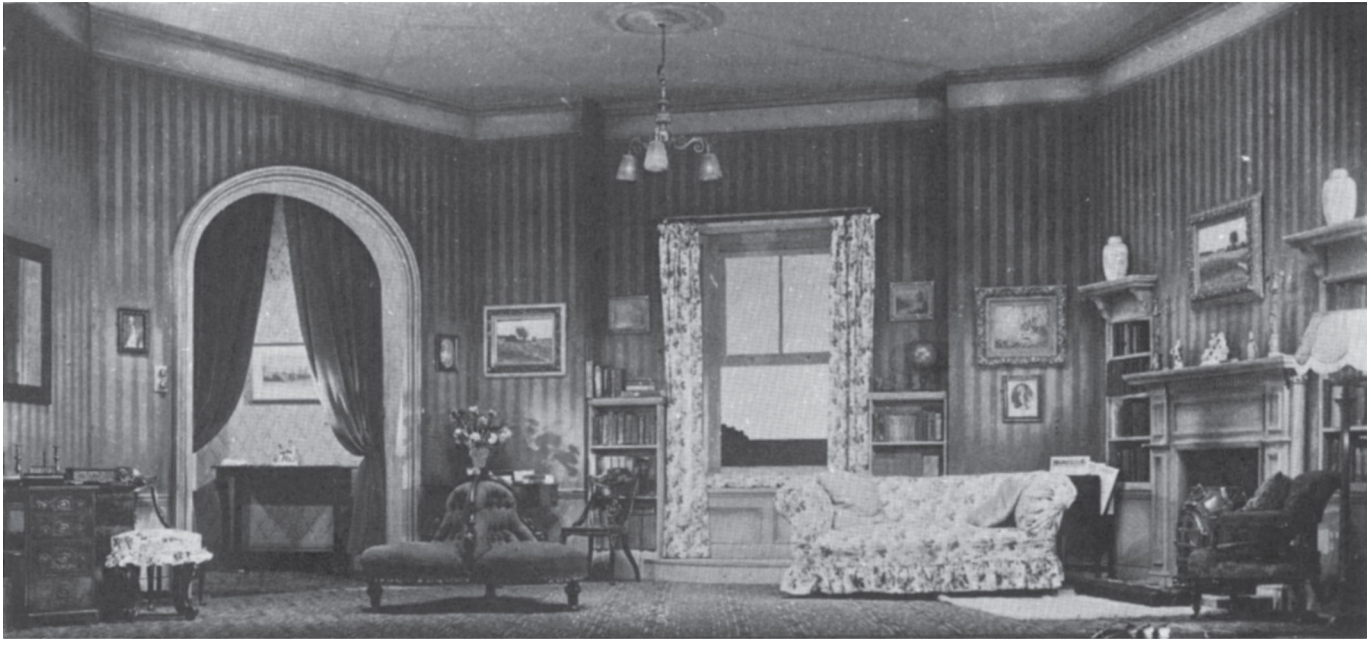
SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I
That night. Kay's twenty-first birthday.

ACT II
Another night. And another birthday.

ACT III
That night again. Her twenty-first birthday.
(Act III is continuous with Act I)

The scene throughout is a sitting-room in Mrs Conway's house, a detached villa in a prosperous suburb of a manufacturing town Newlingham. Acts I and III take place on an Autumn night in 1919. Act II on an Autumn night in the 1930s.



ACT I and ACT III

ACT II

ACT I

SCENE**. A sitting-room in* **MRS CONWAY's house. An autumn evening of 1919.*

The room looks very cosy, although it has no doorway, only the large curtained archway on the right. At the back is a window with a step up to it, and a cushioned seat. The curtains are drawn. On the left is a fireplace with an anthracite stove, glowing red. There are several small bookcases against and in the walls, some pieces of fairly good furniture, and some passable pictures. It is obviously one of those nondescript rooms, used by the family far more than the drawing-room is, and variously called the Back Room, the Morning Room, the School Room, the Nursery, the Blue, Brown or Red Room. This might easily have been called the Red Room, for in this light it seems to range from pink to plum colour, and it makes a fine cosy setting for the girls in their party dresses.

See Photograph of Scene.

When the curtain rises, the stage is in darkness. Then all we can see at first is the strong light from the hall coming gradually up through the curtained archway on the right of the room, and a little red firelight on the other side. But we can hear young voices chattering and laughing and singing, the sharp little explosion of a cracker or two, and a piano playing popular musical-comedy tunes of the period. After a moment, a number of voices begin to sing the tune we hear on the piano. It is all very jolly indeed, and the total effect should be that of a party in progress, which has not yet invaded

this room. Plenty of time should be given the audience to take this in before individual voices are distinctly heard.

HAZEL *(offstage right, but loud and clear)* Mother, where shall we put them?

MRS CONWAY *(farther off, but very clear)* In the back room. Then we'll act out here.

HAZEL *(offstage)* Yes, marvellous! *(Calling to somebody farther away, almost screaming)* Carol—in the back room. Don't let them come in, will you, Mother.

After a moment, she dashes in, switching on the light from the switch below the arch right. She is a very pretty girl in her very early twenties, nicely dressed in a sort of semi-evening dress. She is carrying an armful of old clothes, hats, etc., that people use for charades. She is in high spirits.

By the time **HAZEL** *has put down—on the ottoman right centre—her old clothes,* **CAROL CONWAY** *dashes in with another armful.* **CAROL** *is only about seventeen or eighteen, a very attractive, sweet-natured, high-spirited girl. Now she is excited—and breathless from dashing up and down stairs. Her stock includes a cigar-box filled with old false moustaches and beards, false noses, monocles and spectacles, etc.* **HAZEL** *switches on the standard lamp down left from the switch below the arch right.* **CAROL** *drops an old lady's felt hat containing a small black fan, red rose and Spanish comb, on the table up right.*

CAROL *(panting)* I've found— *(Gasps)* —the box—with all the false whiskers and things in. *(She puts the rest of her bundle on the chesterfield left)*

HAZEL *(triumphantly)* I knew it hadn't been thrown away. *(She moves centre)*

CAROL *(right of the chesterfield)* Nobody'd *dare* to throw it away. *(She holds it out, with the lid open)* Look!

HAZEL, *right of* **CAROL**, *makes a grab at it.*

Don't *snatch*!

HAZEL *(not angrily)* Well, I must *look*, mustn't I, idiot?

They both, like children, eagerly explore the contents of the box.

Bags I this one. *(She fishes out a large drooping black moustache)* Oo—and this! *(She fishes out a very bulbous false nose with red moustache attached)*

CAROL *(an unselfish creature)* All right, but don't take *all* the good ones, Hazel. Kay and Madge will want some. *(She crosses to below left end of the chesterfield, looking through the clothes)* I think Kay ought to have *first* choice. After all, it's *her* birthday—and you know how she adores charades. Mother won't want any of these because she'd rather look grand, wouldn't she? Spanish or Russian or something. What are you doing?

HAZEL *has turned aside to fasten on the nose and moustache and now has managed it, though they are not very secure. She now turns round.*

HAZEL *(above the ottoman, in a deep voice)* Good morning, good morning.

CAROL *(moving to left of* **HAZEL***—with a scream of delight)* Mr Pennyman! You know, Hazel, at the paper shop? The one who hates Lloyd George and wags his head very slowly all the time he tells you Lloyd George is no good. Do Mr Pennyman, Hazel. Go on.

HAZEL *(in her ordinary voice, incongruous)* I couldn't, Carol. I've only seen him about twice. I never go to the paper shop.

ALAN *looks in, grinning when he sees* **HAZEL**. *He is a shy, quiet young man, in his earlier twenties, who can*

have a slight stammer. He is dressed rather carelessly in ordinary clothes. **CAROL** *sees him. She crosses above* **HAZEL** *to* **ALAN** *in the arch, takes his hand and brings him in to left of* **HAZEL.**

CAROL Alan, come in and don't let the others see. Isn't she *exactly* like Mr Pennyman at the paper shop, the one who hates Lloyd George?

ALAN *(grinning shyly)* She is—a bit.

HAZEL *(in a fantastic deep voice)* "I hate Lloyd George."

ALAN No, he doesn't talk like that, Hazel.

CAROL Not the least little bit. *(She pushes* **HAZEL** *away to up right and kneels on the upstage seat of the ottoman)* He says— *(With a rather good imitation of a thick semi-educated man's voice)* "I'll tell yew what it is—Mish Conway—that there Lloyd George—they're going to be shorry they ever put 'im where they did—shee?"

ALAN *(at right end of the chesterfield, grinning)* Yes, that's him. Very good, Carol.

CAROL *(rising—excitedly)* I think I ought to be an actress. They said at school I was the best Shylock they'd ever had.

HAZEL *(taking off the nose and moustache)* You can have these if you like, Carol. *(She comes centre, to right of* **CAROL**, *hands them over, then passes on to sit at left end of the chesterfield)*

CAROL *(taking them)* Are you sure you don't want them? I don't think you ought to dress up as a silly man, because you're so pretty. Perhaps I could wear these and do Mr Pennyman. Couldn't we bring him into the third syllable somehow? Instead of a general. I think we've had enough generals.

ALAN We have. Ask Kay to work in Mr Pennyman instead.

HAZEL Kay ought to be here now, planning everything.

ALAN She's coming in. Mother told me to tell you not to make too much of a mess in here.

CAROL You *must* have a mess with charades. It's part of it.

HAZEL And just wait till Mother starts dressing up. She makes more mess than anybody. *(To* **ALAN***)* I hope some of the old ones are going now. Are they?

ALAN Yes.

HAZEL It's much more fun without them. And Mother daren't let herself go while they're still here. Tell Kay and Madge to come in, Alan.

ALAN Right.

ALAN *goes out. Some voices are heard above the background of party noises, saying, "Are they nearly ready?" etc. etc. The two girls begin turning the clothes over.* **HAZEL** *picks out some old-fashioned women's things and holds them up or against herself.*

HAZEL *(below the chesterfield, picking up an old-fashioned lady's evening cloak)* Look at this! Could you believe people *ever* wore such ridiculous things?

CAROL *(crossing to take it from* **HAZEL***)* I can just remember Mother in that, can't you? *(She returns, looking at it, and puts it down on the upstage seat of the ottoman)*

HAZEL Of course I can, infant!

Piano and noises stop.

CAROL *(more soberly, looking at a man's old-fashioned shooting or Norfolk coat which she has picked up from the upstage seat of the ottoman)* That was Daddy's, wasn't it?

HAZEL Yes. I believe he wore it—that very holiday.

CAROL Perhaps we ought to put it away.

HAZEL I don't think Mother would mind—now.

CAROL *(holding the coat against herself)* Yes, she would. And I know I would. I don't want anybody to dress up and be funny in the coat Father wore just before he was drowned. *(A*

pause. She puts the coat behind the curtain in right corner of the window-seat and turns, standing on the step) I wonder if it's very horrible being drowned.

HAZEL *(impatiently)* Oh, don't start that all over again, Carol. Don't you remember how you used to go on asking that—until Mother was furious?

CAROL Yes—but I was only a kid then.

HAZEL Well, now that you think you aren't a kid any longer, just stop it.

CAROL *(coming down to right end of the chesterfield)* It was the coat that made me remember. You see, Hazel, to be talking and laughing and all jolly, all just the same as usual—and then, only half an hour afterwards—to be drowned—it's so horrible. It seemed awfully quick to us—but perhaps to him, there in the water, it may have seemed to take ages—

HAZEL *(crossing below the ottoman to right of it)* Oh, stop it, Carol. Just when we're having some fun. Why do you?

Piano re-starts playing softly **"THE TICKLE TOE"***—2nd part chorus 2 1/2 times.*

CAROL *(coming centre)* I don't know. But don't you often feel like that? Just when everything is very jolly and exciting, I suddenly think of something awfully serious, sometimes horrible—like Dad drowning—or that little mad boy I once saw with the *huge head*—or that old man who walks in the Park with that great lump growing out of his face—

HAZEL *(stopping her ears)* I'm not listening. I'm not listening.

CAROL *(left of the ottoman)* They pop up right in the middle of the jolly stuff, you know, Hazel. It happens to Kay too. So it must be in the family—a bit.

Some voices are heard off. Enter **MADGE.** *She is a year or two older than* **HAZEL,** *not so pretty, and a far more serious and responsible person. She has been to Girton, and already done a little teaching, and you feel all this*

in her brisk, decided, self-confident manner. She is too an earnest enthusiast.

MADGE *(looking at the things on the ottoman and crossing above it to below the chesterfield, where she picks up a man's old overcoat)* You found them? Good. I didn't think we'd have so many old things left. Mother ought to have given them away.

HAZEL *drifts up to the table up right.* **CAROL**, *who allowed* **MADGE** *to cross below her, goes to right of the ottoman to look for clothes.*

HAZEL *(going above the ottoman to the right arm of the chesterfield and sitting)* I'm glad she didn't. Besides, who'd have had them?

MADGE *(at the fireplace)* Lots of people would have been glad of them. You never realize, Hazel, how wretchedly poor most people are. It just doesn't occur to you, does it?

HAZEL *(not crossly)* Don't be schoolmistressy, Madge.

CAROL *has been putting on a mandarin collar at the mirror over the desk down right and now holds a fan behind her head as headdress.*

CAROL *(pointing at* **MADGE**, *impishly)* Has Gerald Thornton arrived?

MADGE As a matter of fact, he has—a few minutes ago.

CAROL *(triumphantly)* I knew it. I could see it in your eye, Madge.

MADGE *runs across at* **CAROL** *below the ottoman.* **CAROL** *backs to the desk and throws the fan at her.*

MADGE Don't be absurd. *(Going to the table up right and picking up the old felt hat)* He's brought another man with him, a new client of his, who's desperately anxious to know this family.

HAZEL So he ought to be. Nice?

MADGE *(returning to below the chesterfield)* Oh—a funny little man.

CAROL *(above the ottoman, dancing about)* That's just what we want—a funny little man. Perfect for charades.

MADGE No, not that kind. In fact, he probably hasn't any sense of humour. Very shy, so far, and terrified of Mother. Very much the little business man, I should think.

CAROL Is he a profiteer—like the ones in "Punch"?

MADGE He looks as if he might be, some day. His name's Ernest Beevers.

HAZEL *(sliding off the right arm of the chesterfield to sit in right corner of it—giggling)* What a silly name! I'm sorry for his wife, if he has one.

The piano stops.

MADGE I gather he hasn't. Look here, we ought to be starting.

Voices— "Hurry up, **KAY***," etc., stopping with the noise of a door shutting. Enter* **KAY***, whose twenty-first birthday party this is. An intelligent, sensitive girl, who need not be as pretty as* **HAZEL***. She has a sheet of paper and pencil.*

Kay, we ought to be starting.

KAY *(above the ottoman)* I know. The others are coming. *(She begins rooting among the things)* Some good costumes, here, ladies. Oo—look! *(She picks out from the upstage seat of the ottoman a large black cloak. She throws it round her, then goes up to the window, stands and strikes an absurd melodramatic attitude and speaks in a false stilted tone)* One moment, Lord Thing-umti-bob. If I am discovered here, who will believe that my purpose in coming here tonight—visiting your—er—rooms—er—unaccompanied—was solely to obtain the—er—papers—that will enable me to clear—er—my husband's name, the name of a man who—er—has asked nothing better than the—er—privilege of serving his country—one who—that is—to whom— *(Dropping centre*

and speaking in an ordinary tone) No, I'm getting all tied up. You know, we ought to have had a scene like that, all grand and dramatic and full of *papers.*

MADGE Well, what *are* we to have?

HAZEL *(coolly)* I've forgotten the word.

MADGE *goes up left of the chesterfield, gets "The Nation" from the table behind the chesterfield and some feathers to adorn her hat. She then drifts back at her leisure to sit on the footstool by the fire left, fixing the feathers and glancing at "The Nation."*

CAROL *(above the ottoman, indignantly)* Hazel, you're the *limit*! And we spent hours working it out!

HAZEL I didn't. Only you and Kay, just because you fancy yourselves as budding authoresses and actresses.

KAY *(right of the chesterfield, severely)* The word—idiot!—is *Pussyfoot.* Puss. See. Foot. Then the whole word.

MADGE I think four scenes are too many. And they'll easily guess it.

KAY That doesn't matter. It makes them happy if they guess it.

CAROL *(rather solemnly)* The great thing is—to *dress up.*

Voices— "Can't we go in yet? Do let me see," etc. Enter **MRS CONWAY**. *She is a charming woman in her middle forties, very nicely dressed, with an easy vivacious manner.*

MRS CONWAY Now I'm ready—if you are. *(She comes to above the ottoman, throwing things about as she looks for something)* What a mess you're making. I knew you would. Let me see.

She dives further into the clothes, and scatters them far more wildly than the others have done. Crossing to below the chesterfield she finally fishes out a Spanish shawl.

Ah—here they are. Now, I shall be a Spanish beauty. *(Moving to centre)* I know a song for it, too. *(She begins putting the Spanish things on.)*

KAY *fetches safety-pins from the table up right and comes back to left of her.* **CAROL** *assists from right of her.*

HAZEL *(to* **KAY***)* What did I tell you?

MRS CONWAY *(who is specially fond of* **HAZEL***)* What did you tell her, darling?

HAZEL I told Kay, whatever she arranged, you'd insist on doing your Spanish turn.

MRS CONWAY Well, why not?

KAY It doesn't come into the scenes I'd thought of, that's all.

MRS CONWAY *(busy with her costume)* Oh—you can easily arrange that, dear—you're so clever. I've just been telling Doctor Halliday and his niece how clever you are. They seemed surprised, I can't imagine why.

She goes to the table up right for the fan, comb and rose. **CAROL** *helps her.*

HAZEL It's the first time I've seen Monica Halliday out of her land-girl costume. I'm surprised she didn't turn up tonight in her trousers and leggings.

MRS CONWAY *comes down to the mirror above the desk down right to fix her Spanish comb, then throws the lace collar of her frock over it for a mantilla.* **CAROL** *stands on the right seat of the ottoman to help.*

KAY She looks quite queer out of them, doesn't she? Rather like a female impersonator.

MADGE Oh, come on, Kay. What do we do?

KAY The first scene, *Puss*, is an old lady who's lost her cat. She's really a kind of witch.

CAROL *(happily, jumping off the ottoman and going above it)* I'm to be the old lady.

She begins finding suitable clothes—a black skirt, an old shawl with some white hair attached for the old lady. During the following dialogue, she converts herself into a very creditable imitation.

KAY Mother, you and Hazel are her two daughters who are visiting her—

MRS CONWAY *(still adjusting her get-up at the mirror)* Yes, dear.

HAZEL I know my bit. I keep saying, "I always hated that terrible cat of yours, Mother." What can I wear? *(She pokes about)*

MRS CONWAY *(crossing below the ottoman to left centre, below the chesterfield—now Spanish)* Well, that's all right, dear, I'll be the Spanish daughter, you see.

KAY *(at right end of the chesterfield, resignedly)* She didn't have a Spanish daughter, but I suppose it doesn't matter.

MRS CONWAY *(sitting in right corner of the chesterfield)* Not in the least. Nobody cares. And then I think I'd better not appear in the others, because I suppose you'll be wanting me to sing afterwards.

KAY Of course. But I'd put you down for two more. Madge and Joan Helford will have to do those.

During the following scene **CAROL** *sits on right seat of the ottoman and* **HAZEL** *on upstage seat of ottoman, very unobtrusively arranging their costumes.* **MADGE** *is sitting on the footstool by the fire left, reading "The Nation."*

MRS CONWAY What a pity Robin isn't here! You know, Madge, he wrote and said he might be demobbed any day now, and it seems such a shame just to miss Kay's party. Robin loves parties. He's like me. Your father never cared for them much. Suddenly, right in the middle, just when everything was getting going, he'd want to be quiet—and take me into a

corner and ask me how much longer people were staying—just when they were beginning to enjoy themselves. I never could understand that.

KAY I can. I've often felt like that.

MRS CONWAY But why, dear, why? It isn't sensible. If you're having a party, you're having a party.

KAY *(earnestly)* Yes, it isn't that. And it isn't that you suddenly dislike the people. But you feel—at least I do, and I suppose that's what Father felt too—you feel, quite suddenly, that it isn't *real* enough—and you want something to be *real*. Do you see, Mother?

MRS CONWAY No, I don't, my dear. It sounds a little morbid to me. But your father could be quite morbid sometimes—you mightn't think so, but he could—and I suppose you take after him.

KAY *(kneeling right of the chesterfield and speaking very gravely)* Do you think that sometimes, in a mysterious sort of way, he *knew*?

HAZEL *has risen to show* **CAROL** *the evening cloak she is wearing.*

MRS CONWAY *(not too attentive to this)* Knew *what*, dear? Look at Hazel; doesn't she look rather sweet? I can remember where I first wore those things. Absurd! Knew *what*?

HAZEL *sits again.*

KAY Knew what was going to happen to him. You know, Alan said that some of the men he knew who were killed in the trenches seemed to know sometimes that they were going to be killed, as if a kind of shadow fell over them. Just as if—now and then—we could see round the corner—into the future.

MRS CONWAY *(easily)* You have the most extraordinary ideas. You must try and put some of them into your book. Are you happy, darling?

KAY *(rising)* Yes, Mother. Very happy.

MRS CONWAY That's all right, then. I want you to have a lovely birthday. I feel we all can be happy again, now that the horrible war's all over and people are sensible again, and Robin and Alan are quite safe. I forgot to ask— Did Robin send you anything, Kay?

KAY No. I didn't expect him to.

MRS CONWAY Oh—but that isn't like Robin, you know, Kay. He's a most generous boy, much too generous, really. Now, that may mean he thinks he's coming home very soon.

Voices off—"Aren't they ready," etc.,—and continue as background until cue. Enter **ALAN** *with* **JOAN HELFORD**, *who is* **HAZEL***'s friend and the same age, pretty and rather foolish.* **ALAN** *remains by the arch.* **JOAN** *comes above the ottoman to centre.*

KAY Alan, tell them we're beginning—and it's three syllables.

ALAN *goes.* **CAROL** *rises and gets her old lady costume ready.*

JOAN I think you all look marvellous. I'm rotten at this, you know, Kay. Don't say I didn't warn you.

KAY Now then, Carol, you start. And remember, only say "Puss," once. Don't you two say it—only Carol.

ALAN *re-enters to downstage corner of arch.* **CAROL** *puts on her shawl with grey hair attached and, bent nearly double as the old lady, goes below and round the ottoman and off, saying: "Now where are my two daughters? Where are they! I haven't seen them for years!" Loud applause and laughter off as she exits.*

Good old Carol! Now then—you two. *(She almost pushes them off)*

HAZEL *flounces off, followed by* **MRS CONWAY** *with exaggerated Spanish gait. More applause and laughter, which stops with a door-slam.*

Now the next syllable is *"S-Y"* So I thought it wouldn't be cheating too badly if we called that "sy." Y'know, Cockney—"I sy, Bert." So this is an East End scene. Madge, you're the old mother.

MADGE *(who has started putting on very droll and shabby clothes—at the fire)* Yes, I remembered.

ALAN *(above desk right)* What am I? I forget.

KAY You're Bert. Just put something silly on. *(Coming to above the ottoman)* Is there anything here you can wear, Joan?

ALAN *drifts across at back to behind chesterfield where he finds a paper top-hat and scarf.* **JOAN**, *left of the ottoman, finds a white petticoat and starts putting it on.*

JOAN I was in London last week, staying with my uncle, and we went to the theatre *three times. (Moving to the table above the chesterfield and then back to right of the chesterfield)* We saw "Tilly of Bloomsbury" and "Cinderella Man" and "Kissing Time." I liked "Cinderella Man" best—Owen Nares, y'know. I thought Robin was coming home soon.

KAY *(left of* **JOAN***)* He is.

JOAN He's an officer, isn't he? You weren't an officer, were you, Alan?

ALAN *(sitting on the desk down right)* No, I was a lance-corporal. One stripe, y'know. Nothing at all.

JOAN Didn't you want to be anything better than that?

ALAN No.

KAY Alan has no ambition at all. Have you, my pet?

ALAN *(simply)* Not much.

JOAN If I were a man, I'd want to be very important. What are you doing now, Alan? Somebody said you were at the Town Hall.

ALAN I am. In the Rate Office. Just a clerk, y'know.

JOAN Isn't it dull?

ALAN Yes. *(He strikes a match to light his pipe which he has been filling)*

KAY Alan never minds being dull. I believe he has tremendous long adventures inside his head that nobody knows anything about.

JOAN Hazel says you've started to write another novel, Kay. Have you?

KAY *(rather curtly)* Yes.

JOAN I don't know how you can—I mean, I think I'd be all right once I'd started properly—but I can't see how you start. What did you do with the last one?

KAY Burnt it.

JOAN Why?

KAY It was putrid.

JOAN But wasn't that an awful waste of time?

KAY Yes, I suppose so.

ALAN Still, look at the time you and I waste, Joan.

JOAN Oh—no—I'm always doing *something*. Even though I haven't to go to the canteen any more, I'm always busy.

MADGE, *still sitting on the footstool by the fire, now laughs.*

Why do you laugh, Madge?

MADGE Can't a girl laugh?

JOAN *(humbly)* You always did laugh at me, Madge. I suppose because I'm not clever, like you.

Voices off and applause, as **HAZEL** *enters, then the voice of* **MRS CONWAY** *singing "**CARMEN**" [2nd Number— Castanet Dance—Act II].*

HAZEL *(coming to above the ottoman to take off her cloak, etc)* Well, you can imagine what happened. Mother let herself go, and of course it became all Spanish. I don't believe they'll ever remember hearing "puss" mentioned. What are you supposed to be, Joan?

JOAN *(below the chesterfield left centre, turning round to show her costume)* A sort of coster girl.

HAZEL You look a sort of general mess. Oh—*(To* **KAY***)* Carol wants to do Mr Pennyman at the paper shop instead of a general for the third syllable. *(She goes down to the desk right to take the scarf off her head at the mirror)*

KAY How can she? If it's soldiers drilling, you can't have Mr Pennyman. Unless we make him another soldier—and get Gerald Thornton or somebody to be a general.

Loud applause off. **MRS CONWAY** *has finished her song and can now be heard dancing to the repeat of the chorus.* **CAROL** *returns, very hot and flushed, and begins taking off her old woman's disguise.*

CAROL *(coming to above the ottoman)* Mother's still on. Golly! —it's baking being an old witch.

KAY *(right of the chesterfield)* Do you insist on being Mr Pennyman in the third syllable?

CAROL *(brightening up)* Oo—I'd forgotten that. *(To* **KAY***, putting her arms round her and swinging her round)* Yes, please let me do Mr Pennyman, Kay—my lamb, my love, my precious— *(After swinging* **KAY** *round she goes to below the chesterfield)*

KAY All right. But he'll have to be a soldier. Just joined up, you see.

Big applause and laughter off. Enter **MRS CONWAY** *very grand, flushed, triumphant. She is carrying a glass of claret cup. She comes above the ottoman and sits on left seat of it.*

MRS CONWAY Well—really—that was *very* silly—but they seemed to enjoy it, and that's the great thing. I thought you were very good, Carol. *(To* **KAY***)* Carol was sweet, Kay. Now, don't ask me to do any more of this, because really I mustn't, especially if you want me to sing afterwards. So leave me out, Kay. *(She begins to sip cup)*

KAY All right. Now, come on—

She begins shepherding her players, **MADGE, ALAN, JOAN**.

JOAN Honestly, Kay, I'll be *awful—*

KAY It doesn't matter. You've nothing to do. Now then— Madge—

MADGE *(loudly, in laborious imitation of a Cockney mother)* Nah then, Bert. End yew, Dy-sy. Cem along or we'll be lite.

She crosses above the ottoman to the arch and, taking **JOAN** *and* **ALAN** *with her, leads the way off. Applause, and then voices finish on door-slam.*

HAZEL *(right of the ottoman)* How on earth did you get that claret cup, Mother?

MRS CONWAY *(complacently)* Got Gerald Thornton to hand it to me—and it rounded off my little scene nicely. I don't want any more. Would you like it?

HAZEL *takes it and sips. They are all removing things.*

CAROL *(having now put on a frock-coat ready for Mr Pennyman)* Mother, you weren't going to be an *actress*, were you—just a singer? *(She comes to left of* **MRS CONWAY** *on the ottoman and pulls out a pair of trousers on which* **MRS CONWAY** *is sitting. She then goes to below the chesterfield)*

MRS CONWAY I don't know what you mean by *just* a singer. I was a singer certainly. But I did some acting too. When the Newlingham Amateur Operatic first did "Merrie England," I played Bess. And I'd had all you children then. *You* were only about two, Carol.

HAZEL *(kneeling on right seat of the ottoman)* Mother, Joan *did* stay in London last week, and she went to three theatres.

MRS CONWAY She has relatives there, and we haven't. That makes a great difference.

HAZEL Aren't we *ever* going?

MRS CONWAY Yes, of course. Perhaps Robin will take us—I mean, just you and me—when he comes back—

CAROL *(now kneeling in right corner of chesterfield sorting out her next props—solemnly)* It says in the paper this morning that We Must All Get On With Our Jobs. This Mere Rush For Amusement has gone on long enough now. There's Work Waiting To Be Done.

HAZEL *(indignantly)* A fat lot of rushing for amusement we've done, haven't we? I think that's frightfully unfair and idiotic. Just when we *might* have some fun, after washing up in canteens and hospitals and queueing for foul food, with *nobody* about at all, they go and say we've had enough amusement and must get on with our jobs. What jobs?

CAROL *(getting off the chesterfield to pall on her trousers for "Mr Pennyman")* Re-building a shattered world. It said that too.

MRS CONWAY *(half lightly, half not, to* **HAZEL***)* Your job will be to find a very nice young man and marry him. And *that* oughtn't to be difficult—for you.

CAROL Hurry up, Hazel, and then I can be a bridesmaid. I believe you're my *only* chance. Kay says she won't get married for *ages*, if ever, because her Writing—her Work—must come first. *(She puts a large pad—a dress folded up—into her trousers for "Mr Pennyman's" stomach)*

MRS CONWAY That's nonsense, my dear. When the right young man comes along, she'll forget about her writing.

CAROL I don't believe she will, Mother. And anyhow, she won't have bridesmaids. *(She goes up right of the chesterfield with her back to the audience, getting moustache, etc., from the table above it)* And if Madge ever marries, I know it will be to some kind of Socialist in a tweed suit, who'll insist on being married in a Registry Office—

HAZEL I'm not so sure about that. I've had my eye on Madge lately.

CAROL *(turning by right end of chesterfield as "Mr Pennyman" —bowler-hat, glasses, walrus moustache, old morning coat and check trousers)* And I've 'ad my eye on Lloyd George. *(With a gesture to command attention)* An' what for, Mish Conway? Bee-corsh yew can't trusht that little Welshman. Yew watch 'im, that'sh all I shay—yew watch 'im!

MRS CONWAY That's *very* good, dear. You're rather like Mr Worsnop—do you remember him—the cashier at the works? Every New Year's Eve your father used to bring Mr Worsnop here, after they'd done all the books at the office, and used to give him some port. And when I went in, Mr Worsnop always stood and held his glass like this *(she holds an imaginary glass in a rather cringing attitude)* and say "My respects, Mrs Conway, my deepest respects." And I always wanted to laugh. He's retired now, and gone to live in South Devon. *(She rises and goes below the ottoman to the desk down right)*

After a slight pause, **MADGE**, *still in her absurd old costerwoman disguise, enters, followed by* **GERALD THORNTON**. *He is in his early thirties, a solicitor and son of a solicitor, and is fairly tall and good-looking, and carefully dressed. He has a pleasant, man-of-the-world air, very consciously cultivated.* **MADGE** *is arguing hotly, with all the fiery slapdash of enthusiastic youth.*

MADGE That's perfectly true, Gerald. *(As she enters)* But what the miners want and ask for is simply nationalization.

She comes above the ottoman to below the chesterfield. **GERALD** *follows to right of her.* **CAROL** *and* **HAZEL** *go to the table up right for chocolates and give one to* **MRS CONWAY**.

They say, if coal is so important as you say it is, then the mines shouldn't be in the hands of private owners any longer. Nationalize them, they say. That's the fairest thing.

GERALD All right. But supposing we don't want them nationalized. What then? Some of us have seen enough of government mismanagement already.

MRS CONWAY *(right of the ottoman with chocolate)* Quite so, Gerald. Everybody knows how ridiculous they were. Sending bags of sand to Egypt!

MADGE *(crossing to above the ottoman, taking off coster costume—hotly)* I don't believe half those stories. Besides, they had to improvise everything in a hurry. And anyhow, it wasn't a *Socialist* government.

GERALD *(mildly)* But you don't know they'd be any better. They might be worse—less experience.

MADGE *(in the same tone)* Oh—I know that *experience*! We're always having that flung in our faces. When all that's wanted is a little intelligence—and enthusiasm—and—and decency.

Voices, etc., off. **MADGE** *goes above the chesterfield to put down some of her things.*

GERALD *(crossing centre* to **MRS CONWAY** *and speaking rather as one adult to another at a children's party)* I've been conscripted for the next scene. To be a general or something.

HAZEL *(below the table up right)* We haven't fancy dress for you.

GERALD Good!

MRS CONWAY I really mustn't neglect them any longer, must I? And most of them will be going soon. Then we can have a nice cosy little party of our own.

She goes up to the arch and caresses **HAZEL***'s hair as she goes out.*

CAROL *(moving to right of* **GERALD**, *who is centre)* Well, you must look different somehow, you know. You could turn your coat inside out. *(She starts to take his coat off)*

GERALD I don't think that would be very effective.

CAROL *(impatiently)* Wear an overcoat, then. *(Crossing below him to the chesterfield and kneeling on it)* Oh—and— *(She fishes out a large false moustache from the box on the table above the chesterfield and gives it to him)* Put this on, and this. *(She gives him a peaked paper hat)* That's a *very* good one. Try them on over there by the mirror.

CAROL *pushes him down below the ottoman to the mirror above the desk right.* **MADGE** *says, "Here, Gerald," as she throws a man's overcoat across to him.* **JOAN** *rushes in, more animated now her ordeal is over, and comes above the ottoman to centre.*

JOAN *(excitedly, girlish)* Hazel, d'you know who's here? You'll never guess!

HAZEL Who?

JOAN That *awful* little man who always stares at you—the one who followed us once all round the Park—

HAZEL He's *not*!

JOAN He is, I tell you. I distinctly saw him, standing at the side, near the door.

GERALD This sounds like my friend Beevers.

HAZEL *(kneeling on the upstage seat of the ottoman)* Do you mean to say the man you brought is *that* awful little man? Well, you're the absolute limit, Gerald Thornton! He's a *dreadful* little creature. Every time I go out, he's somewhere about, staring and staring at me. And now you bring him here!

GERALD *(at the desk down right, not worried by this outburst)* Oh—he's not so bad. He insisted on my bringing him, and your mother said it was all right. You shouldn't be so devastating, Hazel.

JOAN *kneels on the upstage seat of the ottoman, left of* **HAZEL.** **CAROL** *kneels on the left seat of the ottoman.*

JOAN *(giggly)* I told you he must be mad about you, Hazel.

HAZEL *(the haughty beauty now)* I swear I won't speak to him. He just would butt in like this!

CAROL Why shouldn't he, poor little manny?

HAZEL Shut up, Carol, you don't know anything about him.

CAROL *rises and crosses to below the chesterfield, putting on her bowler-hat. Half-hearted applause off. Enter* **KAY** *and* **ALAN.** **KAY** *comes centre.* **ALAN** *joins* **CAROL** *below the chesterfield.*

KAY That wasn't much good. The costers were a washout. Oh—that's all right, Carol. Now, you're a general, Gerald, and the others are recruits. Hurry up, Alan, and put something different on. Gerald, you're inspecting them—you know, make up something silly—and then say to one of them, "Look at your *foot*, my man." Anyhow, bring in "foot."

GERALD *(crossing left to join* **CAROL** *and* **ALAN** *below the chesterfield)* Have I only two recruits, Carol and Alan?

KAY *(centre)* No, mother's sending in another man. They aren't guessing anything yet, but that's simply because it's all such a muddle. I don't think I like charades as much as I used to do. Dad was marvellous at them. *(To* **GERALD***)* He always did very fat men. You'd better be a fat general. And you can be fat too, Alan.

GERALD *gets two cushions from the chesterfield and* **ALAN** *one cushion from the chair below the fire. As the men are stuffing cushions under their coats,* **ERNEST BEEVERS**

enters slowly and shyly. He is a little man, about thirty, still socially shy and awkward, chiefly because his social background is rather lower in the scale than that of the **CONWAYS**, *but there is a suggestion of growing force and self-confidence in him. He is obviously attracted towards the whole family*, *but completely fascinated by* **HAZEL**.

ERNEST *(in the archway*, *shyly and awkwardly)* Oh—er—Mrs Conway told me to come in here.

JOAN, *who is sitting on the upstage seat of the ottoman, giggles.* **KAY** *nudges her to stop her.*

KAY Yes, of course. You've to be one of the recruits in this next bit.

ERNEST I'm—not much good—at this sort of thing—you know—

KAY It doesn't matter. Just be silly.

GERALD Oh—Beevers—sorry! *(He turns to reveal his exaggeratedly padded stomach)* I'd better introduce you.

He comes centre, to left of **BEEVERS**. **HAZEL** *rises and goes down to the desk right.* **GERALD** *carries off a slightly awkward situation with a determined light touch.*

This—is Mr Ernest Beevers, a rather recent arrival in our—er—progressive city. Now, all these are Conways, except this young lady—Miss Joan Helford—

ERNEST *(seriously*, *shaking hands with her)* How d'you do?

JOAN *(rising and going down right to join* **HAZEL** *by the desk—faintly giggly)* How d'you do?

GERALD This is Kay, who decided to be twenty-one today so that we could have this party—

ERNEST *(crossing to her centre to shake hands)* Many happy returns.

KAY *(nicely)* Thank you.

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