When the Cat's Away

A Comedy in Two Acts

by Johnnie Mortimer
and
Brian Cooke

A Samuel French Acting Edition



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The first performance of WHEN THE CAT'S AWAY was held in June 1977, at the Pier Theatre, Bournemouth, with the following cast:

MILDRED ROPER.....Yootha Joyce
GEORGE ROPER.....Brian Murphy
ETHEL POMFREY.....Dilys Laye
HUMPHREY POMFREY.....Reginald Marsh
JENNIFER FRAZER..... Sue Bond
SHIRLEY.....Roseanne Wickes

CAST

MILDRED ROPER
GEORGE ROPER
ETHEL POMFREY
HUMPHREY POMFREY
JENNIFER FRAZER
SHIRLEY

TIME

THE PRESENT

PLACE

THE ROPER'S HOUSE IN HAMPTON WICK

ACT I

Scene 1	Saturday, 3:30 pm
Scene 2	Saturday, 9:00 am (One week later)

ACT II

Scene 1	Saturday, 12 midnight
Scene 2	Sunday, 9 am

EPILOGUE

ACT I

Scene 1

TIME: The present. About 3:30 on a Saturday afternoon in summer.

SCENE: The living room of a house in Hampton Wick, the home of George and Mildred Roper. It's a modern house, built for the young executive market, but the furniture lets it down, a bit too old, a bit too cheap and a bit too vulgar. A reproduction of "The Green Lady" hangs on the wall and sets the tone for the room

It is a split level and stairs lead up UL to a raised landing running UL to UR, which has doors leading off to the bedroom and the bathroom. The equivalent of the first floor if this were not a dormer bungalow. At the UR end of the landing is a small table, containing a large plant, which partly obscures the face of a grandmother clock behind it.

From the DS living area there is a door DR which leads to the kitchen. Next to it is a partly open hatch. DL there is a row of coat pegs, with several coats hanging on them, the front door,

a window beside it and next to that, at right angles, a door to the downstairs W.C. and cloakroom. these lead off from a slightly raised area, divided off by a rail or low room divider to give the feel of a small entrance hall. One step leads down into the main living area. Next to the front door DS, is a table with a telephone on it.

Underneath the hatch DR is a gate-leg dining table, now folded and stacked against the wall. Four dining chairs next to it, two either side.

DCL is a convertible settee, set at a slight angle, but mainly facing DS. Beside it is a matching armchair and in front a low coffee table. On the table are some holiday brochures, and an ashtray.

DL is a TV set. UC beneath the raised landing is a long sideboard containing some tasteless ornaments, a bottle of wine, a soda syphon and a piggy bank .A table lamp, a record player and some records.

AT RISE: GEORGE backs in from the kitchen. He's sloppily dressed in a baggy cardigan, slippers, etc. He carries a tray of condiments, cutlery, bottle of brown sauce. He's talking back into the kitchen as he enters. He's defiant.

GEORGE. No, no, no, no, no! I'm sorry, Mildred. My mind is made up. I am not going. I will not hear another word! (*He dumps the tray on the gate-leg table and wags a finger through the hatch.*) And it's no use you foldin' your arms and tightenin' your lips! (*Moves down center and declaims.*) It's pointless discussin' the matter further! D'you understand, Mildred?

MILDRED. (*Lets herself in the front door. She's wearing a coat and carries a shopping bag containing groceries.*) George?

GEORGE. (*Startled.*) Nyaa ... (*He falls over the chair.*)

MILDRED. Who were you shouting at? I could hear you in the street.

GEORGE. I was ... I was talking to myself.

MILDRED. At the top of your voice? (*She hangs her coat on the coat pegs.*)

GEORGE. Ah, well ... I ... my hearing's not what it was, Mildred.

MILDRED. Mmmm. Just make sure you never speak to *me* in that tone of voice.

GEORGE. Oh, I wouldn't, my sweet. I'm ... I was just about to set the table. (*During the following, he pulls the gate-leg table out from the wall and sets it up. He places the four dining chairs around it.*)

MILDRED. Good ... (*A thought, she delves in her shopping bag.*) Oh, I've got a new set of place mats ... (*Produces a cellophane wrapped set of four medium place mats, plus a large one.*) "The

Royal Children," coated in heat-resistant melamine. So tasteful.

GEORGE. I don't want that lot gawpin' up at me while I'm havin' me dinner! What's wrong with our "Festival o' Britain" set?

MILDRED. They are old and they are warped.

GEORGE. I like 'em.

MILDRED. You would! (*Slaps place mats into his hands.*) Lay them out! Respectfully! (*She exits to the kitchen with her shopping bag. He rips the cellophane from the place mats, grumbling.*)

GEORGE. It's ridiculous. I bet you *he* hasn't got *our* pictures on *his* place mats. (*Taps mat.*) Probably got "The Goons," or someone like that ...

(*MILDRED comes from the kitchen, carrying sideplates and a bowl of salad. She places them on the table and crosses to the sideboard.*)

MILDRED. By the way, while I was out, I called in on the travel agent ... I've got our tickets!

GEORGE. Ah! ... (*Stiffens, clears throat. The moment for which he's been preparing!*) No, no, no, no. I'm sorry, Mildred. My mind is made up. I'm not going. I will not hear another word! (*She turns, folds her arms and looks tightlipped. He has his back to her.*) And it's not use your foldin' your arms and tightenin' your lips!

MILDRED. (*She looks slightly surprised, since he can't see her.*) It's pointless discussing the matter further, George.

GEORGE. (*Still quoting himself.*) It's pointless discussing ... Eh?

MILDRED. We're going! I've booked!

GEORGE. I don't want to go on holiday, Mildred ... Not abroad!

MILDRED. It's not a holiday! It's a second honeymoon!

GEORGE. What was wrong with the first?

MILDRED. (*She stares at him in disbelief for a long moment, then raises her left index finger as though to start counting off a long list. Takes a deep breath, the words fail her.*) Everything!

GEORGE. Mildred ... that was twenty-five years ago ... you've been holding it against me ever since. What I mean is, at the time, I was ... young and inexperienced. And now, I'm ... well ...

MILDRED. Old and inexperienced. (*She comes over to the table with napkins and four wine glasses.*)

GEORGE. No! I grant you I was perhaps a little over-eager ...

MILDRED. Oho, that's a new one. It's taken you twenty-five years to think that one up! (*Thrusts napkins at him.*) Lay 'em out!

GEORGE. Serviettes?

MILDRED. Napkins! All I'm saying, George, is that I am approaching middle age ...

(*She sits on the settee, looking wistfully at travel brochures.*)

GEORGE. From which direction?

MILDRED. No, I must face up to it ... and I thought it would be nice to ... recapture some of the magic and romance ... that weren't there in the first place.

(*He crosses to behind the settee, realizing that she's a bit emotional, not sure what to do about it.*)

MILDRED. The same little town in France ... the same small hotel ... same bedroom ...

GEORGE. Yes, but you're overlookin' one thing, Mildred. It'll be the same you an' me.

MILDRED. We can try, George. All it needs is a little sympathy, a little understanding of each other's needs ... love ...

GEORGE. (*Musing.*) Same town ...? Same hotel ...? Same bedroom ... um ... I s'pose it could work ... except for one thing.

MILDRED. What?

GEORGE. (*Moving to table again.*) I'm not goin'!

MILDRED. (*Hate.*) Ooh ...!

GEORGE. I don't like flying! It's unnatural for a man to go hurtling through the air at five hundred miles an hour!

MILDRED. (*Stands.*) It may be unnatural, but it's going to happen at any moment!

GEORGE. (*Backs away from her 'round the table.*) Now, now, Mildred ... not in front o' the Royal children. Can't you ... can't you go on your own?

MILDRED. What sort of second honeymoon would that be? (*Answers herself.*) Exactly the same as the first! Come here ...

GEORGE. No, no ... look, they'll be arrivin' soon. You don't want 'em to find us squabbling.

MILDRED. What? (*Checks her wristwatch, calms down.*) Ah ... (*Instantly brisk.*) Get the floral centerpiece ... and take that brown sauce with you ... cushions, cushions ... (*Starts to tidy up, plumping cushions, etc.*) You haven't heard the last of this, George ... and open the bottle of wine.

GEORGE. (*Exits to kitchen, with brown sauce.*) All right, all right.

MILDRED. I want everything to be just so. You know what my sister's like. When it comes to dust, she's got a finger like a laser beam!

(*GEORGE comes from the kitchen with a floral centerpiece, which he plonks on the table. Mumbles darkly.*)

MILDRED. What was that?

GEORGE. I said, "She's a flippin' nuisance!"

MILDRED. Aha! (*Picks up the piggy bank.*) Swearbox!

GEORGE. "Flippin'" isn't swearing!

MILDRED. It *is!*

GEORGE. It bloody isn't!

MILDRED. That is! (*Rattles it at him.*) Swearbox!

(*He dips in his pocket and puts a coin in the box. this is obviously a well established routine.*)

GEORGE. Gor blimey ... (*Mumbles darkly.*)

MILDRED. You're mumbling!

(*GEORGE picks up a bottle of wine which is standing on the sideboard. There is already a pull type corkscrew in the cork.*)

GEORGE. Look here, Mildred, I'll make no bones about it ... (*He struggles to pull the cork, without success.*) ... umph. I do not like your Ethel ... and I do not like her husband, Humpty Dumpty.

MILDRED. Humphrey Pomfrey. (*She crosses to the window by the front door and looks out.*)

GEORGE. Yes, him! The offal king of Oxshott. Just 'cos he's got a bit o' money ... (*Continues to struggle with cork.*) ... umph ... he thinks he's better than me. And ... umph ... *she* thinks he's better than me ...

MILDRED. Three votes to one! Motion carried!

GEORGE. If you're that fond of him, take 'im on your second honeymoon ... umph ...

MILDRED. At least he's a *man.*

GEORGE. (*Crossing to her. Offended dignity.*) I see. Are you implyin' that I am not?

MILDRED. I didn't *say* that ...(*She takes the bottle of wine from him and plucks the cork from it without any effort. Hands it back to him. He looks at it, crosses to the table with it, then ...*)

GEORGE. (*Defensive.*) Yes, well ... I'd loosened it, hadn't I.

MILDRED. Just put it on the ... (*Sees something out of window.*) There's a taxi, George! It'll be them! And you're not even changed!

GEORGE. What's wrong with me as I am?

MILDRED. Just *look* at yourself! All we need is the tin man and the cowardly lion! Get changed!

GEORGE. (*Starts up stairs.*) Oh, all right ... if it's gonna be lah-di-dah time. What shall I wear? (*Attempts Noel Coward accent.*) The velvet smoking jacket? Goes with the top 'at and the ivory fag-holder. (*Sings.*) "Some day I'll find you ... "

MILDRED. Get up there!

(*He scurries into the bedroom as the front doorbell rings. MILDRED straightens her hair, etc., switches on a smile and opens the front door. She admits ETHEL, her sister. ETHEL wears a fur coat and is expensively dressed, though without taste. She's under some strain, but hiding it.*)

MILDRED. Ethel, darling, how lovely to see you ... (*A kiss.*) And Humphrey ... (*Turns to greet HUMPHREY at door, realizes he isn't there.*) ... er ... where's Humphrey?

ETHEL. He's not coming, Mildred. Oh, what a sweet little dress. You *must* let me have the paper pattern!

MILDRED. What?

ETHEL. For my au pair. Consuela loves bright colors. Will you give me a hand with my suitcases, darling?

MILDRED. Yes, of course. I ... (*She brings the expensive suitcases from the front doorstep. Take.*) Suitcases? You've only come for tea!

ETHEL. (*The martyr.*) I've left him.

MILDRED. You've...left Humphrey? (*MILDRED looks shocked. She puts the suitcases down at the foot of the stairs. ETHEL nods.*) Oh, my goodness ... Ethel, I ... but he's rich! I mean ... oh, dear, dear, dear ... Sit down, love, let me take your coat ... What a shock ... (*Moves to hang up coat.*) I thought your marriage was such a happy one ...

ETHEL. About as happy as yours.

MILDRED. Oh, you poor thing!! (*Moves back to ETHEL.*) This is terrible! Terrible! I mean, I've got *four* portions of salmon ...

ETHEL. Then you'll have to put one back in the tin!

MILDRED. It's *fresh!* (*Controls herself.*) Would you like a glass of wine? That's fresh, too ...

ETHEL. Well, so long as it's vintage ...

MILDRED. Oh, it is ... I think. (*Reads from wine bottle label.*) "Mise En Bouteille aux Co-op Bottling Depot, Manchester."

ETHEL. Perhaps just a sip.

MILDRED. Yes, yes, of course. (*Brings over two glasses and the bottle of wine. During the following, she pours a glass for each of them.*) I mean, what happened? Was it something he said? You can tell me, I am your sister ...

ETHEL. I'd rather not talk about it.

MILDRED. (*Disappointed.*) No? Oh, well ... (*Sits on the settee.*) Yes ... there we are ... ahaha ... Mmm. How's the weather in Oxshott?

ETHEL. Fine, thank you. We had a little rain early this morning, but it cleared up very quickly and (*Breaks down. Sobs.*) He's having it off with his secretary!

MILDRED. There, there, there. Are you sure? (*Kneels by ETHEL.*)

ETHEL. (*Stiffly.*) Blonde hairs ... on his coat. He tried to blame them on our golden retriever.

MILDRED. Well, then ...

ETHEL. A golden retriever doesn't have black roots!

MILDRED. Ah.

ETHEL. The faith and trust has gone out of our marriage, Mildred. Whenever she phones, he rings off as soon as I pick up the extension.

MILDRED. Oh dear, dear.

ETHEL. And yesterday ... at four o'clock in the afternoon, he ... he called me by *her* name. "Jennifer," he said. "Jennifer."

MILDRED. Slip of the tongue, dear. (*Stands.*)

ETHEL. You don't know what he was doing at the time.

MILDRED. Well, no, but ... (*Surprise and envy.*) At four o'clock in the afternoon?

ETHEL. Oh, that's a regular thing. He always likes to get it over before The Wombles come on.

MILDRED. But they're on five times a week.

ETHEL. (*Long-suffering.*) You don't have to tell me. Stupid program! He's so demanding. You don't know what it's like, Mildred.

MILDRED. (*Wistful.*) No, I don't. No ...

ETHEL. You wouldn't think it to look at him.

MILDRED. No, you wouldn't. I will in future, though. (*A thought.*) They don't come on till twenty to six.

ETHEL. I know that.

MILDRED. Dear God ...

ETHEL. I'm sorry. I shouldn't burden you with my troubles.

MILDRED. Troubles ...? Yes ... look, love, I'll tell you what we're going to do. You'll stay

here with us until you've sorted things out in your mind.

ETHEL. Oh, I shouldn't ask ...

MILDRED. Of course you should. After all, what are sisters for? Now, could you manage a little something to eat?

ETHEL. Perhaps just a morsel ... since it's fresh.

MILDRED. That's the way. Oh, you poor thing. (*Exits through the kitchen door, reenters immediately.*) What about Saturday and Sunday?

ETHEL. "New Faces" and "Songs of Praise."

MILDRED. Dear God ... (*Lays out plates. Brisk.*)

ETHEL. Shouldn't you ask George if it's all right for me to stay?

MILDRED. I don't think so, dear. I *know* what his answer will be. I'll wait for the right moment to tell him.

ETHEL. He'll see the suitcases.

MILDRED. Not him, love. He's not very observant.

GEORGE. (*Appears from the bedroom. He's changed his shirt, etc. The cuffs are flapping.*) Mildred ... Where are my cuff links?

MILDRED. (*Calling up.*) In your cuffs, George! (*To ETHEL.*) See what I mean? (*Exits to kitchen for GEORGE's fish.*)

GEORGE. (*Starts to come down the stairs, buttoning his cuffs, grumbling.*) Oh, yeah. I can't

see the point in gettin' changed. That other shirt was perfectly clean, apart from a bit o'gravy. It's not as if we were ... (*He trips over the suitcases.*) Aaaagh! Gawd's strewth ... (*Picks himself up.*) Stupid place to leave suitcases! (*Crosses to dining table, vaguely nodding towards ETHEL.*) Hullo, Ethel, hullo, Humphrey.

(*MILDRED enters.*)

GEORGE. Where's me tea, then? (*Sits on US chair.*)

MILDRED. It's here, George. Would you like to take your place, Ethel? (*Places plate in front of GEORGE.*)

GEORGE. (*Looking at salmon.*) What's this?

MILDRED. Fish.

GEORGE. It's got no batter on it!

MILDRED. It's fresh salmon, George ... we have it often. (*Gay laugh.*) You sit here, Ethel ... by Prince Charles.

ETHEL. (*Sits on SL chair, baffled.*) Mmm? (*Realizes, looks at place mat dubiously.*) Oh, yes. Yes ... how loyal. I think he's in long trousers now.

MILDRED. We've had them for some time. (*She sits.*) The wine, George.

GEORGE. Eh? Oh, yeah ... (*Gets up, fetches the bottle of wine from the coffee table.*) I like a bit o'batter. Soaks up the vinegar and ... (*Pauses as a thought strikes him. Looks 'round, mentally*

counts the people present, making sure he's got his facts right.) Where's Humphrey?

MILDRED. Ah.

ETHEL. Er ...

MILDRED. He's not coming, George.

GEORGE. Oh, good. (*Heads back to the table with the wine.*) With chips and a pickled onion. Now that's a proper ... (*Pauses.*) Why not?

MILDRED. Well, er ...

ETHEL. Oh, he'll have to be told, Mildred. (*To GEORGE.*) 'Cos I've left him, that's why not.

GEORGE. What? You mean ... you and him...? You've (*Starts to cackle.*) Heehehe ... Heehehe ... oh, dear, dear, dear ... what a shame ... (*Sits, still cackling.*) Heehehe ... Still, these things happen. I'm sure you'll soon find somewhere nice. (*Long horrified pause.*) Suitcases?

MILDRED. Ethel's staying with us. Until she's made up her mind what she wants to do.

GEORGE. Now, hang on a minute, Mildred. I got nothin' against your sister ... she can't help the way she is ... but she's not staying here. No, no, no, no. Definitely not!

MILDRED. That's settled then, George! Now eat your fish. (*To ETHEL. Unctuous.*) *Do* have a little salad ...

(*GEORGE seethes, wagging a finger, but lost for words.*)

ETHEL. Thank you. Such a nice change from rich foods.

MILDRED. Yes ...

GEORGE. (*Standing.*) I am not having it, Mildred!

MILDRED. (*Indicating kitchen.*) Well, make yourself a sandwich!

GEORGE. I'm talking about *her!* We've only got the one bedroom!

ETHEL. If you think I'll be in the way ...

GEORGE. (*Grateful.*) Yes! Exactly! That's it! (*Sits.*) She understands.

MILDRED. She can share *our* bed, George!

GEORGE. It's not big enough ... !

MILDRED. You ... will be on the bed settee! (*Indicates it. GEORGE looks stricken. To ETHEL, all charm.*) Whoops ... I forgot the thin bread and butter! ... (*She exits to kitchen.*)

GEORGE. Mildred! I ... I ... oh. (*Sees she's gone. Frustrated, he drums his fingers. ETHEL continues to eat her salmon, rather smug.*) Oh ... (*To ETHEL.*) I ... I ... don't want to give the impression that ... that you're not welcome. (*ETHEL smiles stonily.*) No. It's just that ... I ... well, I ... (*An inspired thought.*) I had this idea! I'm takin' Mildred on a second honeymoon! Next Saturday!

ETHEL. What?

GEORGE. Yes, I've booked it! France! Bow-log-nee! I thought it'd give us a chance to

recapture the magic an' romance an' all that rubbish ...

ETHEL. So I'll be left here on my own?

GEORGE. Yes. No! I ... y'see ... oh, gawd. Look, Ethel ... I'm tellin' you now, you will not enjoy sharing a bed with Mildred. I never have! You could puncture beer cans with her elbows ... And another thing, she *sighs* a lot. All night, sometimes ... she lies there ... sighin'.

ETHEL. I can understand that.

(*MILDRED comes in behind him, carrying a plate of bread and butter. She pauses, listening.*)

GEORGE. And grunting ... and moaning ... she makes all sorts o' funny noises ...

MILDRED. (*Clears throat, warningly.*) Ahum!

GEORGE. Yeah, that's the sort of ... (*Realizes.*) Ah ... er ... I was just ... I was just ...

MILDRED. Yes. (*She sits. To ETHEL.*) Here we are. Brown bread ... hand sliced.

ETHEL. Thank you. I must say the Co-op does quite a nice salmon.

MILDRED. The Co-op?

ETHEL. Mmm ... (*Fishes small stick-on label from her plate.*) "Ninety seven pee a quarter" (*With interest.*) "Frozen Food Department."

MILDRED. Ah, yes ...

GEORGE. I thought you said it was fresh?

MILDRED. It was! Before ... it was frozen. (*The DOORBELL rings. She looks grateful.*) Door, George!

GEORGE. Yeah, all right ... (*He stands and crosses to the front door.*) Hehehe ... you got caught out there, Mildred ... (*Looks out of the window.*) Here ... it's Humpty Dumpty! (*Starts to open front door.*)

ETHEL. I don't want to see him!

GEORGE. Oh, all right. We'll leave him out there ... (*Shuts front door and turns away.*)

MILDRED. George! (*To ETHEL.*) We can't just ...

ETHEL. I've got nothing to say to him. (*Stands, upset.*) We said it all this morning. He ... he called me a suspicious-minded old boot.

GEORGE. (*Admiring.*) He always did have a way with words. (*The DOORBELL rings again.*)

MILDRED. (*Consoling ETHEL.*) Never you mind, love. You come upstairs ... start unpacking ... perhaps have a little lie-down ... (*She leads the sniffling ETHEL up the stairs. They take one suitcase each.*)

ETHEL. (*To GEORGE.*) Tell him from me, he's a selfish pig.

GEORGE. Yes, right. Will do.

ETHEL. He can go down on his knees and grovel, but it won't make any difference.

GEORGE. Yes, I've got that.

ETHEL. I've given him the best years of my life and for what ... ?

GEORGE. Hang on ... I'd better write this down ...

MILDRED. Leave it, George! Can't you see she's upset? (*To ETHEL.*) There, there, there ... (*They exit to the bedroom, closing the door. The front DOORBELL rings again.*)

GEORGE. All right ... all right. (*He opens the front door to admit HUMPHREY. HUMPHREY is a middle-aged, self-made man. Well-dressed and sure of himself, he carries a big make-up case.*)

GEORGE. Come in, Humphrey.

HUMPHREY. Afternoon, George. I've brought this ... (*Hefts the case.*)

GEORGE. (*Dismay.*) You're not stayin' as well, are you?

HUMPHREY. It's for Ethel. It's her make-up.

GEORGE. Eh?

HUMPHREY. It's all in there. Plaster, lining paper, undercoat, topcoat ... matt, silk finish, gloss ... the lot. (*Sits on settee, dumps case beside it.*)

GEORGE. She won't be here that long. Oh, by the way, you're a selfish pig.

HUMPHREY. What?

GEORGE. And you can go down on your knees and grovel ... it won't make any difference. (*He collects his plate of salmon and crosses to sit by HUMPHREY, eating it.*)

HUMPHREY. I see. Anything else?

GEORGE. There was a bit more, but it was all along the same lines (*Interested.*) Listen, what did you *do* to get your wife to pack up an' leave you?

HUMPHREY. (*Reluctant.*) Oh ...

GEORGE. No, c'mon, tell me. It could come in very handy, that.

HUMPHREY. I didn't do anything, George! She's jealous, that's all. Imagines things. Thinks I'm having affairs right, left and center.

GEORGE. You must have done *something.*

HUMPHREY. No, nothing! I admit I'm as highly sexed as the next man, but ...

GEORGE. I'm the next man.

HUMPHREY. Yes,well ... as you were. But it's all in her mind, George ...

GEORGE. Yeah ... (*A thought.*) Here, she can't be *that* jealous if she's left you on your own with the au pair girl.

HUMPHREY. Consuela? She's built like a Dalek, George! And she's got a better moustache than you have! (*GEORGE fingers his moustache unhappily. MILDRED enters from the bedroom, closing the door. She comes down the stairs.*)

HUMPHREY. Tell you the truth, I don't think Ethel'd mind if I *was* spreading it about a bit. Take some of the load off her. She's not a ... (*Sees MILDRED.*) Oh ... afternoon, Mildred.

MILDRED. (*Eyeing him speculatively, intrigued.*) Hullo, Humphrey. Ahaha ... Well,

well, well ... and how are you ... Mmmm? (*She sits beside him on the settee, her manner slightly coquettish.*)

HUMPHREY. Oh, pretty fit, y'know. I look after myself.

MILDRED. (*Knowing.*) Yes. Ahahaha ... Yes. Get Humphrey a drink, George.

GEORGE. (*Stands.*) Um ... glass o' water, Humphrey?

HUMPHREY. Whisky and soda, please.

GEORGE. Whisky? Cor blimey ... (*Crosses to sideboard, puts down plate. Opens cupboard, takes out half-full bottle of scotch, resentful.*) It's fifty bob a bottle this, y'know. (*Blows dust off the bottle.*)

HUMPHREY. Fifty bob?

MILDRED. It was when he bought that one.

GEORGE. Right ... damned expensive stuff!

MILDRED. Swearbox!

GEORGE. Oh ... (*Puts coin in the swearbox, grumbling.*) I'm fed up with this blasted thing!

MILDRED. And again.

GEORGE. Oh ... (*Another coin.*)

MILDRED. (*To HUMPHREY, amused.*) Last year I got a real leather handbag out of that pig. (*GEORGE reacts.*)

HUMPHREY. Very nice.

MILDRED. When he saw the bill, he nearly filled it again. (*Chuckles.*)

(*HUMPHREY also chuckles. GEORGE pours him a minute scotch and a large squirt of soda. During the following, he brings it over and hands it to HUMPHREY.*)

HUMPHREY. I'll say one thing for you, Mildred ... you've got a sense of humor. (*He puts his hand on her knee, patting it.*)

MILDRED. (*Thrilled.*) Oh ... (*The Grandmother clock on the landing STRIKES four. MILDRED and HUMPHREY both turn to look up at it as it strikes.*)

GEORGE. (*Checking his own watch, dour.*) Um ... four o'clock.

MILDRED. Yes ... (*Laughs gaily.*) Four o'clock ... ahaha ...

HUMPHREY. (*Shifting restlessly.*) Aye ... Four o'clock ... I'm usually getting in about now.

MILDRED. So I believe. (*Looks at his hand on her knee. Recalls herself.*) Ice, George! For Humphrey! For Humphrey's drink!

GEORGE. Tch! I dunno ... Hand me ... fetch me ... carry me ... (*He exits to the kitchen, grumbling.*)

HUMPHREY. (*Clears throat. Removes hand from her knee. Indicates.*) Is she ... er ... is she upstairs?

MILDRED. Yes, she's having a little lie-down.

HUMPHREY. Ah. She usually does, about this time.

MILDRED. So I understand. (*Pulls herself together. Looks firm.*) Humphrey, Ethel *is* my sister and I *am* very fond of her. So I feel entitled to ask ... is there any truth in what she says? About you and ... your secretary?

HUMPHREY. (*Flatly.*) Miss Frazer ...

MILDRED. Jennifer.

HUMPHREY. (*Impatient.*) Yes ... I think that's her name. Tch ... is she still going on about that? It's fantasy. Dear me ... (*Shakes head sadly.*) No, that's not what this is all about. She's leaving me because ... well, there are certain things I like that she ... isn't so keen on.

MILDRED. Wombling.

HUMPHREY. What? Well, I've never heard it called that before but ... All I'm saying is that ... I'm a red-blooded man, Mildred, and I like a ... I enjoy a ... do I have to spell it out?

MILDRED. No, I know how it's spelt.

HUMPHREY. And Ethel doesn't enjoy it, and that's what the real problem is!

MILDRED. I see.

GEORGE. (*Enters from the kitchen. He's got a handkerchief wrapped around his finger and a vulgar, tasteless ice bucket.*) Strewth! It's murder gettin' them ice cubes out the tray! (*Dumps the ice bucket on the coffee table.*)

MILDRED. You should have used a knife.

GEORGE. I did.

HUMPHREY. (*Helps himself. Plops a couple of ice cubes into his scotch.*) Thanks, George.

GEORGE. I cut me finger. That's why there's blood all over the ice.

HUMPHREY. Eh? (*Looks in ice bucket, then at his drink. Disgusted, he lays it aside and sighs.*) Urgh ...

GEORGE. (*Sits on armchair, putting his feet up on the coffee table.*) Now then, you *are* takin' Ethel home with you, aren't you?

HUMPHREY. It's up to her, George.

GEORGE. No. Oh, no. You are the husband ... the master. The husband tells the wife what to do ... not the other way round.

MILDRED. Feet off the table.

(*He takes them off automatically, not really conscious of the interruption. He crosses his legs.*)

GEORGE. (*To HUMPHREY.*) Man is the dominant partner ...

MILDRED. Don't cross your legs, you'll crease your trousers.

GEORGE. (*Uncrosses his legs.*) ... out, hunting the dinosaur, while the little woman ...

MILDRED. And sit up straight! (*To HUMPHREY.*) I'll get you another scotch.

GEORGE. D'you mind, Mildred? I'm speakin'!

MILDRED. (*Standing.*) Oh, shut up. (*She crosses to the sideboard and pours another scotch and soda during the following.*)

GEORGE. (*Faltering.*) While ... the little woman ... er ... Well, I think I've made my point. (*Clears throat.*)

(*ETHEL comes out of the bedroom. The martyr.*)

HUMPHREY. I know you mean well, George, but Ethel is not ... (*Sees her. Stands.*) Oh, hullo, love.

ETHEL. (*Coming downstairs. Frosty.*) You're still here, are you?

HUMPHREY. Er ... yes.

ETHEL. You're wasting your time! I'm not coming home with you. I've had enough. I've had more than enough! You ... you womanizer! (*Takes the glass of whisky from MILDRED and has a swig. MILDRED looks surprised.*) Thank you. (*Back to HUMPHREY.*) You can go. Go back to your detached house with its heated swimming pool and its three-car garage. I'd rather stay in a hovel ... (*Gestures about her.*)

MILDRED. (*To self.*) Oh, thank you. (*To ETHEL.*) Well, I'm sure you two have got plenty to chat about. We'll leave you to it. Come on, George. (*Picks up some dishes from the table.*)

GEORGE. I wanna stay an' listen.

MILDRED. Out! (*Indicates kitchen.*)

GEORGE. (*Grumbles as he goes.*) Nyaa ...

MILDRED. You're mumbling again!

(*They exit to the kitchen. ETHEL sits, tight-lipped. HUMPHREY paces about, trying to reason with her.*)

HUMPHREY. Ethel ... oh, look, is it because I haven't been paying you enough attention ... is that it?

ETHEL. No! That is *not* it!

HUMPHREY. Oh. Have I been paying you too *much?*

ETHEL. I have always accepted that that side of marriage is important to you.

HUMPHREY. Yes. But you're not ... enthusiastic.

ETHEL. Not while I'm in the middle of pruning the roses, no. Those secateurs finished up three gardens away.

HUMPHREY. Well, if it's not that, what is it?

ETHEL. You know perfectly well.

HUMPHREY. You're not still on about Miss Frazer?

ETHEL. Oh, it's "Miss Frazer" now, is it? At four o'clock yesterday it was "Jennifer, Jennifer!"

HUMPHREY. (*Sits, impatient.*) I didn't say "Jennifer," I said "Pinafore."

ETHEL. (*Skeptical.*) And why would you cry "Pinafore" at an ... intimate moment like that?

HUMPHREY. Because it was getting in my way!

ETHEL. Hah! We'll see if my solicitor believes you.

HUMPHREY. Solicitor?

ETHEL. Oh, yes. I'm taking the matter further.

HUMPHREY. (*Stands, losing patience.*) Oh, do what you like! But I'll tell you this ... you're making a mistake. I have never looked at another woman in my life! (*Heads for front door.*)

ETHEL. I don't believe you.

HUMPHREY. Have it your own way! Consuela ... here I come! Ole´! (*He exits. She looks after him, stunned.*)

ETHEL. (*Calls.*) You know your trouble? You're a ... a ... (*Gropes for words.*)

GEORGE. (*Sticks his head and shoulder through the kitchen hatch.*) Like a cuppa tea?

ETHEL. (*Turning on GEORGE.*) ... sex maniac!

(*The hatch slips down, trapping GEORGE. He squeals.*)

CURTAIN

ACT I

Scene 2

SCENE: The morning of the following Saturday, about nine a.m. The dining table is now folded and stacked underneath the hatch, with the dining chairs on either side of it. The settee has been opened out into a double bed.

AT RISE: GEORGE is asleep and snoring under a tangled heap of bedclothes. He has obviously had a restless night. His clothes are heaped on the armchair. He mumbles and stirs, then settles down again. The letterbox rattles and a morning newspaper. ("The Sun") plops onto the front doormat.

He grunts and sits up, waking. He throws aside the bedclothes and sits on the side of the bed, yawning and scrabbling for a cigarette. He lights one and enjoys a cough and a scratch. He stands and hobbles over to the front door, slightly bent and grunting in pain from his back. He's wearing crumpled pyjamas and socks.

He picks up the newspaper.

GEORGE. Page three ... (*Opens newspaper and reads aloud as he heads back to the bed,*

dropping the letters on the coffee table.) Ah ... "Wendy 42-34-36. Um ... She is studying to be a model and obviously has great things in front of her ..." Yes. (*Thinks about it, then chuckles.*) Hehehehe ... witty, that. (*Climbs back into bed.*) I dunno how they think them up ...

MILDRED. (*Enters from the bedroom. She's wearing a smart going-away outfit. She comes downstairs carrying a suitcase.*) George ...

GEORGE. (*Hastily turning page.*) I see the pound is buoyant on the international money market.

MILDRED. Will you get up! I'm not taking you to France in your pyjamas!

GEORGE. You're not taking me to France at all!

MILDRED. ... Get up! How do you think Ethel feels, seeing you half naked every morning?

GEORGE. (*Slyly.*) Y' reckon I'm gettin' her over-excited, do you?

MILDRED. Don't be pathetic! (*Puts her suitcase on the armchair.*)

GEORGE. Ah, now, come on, Mildred ... (*Strokes his moustache.*) It has been remarked that I have certain things in common with Ronald Colman.

MILDRED. You have! He's been dead for years! Now, get out of that bed, or I'll climb in with you!

GEORGE. (*Springs out of the bed with alacrity.*) I'm out! I'm out! But I'm still not coming with you! (*During the following he puts on a tatty dressing gown and his slippers. She briskly tidies the bedclothes.*)

MILDRED. We'll see. How on earth you get these sheets in such a ... (*She finds a jar and a packet under the pillow.*) "Pickled onions?" "Cream Crackers?" Oh, you're enjoying your little self down here, aren't you?

GEORGE. It has its compensations. I can move me legs about without it being misunderstood.

MILDRED. Give me a hand. (*He helps her straighten the bedclothes.*) I want this place tidy before Ethel comes down.

GEORGE. Oh, Ethel ... (*Mumbles darkly.*)

MILDRED. What did you say?

GEORGE. I'm not telling you. You'll make me put money in that thing. (*Indicates swearbox.*)

MILDRED. You really resent her being here, don't you? You've been making it obvious all week. I've seen you ... dropping your chewing gum in her tea.

GEORGE. Well ... she's in the way, Mildred. (*Indicates W.C.*) If I wanna go to the loo, she's in there. (*Indicates bathroom.*) If I wanna go to the bathroom, she's in there. And she forgot to lock the door yesterday!

MILDRED. I know. I heard the scream.

GEORGE. I couldn't help it. Frightened the life out o'me.

MILDRED. You didn't have to strike up a conversation with her.

GEORGE. It was an embarrassing moment. I was trying to smooth things over.

MILDRED. By discussing her appendix scar?

GEORGE. She didn't have a lot else that was worth talking about.

MILDRED. (*Thrusts pillows at him.*) Sideboard.

GEORGE. Yes. (*Wheedling.*) When she's going back to him, Mildred?

MILDRED. When she thinks he's suffered enough.

GEORGE. But he isn't sufferin' at all. She's stayin' here! I'm the one who's suffering. (*He puts the pillows in the sideboard. Returns. They fold the bed back into a settee.*) It's only because of her that you make me dress for dinner.

MILDRED. I'd hardly call putting a shirt on "dressing for dinner!"

GEORGE. I don't like her.

MILDRED. George, she is my sister. We grew up together ... (*Sits on the arm of the armchair, becoming sentimental.*) We shared our childhood. I used to wear her dresses after she'd grown out of them ... She let me have her toys when she'd finished with them ... We even had a crush on the same boy at school. He used to carry my books until ... he met Ethel. (*Hardens.*) I

don't like her, either, but she's my sister! (*She stands and exits to the kitchen.*)

GEORGE. (*Calls after her.*) I think Humpty's right. He knows her better than either of us ... and I agree with him. She's an old ... (*Turns to see ETHEL coming from the bathroom.*) ... boot-tiful morning, Ethel.

ETHEL. (*Wearing a frilly, feminine, rather expensive dress. She sweeps regally downstairs.*) I suppose so.

GEORGE. You sleepin' all right, are you?

ETHEL. Not really. Mildred's very restless. Keeps flinging her arm across me.

GEORGE. Oh, yeah. She does that with me.

ETHEL. I wondered whether to wake her up.

GEORGE. Oh, no. That's the worst thing you can do! She gets frisky, know what I mean?

ETHEL. Yes, indeed. Humphrey's the same.

GEORGE. Here, speakin' of Humphrey. When are you going to go back to him?

ETHEL. When he gets down on his knees and begs my forgiveness!

GEORGE. Ah ... (*Sits to read newspaper.*) I thought you said that wouldn't make any difference?

ETHEL. That was before I'd had a week of Mildred's elbows and you ogling me in the bath!

MILDRED. (*Comes from the kitchen.*) Oh, you're down. The kettle's on. (*Eyes her outfit, jealously.*) Is that a new dress?

ETHEL. (*Smug.*) Yes. It's one of Pierre Cardin's ...

GEORGE. Same size as you, is he? Hehehe ... Just my little joke ... hehehe ...

ETHEL. Yes, I've heard about your little joke.

(*Uncertain what she means, GEORGE looks suspiciously at MILDRED.*)

MILDRED. (*Hastily.*) Ah! The tickets! For our flight! Ahaha ... If we leave fairly soon ...

GEORGE. (*Disbelief.*) Mildred ... tch, it's like talking to a brick wall ... I've told you! I'm not goin'!

MILDRED. George, I've booked! I've got the foreign currency ... I've got the tickets. If you didn't want to go, you should have said so.

GEORGE. (*Splutters.*) I *did!* I heard myself!

MILDRED. That's settled then, good. (*To ETHEL.*) The flight's at one o'clock, so we really should leave as soon as ...

GEORGE. Hang on! I said I'm not going!

MILDRED. That's right, George. You're not going. (*To ETHEL.*) ... as soon as we've had a quick cuppa ...

ETHEL. (*Enthusiastic.*) We must try and visit one of the vineyards.

MILDRED. Yes ... and there's one or two little restaurants you'll *love!*

ETHEL. Oh, I adore French food ...

MILDRED. So do I ...

GEORGE. (*Has been looking from one to the other, baffled.*) Just a minute! What ... what ... what's it got to do with her?

MILDRED. She's coming with me, George. No point in wasting the ticket.

ETHEL. I shall pay my own way. (*To MILDRED.*) There's a little boutique in Lyon ...

MILDRED. I know! You mentioned it!

ETHEL. The most gorgeous silk scarves ... and the shoes ...!

MILDRED. (*Thrilled.*) Ooh ... !

GEORGE. Tup ... tup ... tuptch ... What about *me?*

MILDRED. You can stay here, George. Have the house to yourself. You've been complaining all week it's over-crowded.

GEORGE. Strewth! (*Stands.*) That's marvelous, innit? She's pinched me bed ... now she's pinching me second honeymoon.

MILDRED. You said you didn't want to go!

GEORGE. No, I didn't! Not in so many words ... (*Accusingly.*) You two have got it all worked out!

ETHEL. I've no wish to come between husband and wife ...

MILDRED. Don't worry, love. There's yards of room! (*To GEORGE.*) All right. Here is your last chance! Are you coming with me or are you not?

GEORGE. (*Cunning.*) Aha! So that's what this is all about. (*Dry chuckle.*) I see through your

little game ... it's all a bluff, innit? Just to get me to say I'll go. Well, I won't! Hehehe ... so what you gonna do now?

MILDRED. I'll go with Ethel. (*A kettle WHISTLES in the kitchen. She stands. To ETHEL.*) Tea and toast?

ETHEL. Yes, please. My Earl Grey. And my Fortnum and Mason wholemeal.

MILDRED. Of course. (*Exits to kitchen.*)

GEORGE. (*Calling after her, losing confidence.*) No, no ... y'see ... I called your bluff there, Mildred. I mean ... I ... (*To ETHEL.*) I called her bluff, see ... erm ... Oh. (*He sits beside her.*) It's ridiculous. Second honeymoon at our age. You wouldn't ask Humphrey for a second honeymoon, would you?

ETHEL. (*With feeling.*) God forbid!

GEORGE. There you are, then.

ETHEL. (*Softening.*) Look George ... I know you and I haven't always got on very well, but ... I am a guest in your house and I feel I've imposed enough ...

GEORGE. True.

ETHEL. Well, I meant what I said. I didn't want to come between a husband and wife ... (*Instantly fearful.*) God knows, I know what it's like when another woman comes between a husband ... and ... and ... oh (*Stifled sob.*)

GEORGE. Now, now, don't start the waterworks ... (*Calls off.*) Mildred! (*To ETHEL.*) Look, I'm not bothered ... I mean ... I

got a hanky here somewhere ... (*He fumbles in his dressing gown pocket, half pulls out a piece of material.*)

ETHEL. (*Sobs.*) Mildred just thought ... a little holiday might help me see things in perspective ... Thank you.

(*She reaches across, gropes for and takes the piece of material from his hand. Turns away. She goes to dab her eyes with it. We and GEORGE realize that it's the hem of his pyjama jacket, that he's inadvertently pulled through a hole in his dressing gown pocket.*)

ETHEL. And since you didn't seem to want to go ...

GEORGE. Er ... no, not really. Thing is, y'see ... er ... erm. (*Tries to draw her attention to the fact that she's dabbling her eyes with his pyjamas.*) I ... er ... that's my ... er ... Look, you go, Ethel! I don't mind ... but, the thing is, you got hold o' my wotsit ...

ETHEL. I'll be all right in a minute. (*She blows her nose on the corner of his pyjama jacket.*) Thank you. (*She hands the piece of material back to GEORGE. He looks at it gloomily.*)

GEORGE. Thank *you!* Cor blimey ... (*Stands, with his back to the kitchen, opens his dressing gown wide to show her what she's done.*) Look at that? Innit marvelous ... !

(*During the above, MILDRED enters from the kitchen, carrying a small tray containing tea and toast.*)

MILDRED. George ...! What are you *doing?*

GEORGE. Eh?

ETHEL. He was just being kind, Mildred ... (*Picks up the newspaper.*)

GEORGE. It's the last time I offer *her* anything! (*Heads for the W.C.*) That's probably stained my pyjamas, that has. (*Returns and snatches the paper from ETHEL, then exits to the W.C. with it.*)

MILDRED. (*Baffled.*) Yes, well ... tea and toast. (*Puts it on the coffee table.*)

ETHEL. Thank you. (*Nibbles at the toast, sips the tea.*) The last time I was in France, I had an improper suggestion made to me on the beach.

MILDRED. (*Fascinated.*) Really? How dreadful? What did he say? (*She's crossed to the front door, and now brings in a bottle of milk from the doorstep.*)

ETHEL. I don't know. It was all in French.

MILDRED. Oh. Then how did you know it was ...

ETHEL. He did drawings in the sand with his loaf.

MILDRED. (*Thrilled.*) Disgraceful. Which beach was this? (*Sits beside ETHEL, adds milk to her own tea.*)

ETHEL. Oh, they're all the same. You have to watch out for that sort of thing.

MILDRED. I certainly will, yes. (*Looks at her watch.*) Actually, we don't want to miss the plane.

ETHEL. Um? Good heavens, yes. I better finish packing. (*Heads upstairs to the bedroom, taking her coffee with her.)* That's all the French ever think about. That's why there's so many of them.

MILDRED. Yes. I see what you mean. (*ETHEL exits to the bedroom, closing the door.*) Oohoo ... (*She crosses to her suitcase, opens it. She glances 'round, then takes a bikini top from the case. She tries it against herself, wriggles with excitement at her own daring.*) Oohoo ... (*Dreamily.*) Ooh ... Bonjour, Jean-Paul. Je suis ... er ... je suis ... fancy-free! (*Turns the other way.*) Pardon, Pierre? Moi? Et tu? Back to your place? Ah, no, no, no, no. Naughty boy!

(*During the above, HUMPHREY has appeared at the partly open front door. He carries a bunch of flowers. He looks at MILDRED, amazed, then clears his throat.*)

HUMPHREY. Harrumph ...

MILDRED. (*Flustered.*) Ah, Humphrey ... bonjour ... er ... hullo.

HUMPHREY. Hullo, Mildred. I was just passing ... thought I'd drop by ... see if Ethel's come to her senses yet.

MILDRED. Ah, yes ... do sit down. (*Hastily removes bikini top and stuffs it in the case.*) Aha ... I'll move the suitcase. (*She moves the case onto the armchair.*)

HUMPHREY. You going somewhere?

MILDRED. Flying to France. Second honeymoon.

HUMPHREY. Ah ... I thought George didn't like flying. (*Sits.*)

MILDRED. He's not coming.

HUMPHREY. Oh. (*Holds up flowers.*) I've brought these ... she ... (*Take.*) Isn't it a bit pointless? If he's not with you?

MILDRED. Ethel's coming. (*HUMPHREY reacts.*) It's more of a *holiday*, really.

HUMPHREY. I should hope so. (*Realizes.*) Ethel? To France?

(*During the above, ETHEL has come from the bedroom, wearing a fur coat and carrying a suitcase. She sees HUMPHREY and comes down.*)

ETHEL. (*Frostily.*) So, *you're* here, are you? You've condescended to drop in ... see if I'm still alive.

HUMPHREY. (*Stands.*) Yes, love. Are you? Uh ... *how* are you? (*Gives her flowers.*)

ETHEL. I'm fine, thank you ... Rested.

HUMPHREY. Good, good. Well, I came to take you home ...

ETHEL. Oh, did you? And what about you and Consuela?

HUMPHREY. (*Exasperated.*) Oh, for ... that was a joke! (*To MILDRED.*) You've seen her.. (*To ETHEL.*) ... daughter of Godzilla!

MILDRED. Ethel, dear ... if you'd rather go home with Humphrey ...

HUMPHREY. Right, that's settled, then. Come home, we'll go out tonight! I've booked a table at your favorite Italian restaurant ...

ETHEL. (*Cool.*) Oh, have you?

HUMPHREY. ... that little trattoria ... in Fulham ... where the guitarist gave you the rose, remember? And I tucked it in your hair and ... and ... (*Loses confidence as he sees her stony expression.*) ...and you ... er ... you ...

ETHEL. I have never been to an Italian restaurant in Fulham in my life! (*Drops the flowers on the coffee table.*)

MILDRED. Whoops! Faux pas! Sorry ... just practicing my French. (*Heads for bedroom.*) I'll get the other suitcase ... (*Exits to bedroom.*)

HUMPHREY. No. No ... I, er ... believe you're right, Ethel. It wasn't you. It was a ... it was a client. Mr. ... ah ... Mr. Thomson, Sid Thomson.

ETHEL. And you tucked a rose in his hair.

HUMPHREY. I ... may have exaggerated that bit ...

ETHEL. (*Stiffly.*) It was *her*, wasn't it? It was Jennifer.

HUMPHREY. No, no. No! Sid Thomson's nothing like her! He's bald. Well ... he's got enough hair to tuck a rose in, but ...

ETHEL. Oh, what a tangled web we weave.

HUMPHREY. Look, we won't go there. We'll go to that Japanese one, where they serve the wind-dried ... (*Sudden doubt.*) We have been to a Japanese restaurant, haven't we?

ETHEL. Yes.

HUMPHREY. Oh, good. We'll go again! And then ...

ETHEL. Humphrey, I am going to France with my sister. While I am away, I will consider my position ...

(*GEORGE comes from the downstairs W.C. F/X toilet flushing, but not loudly. He carries a folded newspaper and a pencil. He's dressed in trousers, cardigan, etc.*)

GEORGE. Ah ... four-letter word ... oh, hullo, Humphrey. Can you think of a four-letter word ...

(*MILDRED comes from the bedroom, carrying another suitcase. She comes downstairs.*)

HUMPHREY. No problem at all, George.

GEORGE. (*Reading clue.*) "Footwear named after Wellington?"

HUMPHREY. Boot!

GEORGE. Oh, yeah! (*Looks at ETHEL, fills it in.*) Yeah!

MILDRED. (*Looking through window.*) The taxi's here! (*To ETHEL.*) I do think we ought to be going ... if we *are* going, that is.

ETHEL. Well, I'm ready. (*Picks up suitcase.*)

HUMPHREY. (*Pleading.*) Ethel ... (*Takes suitcase from her.*) Why don't we just ... Ethel! (*ETHEL marches out of the front door. HUMPHREY goes to follow.*)

MILDRED. If you wouldn't mind, Humphrey? (*Indicates her suitcases.*)

HUMPHREY. What? Oh ... yes. (*Picks them up, then follows ETHEL out.*) Ethel! Can't we talk about it ... ?

MILDRED. (*Turns to GEORGE, who's still considering his crossword.*) Well, George, I'm going.

GEORGE. (*Not looking up.*) Enjoy yourself.

MILDRED. Make sure you eat properly ... don't watch too much television ... oh, and don't forget to change your underwear.

GEORGE. (*Looking up.*) I won't need to. You're only goin' for a week.

MILDRED. (*Sighs. Gives him piece of paper.*) That's the address and phone number of the hotel. Will you miss me?

GEORGE. Oh, yeah. Yeah. S'funny, really ... you on your second honeymoon ... and I'll be miles away.

MILDRED. You were miles away on our first, George. Now, come on, bite the bullet, kiss me goodbye.

GEORGE. (*Reluctantly.*) Umm ... right. (*Gives her a peck on the cheek.*) There!

MILDRED. Oh, thank you. Done with all the passion of a sparrow attacking a crust.

HUMPHREY. (*Mooches in.*) Ethel wants to know if you're coming ... says there's no time to hang about.

MILDRED. I've been telling *her* that ... oh ... 'Bye, Humphrey. 'Bye George, I'll send you a postcard. (*She exits. HUMPHREY and GEORGE look out after her.*)

GEORGE. 'Bye ... (*An afterthought.*) Oh, when you take out the flight insurance, put it in my name ... 'Bye!

HUMPHREY. 'Bye. (*GEORGE shuts the front door.*) Ah, well ... (*Reaches for his hip pocket.*) Fancy a good stiff scotch, George?

GEORGE. I wouldn't mind. Ta.

HUMPHREY. (*Indicating sideboard.*) The bottle's in the sideboard. (*Takes out cigarette case.*)

GEORGE. Oh, yeah ... um. S'pose so. Bit *early*, innit? (*HUMPHREY sits on the arm of the chair. GEORGE pours a couple of scotch and sodas.*)

HUMPHREY. Only in England.

GEORGE. Um ... well, I s'pose so ... Did you come 'round for any reason at all?

HUMPHREY. (*Sighs.*) Aye. I came to get Ethel back.

GEORGE. What for?

HUMPHREY. I don't know, Geo ... well, I *do* know. I saw my solicitors yesterday afternoon.

GEORGE. Ah ... (*Bringing drinks.*) Here y'are. You don't want ice in it, do you?

HUMPHREY. (*Hastily covering glass.*) No! No ... thanks. George. D'you know what they said? If me and Ethel split up ... she can take damn near every penny I've got!

GEORGE. Tch, tch, tch. Swearbox! (*Picks up swearbox.*)

HUMPHREY. Eh? It doesn't apply to me.

GEORGE. No. Ah ... (*A thought.*) Here, it doesn't apply to me either. Not now. (*He snickers gleefully, shakes the box up and down.*) I can say anything I like! Hehehe ... I could say ... er ... ooh! I could say ... I could say ... (*Dismay.*) There's no fun in it when it's free.

HUMPHREY. (*Long-suffering.*) I was talking, George.

GEORGE. Oh, sorry. (*Puts box down on coffee table.*) Every penny you got ... go on.

HUMPHREY. It's all in her name, y'see. For tax purposes. The house, the car, three o' the shops ... all in her name. If she divorces me, well ... I've *got* to have her back! (*Brightens.*) But not for a week, thank God. (*Swigs his scotch.*)

GEORGE. You don't miss her, then?