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SF PERUSALS

WHO GOES BARE?

by

RICHARD HARRIS

and

LESLIE DARBON

SAMUEL  FRENCH

LONDON

NEW YORK TORONTO SYDNEY HOLLYWOOD

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ISBN 0 573 01546 5

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CHARACTERS

Edward Manchip
Brian Manchip
Joan Manchip
Nancy McSmith
Angus McSmith
Maxie Maudlin
Minnie
Mrs Court-Bending
Mr Butcher
Police Sergeant

The action passes in the entrance hall to a country mansion

ACT I

Scene 1	A late afternoon in autumn
Scene 2	A few minutes later

ACT II — A few minutes later

Time – the present

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(See also page ii)

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ACT I

SCENE 1

The large entrance hall to a country mansion. A late afternoon in autumn

On one side a staircase leads to a gallery off which open four doors, each to a bedroom, numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4. An archway leads off to another staircase which is not visible. Below the stairs is a swing door marked Staff Rooms, and opposite this is the main entrance to the hallway. At the rear of the hall, beneath the gallery, are three more doors. The centre one is a swing door marked Treatment Rooms; on one side is a sliding door to a cupboard; on the other a swing door marked Gymnasium. There is a reception desk with a telephone, a service bell and a jug of water. There are various occasional chairs and three antiquated heating radiators. Next to the Staff Room is a wall telephone. A large banner poster proclaims "Healthy is Happy" and there are several other posters, including one suggesting that "Abstinence Can Be Fun". Above the lower landing of the stairs is a large stained-glass window. The double casement opens outwards on to a rural view. Next to the window is a bentwood hatstand bearing a couple of men's hats. The general feeling of the place is that of a rich man's folly which in its time has played many parts. There is an air of seediness: funds would appear to be limited

When the CURTAIN *rises, the stage is empty. Then Mr Butcher enters through the main doors. He is carrying Eddie over his shoulder. Eddie's downstretched hand clutches a bottle of vodka. Eddie Manchip is a tall, usually elegant, dilettante ladies' man of somewhat unctuous charm. Conscious of being forty, he favours clothing at least fifteen years too young for him. At the moment, his suit is crumpled, his tie awry, a gay handkerchief dangles from his top pocket. He looks terrible: the product of a lost week-end. Mr Butcher is a huge, square man in a huge, dark square suit and black hat. He pauses just inside the door, looking around, then moves to lower Eddie into the chair by the desk*

Mr Butcher (*shaking his shoulder*) Wakey wakey, my old china.
Eddie (*dazed*) Where am I?
Mr Butcher 'Ome. I've brought you 'ome. Now *there's* service for you.
Eddie (*getting shakily to his feet*) Thank you, my good man. (*He pats his pockets*) I don't seem to have my . . .
Mr Butcher No, no, Eddie. No need for *that*.

Eddie gives a weak smile and slumps into the chair again, clutching his aching head. Mr Butcher surveys the place

Mr Butcher Nice little place you've got here, Eddie. The boys *will* be pleased.
Eddie Boys?
Mr Butcher Butcher, they said, take our friend Eddie the Elf back to his house in the country.
Eddie Butcher?
Mr Butcher Don't tell me you've forgotten your new *friends.*
Eddie I know this sounds ridiculous, Mr Butcher—but could you refresh my memory a little?
Mr Butcher The *card* game. At the *club.*
Eddie Oh. (*Realizing*) *Oh.*
Mr Butcher Eddie the Elf—none of the firm could work it out—why does he call himself Eddie the Elf we arsked ourselves—but now I understand —it's because you run an *Elf* Club.
Eddie Yes, it all falls into place, doesn't it? (*He stands shakily*) I expect you're anxious to dash off home and explain it to them.
Mr Butcher Hang about, Eddie . . . hang about. There's still the question of *this.*

He produces a piece of paper. Eddie moves to take it

Uh-uh—naughty, naughty.
Eddie Yes, of course. What exactly *is* it?
Mr Butcher Your I O U. From the card game.
Eddie You don't mean . . . ?
Mr Butcher So if we can just square up.
Eddie What exactly *do* I O U?
Mr Butcher (*reading*) I O U the deeds of my property. So if you'll just hand them over . . .
Eddie Certainly. (*Realizing*) You mean *this* place?
Mr Butcher That's *exactly* what I mean.
Eddie That's impossible.
Butcher Nothing's impossible if you try, Eddie boy.
Eddie But I was blind drunk.
Mr Butcher (*holding out his hand*) The deeds.
Eddie Just as a matter of interest—what would happen if I refused?
Mr Butcher Well now—the organization would move in and redecorate the place.
Eddie How nice.
Mr Butcher Blood red.
Eddie (*staggering a little*) My favourite colour.
Mr Butcher Ours, too. On the other hand, there's an alternative.
Eddie I'm all ears.
Mr Butcher For the time being. Shall we say—twenty thousand?
Eddie Twenty thousand *pounds*?
Butcher You *are* quick.
Eddie Where can I get my hands on twenty thousand pounds?
Mr Butcher You seem to get them on everything else, you naughty man, you. Which reminds me—Loretta said to remind you, you've got a

little something of hers. Well then, Eddie boy—it's the house or twenty thousand—*you* think about it while I have a little walk. (*Moving to the main doors*) Incidentally—you don't know of a gravel pit near here, do you?

Eddie No.

Mr Butcher Pity. The boys'll have to bring their shovels. And it's bound to be clay.

Mr Butcher gives a flat smile and exits

Eddie, paralysed with fear, shakily pours himself a vodka

Minnie enters from the Staff Rooms. She is very short and lumpy, and wears thick pebble glasses for short sight. She is dressed in a white mob-cap, white overalls and white plimsolls. In her top pocket is a row of pens and pencils. Sticking out from another pocket is a yellow duster

Minnie Oh—there you are, Mister Edward, sir: welcome home.

Eddie Minnie—what *day* is it?

Minnie Saturday, sir.

Eddie *Saturday? (He winces at his head movement)*

Minnie It was when I woke up this morning, sir. Can I get you something for your head?

Eddie Yes—a transplant. On second thoughts, just an aspirin.

Minnie Yes, sir.

She finds the aspirins in her pocket, pops them into his mouth. He swallows them down with a glass of vodka

Good do, was it, sir?

Eddie Do?

Minnie The Health Conference.

Eddie Health Conference? Yes, of course—the *Health* Conference. Refresh my memory, Minnie: when did it start?

Minnie On Thursday, sir.

Eddie It seems to have gone on a bit. (*He pulls out th pocket handkerchief which he reveals to be a pair of panties. Playing cards flutter from his pocket also. Referring to the panties*) In fact it seems to have gone on a bit more than I thought. (*He stuffs the panties back into his pocket*)

Minnie (*picking up the cards*) You've not been gambling again, sir?

Eddie No, no, no—of course not, Minnie: I must have been playing patience. In between sessions.

Minnie Only I know what you're like once you enter the Metropolis.

Eddie (*suddenly very fearful*) What have I *done*, Minnie?

Minnie It'll all come back to you, sir.

Eddie It already *has*—and it's *enormous*.

Minnie Well, if you're going to do it, you might as well do it big, I always say. By the way, your brother telephoned, sir.

Eddie My brother? What did *he* want?

Minnie He said—(*she closes her eyes in concentration*)—my E.T.A. is fifteen-twenty hours, traffic and weather conditions permitting. Over and out.

Eddie E.T.A.? Why can't he just say he'll be arriving here at—(*realizing, looking at his watch*)—three-*twenty*. Oh, my god—you didn't tell him where I was?

Minnie Yes, sir—I said you were at the Health Conference.

Eddie That's right—yes—of course I was. Now look—Minnie. My brother is coming down here for the week-end with a very important visitor. A lady. A lady who is going to invest money in this place. She could be the answer to all our problems . . .

Minnie Oh, sir—oh, sir . . .

Eddie It's imperative that everyone's on their toes. Go and call the rest of the staff.

Minnie Yes, sir—yes, sir—no, sir—no. I forgot to tell you, sir . . .

Eddie Tell me *what*?

A car horn sounds. He looks towards the main doors, then bundles her towards the Staff Rooms

All right, Minnie—leave it to me.

Minnie But, sir . . .

Eddie No buts, Minnie—off you go . . .

Eddie gets Minnie into the Staff Rooms as Brian Manchip enters from the main doors. In his early forties, shorter, tubbier, stodgier, than his brother. In fact a pompous prig. Although it's the week-end, he wears black jacket and striped trousers, beautifully polished black shoes. As he enters, he is tetchily dusting his hands over his jacket

Brian Edward! Ah—there you are.

Eddie Hello, Brian old son—good drive down?

Brian Appalling. Close the window and you suffocate—open it and you choke. Look at the state I'm in—look at me—filthy. (*He takes the panties from Eddie's pocket, sees what they are*) What were *these* doing in your top pocket?

Eddie Those? Those are a pocket handkerchief.

Brian I see. *These* is a pocket handkerchief.

Eddie Of course they is.

Brian *Are* it, indeed.

Eddie A novelty pocket handkerchief.

Brian Looking exactly like a pair of knickers.

Eddie Of course. That's the novelty. (*He retrieves the panties, stuffs them into his pocket*) The—er—the little lady with you, is she?

Brian If by "little lady" you mean Nancy McSmith—no, she is not. She's coming by train.

Eddie (*knowingly*) Of course.

Brian Now look here, Edward: I'm a highly respected man—both in my

private and my business affairs. Everything I've done has been above board——

Eddie —until now.

Brian Are you trying to suggest . . .

Eddie Not *me*. But you know how some people's minds work. A man takes someone else's wife away for the week-end—let's face it—you could be up to *anything*.

Brian Ridiculous!

Eddie In *your* case, absolutely.

Brian On the other hand——

Eddie / **Brian** —discretion. *Speaking together*

Eddie Naturally.

Brian Yes—well . . . (*He looks at his watch*) Nancy McSmith's train is due in half an hour—now—which room is she having?

Eddie Number One—best in the house.

Brian goes up to peer into Room 1. As he does so, Eddie—worry showing—moves to look out of the main doors

Brian Yes, that's all right. Which is my room?

Eddie Number Two.

Brian puts his head briefly into Room 2, considers it in juxtaposition to Room 1, then moves along to look into Room 4

Brian I think I'd prefer *this* one. (*He comes downstairs, indicating the place*) Look at the place. Look at it. Why did I ever let you trick me into putting up the money for this—this *mausoleum*?

Eddie Health Club, if you don't mind.

Brian Let me warn you, Edward: this is your last chance. If anything goes wrong this week-end—*finished.*

Eddie My dear Brian—what could possibly go wrong—with you at the wheel?

Brian (*after thinking a moment*) Yes—well—I told her I come here at least twice a week—I must know every *inch* of the place—what's in here?

Without waiting, he bustles out through the Treatment Rooms door. Eddie almost goes to the main doors but changes his mind and exits quickly after Brian. Minnie sticks her head round the Staff Room door. She enters and moves to the store cupboard. She is about to open the door when Eddie enters quickly from the Treatment Rooms

Eddie Minnie. Where is the staff?

Minnie That's what I was trying to tell you, sir. They've gone.

Eddie Gone?

Minnie Yes, sir. They had a meeting to express their discontent re the financial situation and—hopped it.

Eddie *All* of them?

Minnie *Not me*, sir—*not me* . . .
Eddie What about Gladys?
Minnie Him, too, sir. He had this incredible proposition on the Kings Road.
Eddie Why didn't they tell me.
Minnie They voted me spokesman, sir—on account of our peculiar relationship.
Eddie How could they do it to me? *Me.* After all I've—didn't I give them a bonus at Christmas?
Minnie They were all very pleased, sir, I know they were.
Eddie Then what's their complaint?
Minnie I think it's because they didn't get anything for the rest of the year.
Eddie Details, Minnie, details. What have they done to me?
Minnie A martyr: that's what you are, sir—a martyr.
Brian (*off, calling*) Edward!
Eddie Whatever you do, Minnie, say *nothing.*
Minnie What about?
Eddie *Anything.*

Brian enters from the Treatment Rooms.

On seeing him, Minnie does her curtsying and dusting bit

Brian Where on earth is the *staff*?
Eddie Around, old son, *around.*
Brian I haven't seen a *soul* yet.
Eddie Really? Well, *there's* one for a start.

He indicates Minnie who is now dusting maniacally. Brian stands open-mouthed as Minnie curtsies and dusts her way out backwards into the Staff Rooms

Minnie exits

Brian Why does she keep jigging up and down all the time? (*He vaguely imitates Minnie's curtsies*)
Eddie She's a born servant.
Brian What exactly does she *do* here?
Eddie Anything I ask. She came with the place. I think one of the builders must have left her. She's in love with me. On the rebound. She was jilted by a pirate.
Brian A pirate?
Eddie We had a fancy dress ball—someone came as a pirate and Minnie fell in love with him.
Brian You mean she doesn't know who he was?
Eddie He swore a promise of eternal love and disappeared.
Brian I'm not surprised.

Eddie Tragic really: she's been mooning over him ever since.
Brian Which reminds me—Nancy McSmith is the wife of one of my most valued business clients. *Don't try your luck.*
Eddie My dear Brian. To me, she's just a cheque-book with a human appendage.
Brian Well, keep your hands off her counterfoils. (*He looks at his watch*) I must go. (*Moving to the main doors*) If my wife telephones, I haven't arrived yet. And whatever you do don't mention Nancy.
Eddie You mean Joan doesn't know you're bringing her here?
Brian (*shocked*) Are you *mad*?
Eddie Don't tell me she's still jealous?
Brian Jealous? She'd be jealous if I was run over by a woman *driver.*
Eddie Jealous of you? I mean, it really is ridiculous.
Brian (*haughtily*) What are you trying to say?
Eddie Well, let's face it—if you were marooned on a desert island with Raquel Welch, you'd use her to build a raft.
Brian Nonsense. (*Pause*) Who *is* Raquel Welch?

Eddie grimaces

I'm talking about my wife.
Eddie Your wife. Now there's reality for you. What does she think you're *doing* here?
Brian Actually I was rather firm. I told her I was very ill. Sick. I've come down here for a rest. You see what I've done for you? Lied—to my own wife.
Eddie I know: It's almost human.
Brian So if she does telephone, I can't speak to her because I'm in bed, pulling myself together.
Eddie With Nancy McSmith . . .
Brian Will you please stop . . .
Eddie You misunderstand me. What I mean is, you *can't* be in bed doing your own little thing because as far as Nancy McSmith is concerned, you're a bundle of health.
Brian Am I?
Eddie Of course you are: you told her you come here twice a week. The whole point is for you to *impress* her.
Brian You're absolutely right. (*Pause*) How do I do it?
Eddie With your *body*. It's got to be bouncing with health and vitality. Like those budgerigars you see on television.
Brian Do they *really* bounce?
Eddie Certainly: and they're only actors. You're the real thing. Well—almost.
Brian (*suddenly worried*) There's nothing that can go wrong, is there?
Eddie Nothing in the world.
Brian I mean—there's nothing I should know about? (*He puts a brotherly arm round Eddie*)
Eddie Brian old son—if anything *had* happened, you'd be the last to know about it.

Brian isn't quite sure how to take this

Brian Then let me warn you, Edward: my present financial situation is extremely precarious.
Eddie Where's all this money *gone* then?
Brian Frankly, I've frittered it all away on income tax. So remember, Edward—let me down—and it will be the end—for *both* of us. (*He glares at Eddie and moves to the main doors*) I must meet that train. And for God's sake get this place looking healthy!

Brian exits by the main doors. Minnie enters from the Staff Rooms

Eddie Minnie.
Minnie Yes, sir?
Eddie For God's sake get this place looking healthy!
Minnie Yes, sir—yes, sir . . . (*She looks around, then crosses to open the window. She whips out her duster to wave in some air*)

Meanwhile, Eddie goes to the poster and pours himself another vodka

Eddie What's the point, Minnie? What am I going to do? Apart from anything else, I'm dead skint.
Minnie (*shyly*) I want you to know, sir—that if ever you need anything financial—like money—you have only to ask.
Eddie I know that, Minnie.
Minnie Truly, sir: everything I have is yours for the taking.
Eddie (*snapping out of it*) I can't lose this opportunity—this place is like a millstone round my neck—I've got to impress this Nancy McSmith *somehow*—but how can I do it when there's no-one here to *do* it with? No clients—no staff—if nothing else, I've got to have *staff* . . .
Minnie There's *me*, sir—there's always *me*.
Eddie But I need expert staff—therapists—hairdressers—masseuses . . .
Minnie (*in ecstasy*) *Masseuses!* Oh, sir—oh, sir—if only you knew how I've lived for this moment . . . (*She dashes over to the cupboard and pulls out the wheelchair to swing it round. Sitting in the chair is what appears to be an old man swathed in blankets with a suitcase on his lap*)

Eddie can only stare as Minnie takes the suitcase and puts it on the floor to open it. She kneels to pull out a doctor's stethoscope, a hammer, a huge bottle of horse embrocation, a paperback book, huge scissors

If only you knew how I've studied on your behalf—for years I've crimped and shaved—for years I've studied books in the most pertinent detail. (*She holds up a book*) *Do It Yourself Massage*—and very hard it was too, sir—you name it, I've massaged it. (*She gets to her feet to snatch the blankets from the figure to reveal that it is a life-size sorbo dummy—naked. She throws the dummy face-down on the floor and starts to "massage" it feverishly*) Look, sir—look.
Eddie (*dazed*) I can't *believe* it.
Minnie It's true, sir—it's *me*—your Minnie.

Eddie (*standing up and snapping out of his horror*) Get that thing out of here! You'll frighten people to death! (*Desperately, again*) *What* people? Get rid of it—burn it!

Minnie clings protectively to the dummy

Minnie I couldn't, sir—not my Phillip—not my prince—I beg you, spare his life. Without him I am nothing. (*She is on the point of another breakdown*)

Eddie All right, all right. Just keep it out of the way—*please*—and get this stuff out of here.

Minnie gets on hands and knees and begins collecting her equipment and bunging it into the suitcase. Eddie paces, then comes to a decision

There isn't time to get anyone else. You'll have to help me.

Minnie Oh, sir!

Eddie But I beg you, Minnie—don't use your initiative—do only what I tell you to do.

Minnie I will, sir—I will . . .

Eddie I don't want to see you hanging around, Minnie. (*He moves closer to Minnie*) You've got to distribute yourself—somehow you've got to make yourself look like a highly qualified team of experts. I don't know how, but we'll do it.

Minnie Oh, I will, sir—I will . . .

Eddie (*moving to the stairs*) And get that thing out of here.

Eddie exits to the Staff Rooms

Minnie is in raptures. She jerks the dummy upright and kisses it

Minnie Oh, Phillip—Phillip—it's like a dream come true. Don't think I don't appreciate your muscles—but I've always wanted to get my hands on a real one, and now . . .

Mrs Court-Bending (*off*) Hello there!

At the sound of the voice Minnie gets the dummy and wheelchair back into the cupboard, closes the cupboard door, and turns

Mrs Court-Bending enters. A hale, middle-aged county lady

Hello there—Mr Manchip about—is he?

Minnie I'll find him for you, madam.

Mrs Court-Bending Not to worry—can't stop—just popped in to remind him about the jolly old jumble. He didn't mention it, I suppose?

Minnie Not within earshot, no, madam.

Mrs Court-Bending Briefly put you in the picture—the name's Court-Bending—spoke to him on the blower couple've days ago—collecting old clothes for Oxfam—said he'd sort something out—obviously hasn't—jolly good cause—doing me best—here, have a brochure. (*She takes*

out a piece of paper and gives it to Minnie, then looks at her watch) Pop back later then—don't forget—tell him I called.

Minnie is peering short-sightedly at the brochure. She looks up and curtsies

Minnie From Oxford. Yes, madam, I'll tell him.
Mrs Court-Bending Jolly good. Cheer-oh!

Mrs Court-Bending exits

Minnie curtsies, then stares at the brochure again

Minnie (*reading*) Oxford Famine Relief! Oxford. Well I never . . . all them poor students . . .

Minnie exits, still reading, to the Treatment Rooms.
Eddie, in a change of clothing, enters from the Staff Rooms. As he reaches the foot of the stairs Brian enters urgently through the main doors

Brian Edward—she's here.
Eddie There's something I ought to tell you . . .
Brian Later—later . . .

Nancy enters. She's a strapping woman in her twenties. She wears the mini-est of clothing and carries only a small vanity case

Nancy (*with a smile*) Hello.
Eddie (*impressed*) Hello.
Brian Nancy—I want you to meet my brother, Edward. Edward—let me introduce a wonderful lady, Nancy McSmith—(*pointedly*)—Mrs *Angus* McSmith.
Eddie I don't think I've had the pleasure.
Brian That makes a change. Incidentally—what did you tell your husband?
Nancy Angus? I said I was spending the week-end with my mother.
Brian Oh.
Nancy He just doesn't understand about places like this.
Brian Where *is* he?
Nancy He's away for the week-end—adjudicating at a porridge festival.
Brian I never knew he did that sort of thing.
Nancy Oh, yes—he's always been a great one for his oats.
Eddie I'll fetch your luggage.

Nancy hands him the vanity case. Eddie looks from the case to Brian

Nancy Do show me to my room—I'm dying to get out of these clothes.
Eddie You almost are. (*He pointedly takes the case from Nancy*) *I'll* show you up. (*He guides Nancy towards the stairs*) It's room number one—the best in the house.

Nancy, on the landing, looks out of the window

Nancy Oh, look—a swimming pool—shall we go and see?
Brian Us? Oh, yes—lovely.

Nancy, moving back down the stairs, indicates the Staff Rooms door

Nancy This way?
Eddie (*indicates*) Straight through.

Nancy exits

Nancy (*as she goes*) I'm so looking forward to this week-end.
Brian (*an obvious lie*) Me, too.

Brian exits after her

(*As he goes, with a hiss at Eddie*) Why is it so cold in here?

Eddie watches his exit with relief

Minnie enters from the Treatment Rooms

Eddie Minnie—why is it so cold in here?
Minnie It's the heating, sir.
Eddie I know it's the heating. Why isn't it?
Minnie Why isn't it what, sir?
Eddie The boiler—why isn't it heating?
Minnie Its been off it's food for days, sir. I bung coal in and it just lies there—staring at me.
Eddie First the staff leaves now the boiler goes out. I'll have a look at it.
Minnie It would like that, sir—I know it would.

Eddie almost exits to the Treatment Rooms but pauses

Eddie Minnie—don't forget—the lady is very important—you've got to give her the full treatment. She is our salvation.
Minnie Oh, I will, sir—I will . . .

Eddie looks at her hopelessly and exits to the Treatment Rooms

Minnie is about to exit to the Staff Rooms when we hear the sound of a car horn. She freezes, then dashes across to look out through the main doors

A taxi. It's her—I've got to give her the full treatment! (*She looks around wildly then whips out a duster and starts dusting the cupboard door*)

Joan enters carrying a suitcase identical to Minnie's. She is an attractive woman in her thirties, fashionably dressed. She looks at the dusting Minnie and puts down the suitcase

Minnie curtsies across to the desk and sits

Minnie (*in a receptionist voice*) You rang, madam?
Joan I'd like to see my husband.
Minnie Oh, yes?
Joan Mr Manchip.
Minnie You've made a mistake, madam. Mr Manchip isn't married.
Joan I'm talking about his brother.
Minnie I can assure you, madam, that if Mr Manchip had married his brother, *I* would have been one of the first to know. I'd go so far as to say I would have been a bridesmaid.
Joan I am Mr Edward's sister-in-law. That is, I married his brother, Brian. And I want to see him.
Minnie Yes, of course you do, madam. But first things first. Have you been here before?
Joan I've always managed to avoid it.
Minnie I'll have to make out a form then.
Joan Is that necessary?
Minnie Oh, yes—they always make out a form.
Joan (*all patience gone*) Just what exactly do you want to know?

Minnie stands up, produces a steel tape-measure and moves round to vaguely hold it up against Joan, making notes

Minnie We'll begin with height, weight and other physical peculiarities.
Joan Do you *always* treat people like this?
Minnie Oh, no, madam. But then you're special. You are our salvation. How long will you be staying?
Joan Just for the week-end, thank God.
Minnie I'll prepare your room. That is, I'll advise one of the several chambermaids of your proximity.

Minnie curtsies—and backing away as though to royalty—goes up the stairs into Room 1

Joan I think *I* shall be the one with the nervous breakdown. (*She takes up the card Minnie has written on*) Height—average. Weight—average. Physical peculiarities—yes. Oh, charming. (*She tosses the card back on the desk and raps her fingers impatiently on the desk*) Where is everyone?

Joan exits to the Gymnasium

Eddie enters from the Treatment Rooms, sees Joan's suitcase and moves to take it up

Eddie (*calling*) Minnie!

Minnie enters from Room 1 to wave a feather duster from the gallery

Minnie Yes, sir?

Eddie (*of the suitcase*) I told you to get rid of this.
Minnie Rid of what, sir?
Eddie *This.* Look—I'll put it in the store cupboard. Get rid of it as soon as you've finished doing whatever it is you're doing. (*He goes to toss the suitcase into the cupboard*)

Minnie exits to Room 1. Joan enters from the Gymnasium

Joan Edward.
Eddie (*turns, shocked*) Joan! That is—I mean—*Joan.* (*He kisses her*)
Joan I've come to spend the week-end with my husband.
Eddie But he's sick—*ill.*
Joan Precisely. And like the fool I am, I worry about him.
Eddie But that's why he's here—to get away from you—I mean—not *you* —*everyone.*
Joan A wife's place is by her husband's side. Especially when he's with someone like *you.*
Eddie Oh, my God. You still don't trust me.
Joan No I don't trust you. You're a bad influence.
Eddie I admit I have my weak moments.
Joan Unfortunately your *weak* moments last for *years.*
Eddie Unfair. Unfair.
Joan A fine reception this is, I must say.
Eddie If only you'd *said* you were coming.
Joan (*suspiciously*) Why are you so concerned?
Eddie Let's not talk about us—let's talk about Brian. The man is sick.
Joan Sick? He certainly is.
Eddie The thing is—he needs to be left alone.
Joan From what I can see, he's come to the right place.
Eddie Therefore—speaking not as his brother, but as his health adviser—notwithstanding how much you worry about him and want to look after him—I think you should go.
Joan I shall.
Eddie I knew you'd see sense.
Joan To my room. (*She moves to the stairs*)

Minnie comes stumbling out of Room 1 and down the stairs dusting as she comes, to curtsy

Minnie Lovely room that, madam. Goes with your hair.
Joan Thank you. Please tell my husband I'm here.

Joan exits to Room 1

Minnie takes off her glasses to dust them, showing how short-sighted she is. Eddie is lost in thought

Minnie I'll go and find him, sir.

Eddie Who?
Minnie Madam's husband.
Eddie He's in the garden. No! The thing is it's very important that he doesn't know his wife is here.
Minnie But madam *said*, sir . . .
Eddie Yes, I know that, Minnie—the thing is—it's his birthday.
Minnie Oh, I see, sir: you want it to be a surprise.
Eddie That's it, Minnie: probably the biggest surprise he's had in his life—so we'll only let him in on it when I've thought of something—that is, at the right moment. (*Fingers to lips*) Mum's the word.

Minnie puts her fingers to lips, enjoying the spirit of the occasion

Minnie (*whispering*) I'm sure the lady will be very happy in number one, sir.
Eddie (*whispering*) I'm sure she will. (*With a sudden thought, and back to his normal voice*) Number *one*? That room was for the *other* lady.
Minnie (*looking round*) What other lady?
Eddie The lady I told you was very important.
Minnie Oh, that one's a very important lady, sir. Treated me like a dog, she did.
Eddie Minnie—there's *another* lady coming—don't you remember?
Minnie Oh, that's right, sir—the lady from Oxford.
Eddie Oxford?
Minnie The Welfare lady with all those starving students.
Eddie What starving students?
Minnie All those starving students in Oxford, sir. Look, sir—I'll show you. (*She pulls out the crumpled brochure and hands it to Eddie*) Tragic it is, sir. They eat clothes.
Eddie Minnie—they don't *eat* the clothes, they *sell* them to buy food.
Minnie That's not what I was given to understand, sir.
Eddie Minnie—when the lady comes, we'll give her some clothes, I promise you. I want you to try and think about the *other* lady.
Minnie Oh, sir—don't tell me they're having a hard time in Cambridge . . .
Eddie The one who's with my brother!
Minnie Oh. A-*nother* lady!
Eddie *Yes*, Minnie. Now will you please go and prepare a room for her—number *three*. And remember—distribute yourself.

Minnie curtsies away and scuttles up the stairs and into Room 3. Joan enters from Room 1

Joan Where *is* he?
Eddie Just coming. (*He waves towards the main rooms*)
Joan Why is it so cold in my room?
Eddie Cold? (*He rubs his brow*) I'm feeling rather hot myself.
Joan Either *do* something—or I want another room.

Joan glares at him and exits to Room 1. Nancy and Brian enter from the Staff Rooms

Eddie (*weakly*) Back so soon?
Brian I was just telling Nancy how peaceful it is down here.
Eddie Ha! Peaceful! What? Incredibly.

Throughout the following he's very much aware of Joan in Room 1 and makes desperate signals to Brian who just doesn't understand. When Eddie points upstairs, Brian thinks he means the window

Brian Incidentally, who was that hanging about at the end of the drive?
Eddie What did he look like?

Brian mimes a large box

The Butcher?
Brian The Butcher.
Eddie Our—local butcher.
Brian What was he doing here?
Eddie He came to give me the chop—a chop.
Nancy I thought you'd be a vegetarian.
Eddie So I would be—if I didn't eat meat.
Nancy *I'm* supposed to be a vegetarian—but I must admit I do sometimes have a bit on the side.
Eddie How very interesting.
Nancy He seemed quite a character.
Eddie The Butcher? He is—yes, he is. Did you—er—did you speak to him?
Brian He seemed rather preoccupied—chopping down a tree.
Eddie How incredibly rustic.
Nancy With the side of his hand.

She mimes a karate chop. Eddie staggers a little

Minnie enters from Room 3 and comes down, curtsying

Minnie The room's all ready, sir—not for the lady with all those starving students—or for the lady what treats me like a dog—or would do if she was here which she isn't and we all like a nice surprise, don't we sir? No—the lady from Cambridge, sir.

Still curtsying, Minnie backs into the Treatment Rooms

Brian and Nancy look from her to Eddie

Eddie Sweet, isn't she?
Brian I'll show Nancy to her room. Room number one . . .

Eddie moves quickly to them and tries to relieve Brian of the vanity case. It becomes a struggle

Eddie Actually it's room number three.
Brian We agreed that number one was the best room . . .
Eddie Yes, of course, we did. Now it's room number three. (*He finally*

gets possession of the case. To Nancy) The room's the same, it's just that every so often, we change the numbers on the doors. It's so easy to get into a rut, don't you agree?

Nancy Oh, I do. That's why I came to a place like this. Somewhere where one can feel *free*. (*She makes an expansive gesture of freedom*)

Brian Yes—well—Room number *free* then. (*He laughs feebly at his "joke"*)

Eddie guides Nancy upstairs, still trying to make warning signals to Brian

Eddie I'll show Nancy to her room. You fill out her form.

Brian Does it *need* filling out?

Eddie (*waving at desk*) The *form*. I can't understand it, he knows it's the form to fill out the form.

Eddie opens the door to Room 3. Nancy leans in

Nancy Oh—what a wonderful view.

Eddie (*referring to her*) Wonderful—yes—wonderful.

Eddie and Nancy exit to Room 3, Eddie making a final despairing signal at Room 1

Brian Form? What form? (*He moves to the desk*)

Joan (*off; calling*) Edward? What have you done with my husband?

Brian (*freezing*) My wife!

Brian dashes into the cupboard, sliding the door shut as Joan enters. Minnie enters from the Treatment Rooms as Joan comes downstairs

Joan Have you seen my husband?

Minnie What does he look like, madam?

Joan He's short, round and very ill.

Minnie Oh, dear. He should see a doctor.

Joan Exactly what *I* said.

Minnie I thought *I* did.

Joan Yes, you did.

Minnie Did I?

Joan Yes.

Minnie And did he?

Joan Did he what?

Minnie See a doctor.

Joan No.

Minnie No wonder he's ill then.

Joan gives up and storms out through the Gymnasium door

Now that the coast is clear, Minnie looks around, goes quickly to the cupboard door. She opens it. We see that the dummy is standing upright. She reaches in and pulls it out, revealing that it was being held there by Brian who stands with his eyes firmly shut, expecting the worse. Minnie has taken out the dummy without any acknowledgement of Brian. Now she shuts the

door and starts to move away, stops, then moves back to open the cupboard door. Brian stands in exactly the same position as we last saw him

Minnie Oh. It's you, sir. I thought it was the bank manager.
Brian Oh really?
Minnie Might I wish you a Happy Birthday?
Brian Thank you, Minnie.

With no more ado, Minnie slides the door shut and carries the dummy into the Staff Rooms.

Door 3 and Eddie comes out and hurries downstairs, as Brian enters fearfully from the cupboard

Brian (*pointing towards the bedroom*) Joan—she's here . . .
Eddie I know—I know. You've got to persuade her to leave.
Brian How can I? When have I ever been able to persuade her to do *anything*?
Eddie You'll think of something.
Brian *You* think of something.
Eddie I've already thought what to *do*—all you've got to do is *do* it. (*He hurries back upstairs*)
Brian Where are you going?
Eddie To keep Nancy in her room.

Eddie exits to Room 3. Brian looks around desperately, then exits quickly to the Gymnasium.

Minnie enters from the Staff Rooms, singing Happy Birthday to You. She moves to the window, looks out, and exits to the Treatment Rooms. Brian, coughing, and Joan enter from the Gymnasium

Joan and Brian are in the middle of an argument. Note: *whenever Brian is with Joan he acts the "sick man"*

Joan I've no intention of returning to London. Now that I'm here, I'm here to stay.
Brian But you *can't stay.*
Joan Why not?
Brian Because—because I'm ill. (*He gives a little wheeze*)
Joan Which is precisely why I'm staying.
Brian But don't you understand? If you're here, I shall be worrying about you. I should be *resting*. (*He collapses into a chair, chest heaving dramatically*)
Joan (*suddenly*) Who is Nancy?

It is so sudden that Brian is pulled up with a jolt

Brian (*weakly*) Nancy?
Joan I just happened to be rubbing a pencil over your telephone pad when I distinctly made out the outline of today's date and the name Nancy.
Brian Oh—*that* Nancy.

Joan *Which* Nancy?
Brian Nancy—you know—*(quickly)*—The National Association of Nautical and Cinematographic Yachtsmen.
Joan The National Association of *what*?
Brian *(quickly)* Neurotics and Cricketing Yorkshiremen. It's their anniversary. I send them a donation. *(He coughs to remind her that he's ill and clasps at a sudden pain in his back)*
Joan You should be in bed.
Brian I know—I know . . .

Joan moves to him and kisses his forehead

Joan My poor darling—I'm so worried about you. *(She kisses him again)* It's just that I don't trust that brother of yours. If it's not one thing it's the other.
Brian I admit he's sometimes asked me for a bit of money, but he's never asked me for a bit of the other.
Joan *(pointing upstairs)* Come on. Bed.
Brian I think I'll just have a quick lie down in the sauna bath.

Brian hurries—then remembers, and limps—to exit to the Treatment Rooms

Joan climbs the stairs, closing the window as she goes

As Joan gets to the top, Eddie enters from Room 3, slamming the door, and clutches the door handle

Joan *(after looking at him for a moment)* Why are you hanging on to that door handle?
Eddie Am I? So I am. Yes. I'm testing it. *(He rattles the handle)* You see, if anyone was stuck inside, I could shake the handle and shout out: *(He shouts at the door)* It's all right! The door's stuck! I'll let you out in a minute! *(Turning to Joan)* But of course it *isn't* stuck, so I don't have to shout. *(He shouts at the door)* Don't do anything! Just sit there quietly! *(To Joan)* All I have to do is shake the handle. Simple really.

Joan looks at him, then goes into Room 1, closing the door. Immediately Eddie dashes downstairs as Brian enters from the Treatment Rooms

Brian Joan refuses to leave!
Eddie What did you tell her?
Brian I said I was sick.
Eddie Never mind about Joan—what did you tell *Nancy*?
Brian Why?
Eddie *Why? (He points wildly upstairs)* She thinks this place is a *nudist* colony!

At this moment the door to Room 3 opens and Nancy comes out. She is "naked", covered by her long blonde hair and two tennis racquets

Eddie and Brian can only stare at her

Nancy Anyone for tennis?

The Lights fade to a quick Black-Out, as—

the CURTAIN *falls*

SCENE 2

A few minutes later

When the CURTAIN *rises, Eddie is discovered looking out of the open window Brian is pacing nervously*

Brian What's she doing?
Eddie Gambolling.
Brian Who with?
Eddie On the lawn. *Gambolling.* Up and down jumping. *Starkers.*
Brian (*despairingly*) What can we do?
Eddie Fetch the binoculars.
Brian Stop staring out of that window and *think.*
Eddie (*with an evil grin*) I *am* thinking. (*Concerned*) Anyway, it's your fault. What did you tell her about this place?
Brian I don't know. I can't understand it. All I said was that this is the Healthy Vale Sun Club.
Eddie No, no, no—The Sunny Vale *Health* Club!
Brian Is there a difference?
Eddie My dear Brian—when you go to a health club you take off weight. When you go to a sun club, you take off *everything.*
Brian Everything?
Eddie *Everything.* Witness gambolling Godiva out there.
Brian What sort of man does she think I am?
Eddie I dread to think.
Brian Now look here . . . (*Suddenly realizing*) Oh my God. (*He starts to climb the stairs*)
Eddie Where are you going?
Brian My wife. I've got to stop her looking out of the window.
Eddie (*pointing to the window*) You're supposed to be with the delectable Mrs McSmith . . .
Brian Will you stop trying to imply that there is anything going on between that dear lady——
Eddie —dear naked lady——
Brian —dear naked lady and myself . . . (*Suddenly remembering Nancy is outside*) Oh my god. (*He looks through the window and winces at what he sees*) Look at her. (*Imploring, to Nancy*) Keep *still,* madam. (*To God, hands in prayer*) I've never asked you for much—but couldn't you send

down just a *little* fog? (*To Eddie*) It's all a terrible mistake—but you're right. Joan will never understand.

Eddie Right. *I'll* look after Joan—*you* look after Nancy.

Brian Yes. (*He moves to the Staff doors*)

Eddie Before you go . . .

Brian turns

Take your clothes off.

Brian Yes, of course. (*He starts to unbuttom his jacket, but realizes*) No, I will not take my clothes off.

Eddie Look—*someone* has to convince Nancy that this is a nudist colony.

Brian Why?

Eddie Why? Because—one—we need the money—more than you know—and two—if *she* finds out that you lied to her and tells her husband—your most valued client—things could be very nasty—very nasty.

Brian I didn't lie to her. She misunderstood.

Eddie I see. Like Joan misunderstood.

Brian All right, all right. But she's got to find out sooner or later that she's made a mistake.

Eddie Whatever happens, we've got to get that money out of her. So: she wants to think this is a nudist colony. Which means seeing someone else in the same state.

Brian Do you really expect me to go out there and—*frolic naked*?

Eddie No, no, no—it doesn't mean that you have to *appear* naked.

Brian No?

Eddie No. It means that you have to *appear* to appear naked.

Brian You mean . . . ?

Eddie *Of course.* You surely couldn't have thought that I meant . . .

Brian No, no. Of course not. I apologize.

Eddie I accept your apology. Off you go then.

Eddie points upstairs. Brian moves to the stairs, looks out of the window at Nancy then

Brian Where to?

Eddie Your room.

Brian My room. Yes, of course. (*He takes a few more steps, then stops*) Why?

Eddie So that when you reappear, you will appear to appear naked—which is what we agreed.

Brian Did we?

Eddie Yes.

Brian So we did. (*He moves a few more steps up*) We did not!

Eddie Shall we discuss it with your wife?

Brian That's blackmail!

Eddie Isn't it!

Brian fumes a moment, then hurries upstairs, clasps his hands to his head, and exits to Room 4

As soon as Brian has gone, Eddie goes to swivel the poster and pour himself a large vodka, and starts to drink

Maxie Maudlin enters through the main doors. He is fifty, wears a check suit and fedora. He looks very twitchy, is grabbing at a bottle of pills

Eddie is clearly amazed to see him

Maxie Eddie—Eddie . . .
Eddie *Maxie*—what do *you* want?
Maxie Water—water—a glass of water . . . (*He makes to take the glass from Eddie*)
Eddie That's neat vodka. (*He points to the desk*) Here—here—on the desk.

Maxie goes to the desk, pours himself water from the jug and drinks down some pills. He takes a deep breath, hand on heart

Maxie You've got to help me, Eddie.
Eddie Help *you*—ha!
Maxie Tell me who I am.
Eddie Who you are?
Maxie Who am I?
Eddie You're Maxie Maudlin—the famous quick-change artist—The Man With a Thousand Faces . . .
Maxie That's just it, Eddie—I've got to have a rest—doctor's orders—they're taking me over.
Eddie Who are?
Maxie My masterful impersonations. I don't know who I *am* any more.
Eddie You mean like . . . ?
Maxie Exactly. Doctor Jekyll and Mister Maudlin—it's getting me down, Eddie—my life isn't my own any more—I can't stand it. It's getting worse! (*He grips Eddie's arm*) Eddie—you've got to let me have a room—just for a few days.
Eddie I can't have this place cluttered up with invalids—it's supposed to be a *health* club.
Maxie I beg of you, Eddie—I've got to find myself before it's too late . . .
Eddie I'd like to, Maxie, but—(*a sudden thought*)—hold on a minute. Have you got your costumes with you?
Maxie Me trunk's outside. I've come straight from a barmitzvah in the Balls Pond Road.

Suddenly Eddie is all charm: his arm goes round Maxie

Eddie Maxie—my dear old friend—you couldn't have come at a better time—*of course* you can have a room—*of course* you can stay here. For as long as you like. As my guest.
Maxie (*suspiciously*) There must be a catch.
Eddie It's like this, Maxie. Tne staff has hopped it. I need to convince a certain lady that they're still here—and highly efficient. You're the only one who can do it for me.

Maxie Me? How?
Eddie Simply by creating a few of your masterful impersonations.
Maxie (*apalled*) Not that, Eddie—I beg you—anything but that!
Eddie Nonsense, old son: after all I've done for *you*? All you've got to do is keep your eyes and ears open and put in an appearance as and when it becomes necessary. (*He rings the desk bell*) You can have Room Number Two—Minnie will bring your things up.
Maxie (*horrified*) *Minnie*—I thought she'd have been put down by now. I'm off.

He makes to go but Eddie restrains him

Eddie You can't go now.
Maxie Watch me.
Eddie I'll tell Minnie who her amorous pirate was.
Maxie I was drunk. . . . I had a black-out.
Eddie You must have done.

Minnie lurches in from the Treatment Rooms

Minnie (*curtsying*) You rang, sir?

Maxie presses himself back, trying to hide. He squeezes his eyes shut

Eddie Minnie, we have another guest—would you bring in his luggage, please—and take it straight up to room two.
Minnie Yes, sir—yes, sir . . .

Minnie curtsies towards the main doors, sees the shut-eyed Maxie, waggles her duster over him and exits

Maxie (*opening his eyes, amazed*) She didn't recognize me!
Eddie *Of course* she didn't—it's the *pirate* who fills her dreams. You're perfectly safe. (*A thought*) In fact, you're probably the only one who *is*.
Maxie If she finds out—think of it—sailing the seven seas with *her* on my back—doomed—like the Flying Dustman.
Eddie She won't find out—as long as you help me.
Maxie That's blackmail!
Eddie I know: it's the current craze. So it's either help *me*—or it's over the waves with that bow-legged Pandora out there.

Minnie crashes through the main doors with a huge trunk. The trunk is covered in seaside stickers. She staggers around under the weight of the trunk, staggers to the rear, watched by the frozen Maxie and Eddie, then lurches forward, almost falls into the pit, is saved by Maxie. She continues to weave precariously and finally finds the stairs. She gets a few steps up, then begins to descend backwards, Maxie and Eddie rush to her and succeed in giving her sufficient momentum to mount the stairs. They watch as she crashes into Room 2. There is an enormous crash. Then Minnie reappears minus the trunk, comes downstairs, curtsies and exits to the Staff Rooms

Eddie and Maxie have watched all this in silent horror. Now Eddie puts an arm round Maxie and guides him upstairs

Eddie The thing is, old son, I've got a terrible problem. The staff's all gone and we've got someone very important staying here this weekend . . .

We lose the words as they mount the stairs and move along the gallery, but still see Eddie explaining

Maxie (*as they reach Room 2; loudly*) You mean she's out there—*frolicing naked?*
Eddie Believe me—it's a matter of life and death . . .

Eddie ushers Maxie to Room 2, then moves along to Room 4, just as Brian puts his head out. He is holding his clothes

Ready?
Brian (*raising his eyes to heaven*) If there is a—you know—Someone Up There—he'll understand, won't he? He'll understand . . . ?

Eddie takes the pile from him, moving away

Eddie You might know the answer sooner than you think if you don't hurry up.
Brian What are you doing with my clothes?
Eddie Just making sure you play the game, old son. (*He hurries downstairs and tosses the clothes into the cupboard. He takes up his glass of vodka from the desk, and has a sip*

Brian comes out of his room. He is naked, apart from shoes and socks, but clutches a framed oil painting to cover his dignity. Slowly he comes downstairs

Eddie (*referring to the painting*) *The Stag At Bay.* Very appropriate.
Brian (*terrified*) What happens now?
Eddie You go into the garden and you gambol!
Brian I can't—I can't . . . !
Eddie Of course you can. (*Referring to his drink*) Bottoms up!
Nancy (*off*) Coo-eeee!

They freeze

Nancy appears at the window. We see enough of her to gather that she is naked. She waves a tennis racquet

Anyone for tennis?
Eddie Yes—Brian.
Brian No! That is—no-one *else* playing?
Nancy I was hoping for a mixed doubles but I can't find anyone.
Eddie They're all on the run. That's it—a cross-country run. Incredibly healthy. They'll be hours. Probably the rest of the day.
Nancy Oh well—*we'll* have a nice little game then, Brian.

Brain Us? Oh—yes—lovely. (*He mimes a tennis stroke and nearly dislodges the painting*)
Nancy Come on then—I'm dying to play with you.
Brian I think I've left the gas on—I mean, light on—in my room. You go and—get the net warmed up. With you in two shakes of a—that is, two minutes. (*He backs away up the stairs, out of her vision*)
Eddie That's it, Nancy—you toddle off and practise a few strokes—careful on the old backhand, eh?
Nancy See you later then.

Nancy skips off

Brian breathes a sigh of relief and comes downstairs. Eddie pours himself another vodka

Brian I can't play tennis like *this*. (*With a sudden thought*) I can't play *tennis*.
Eddie You'll have to.
Brian (*referring to the painting*) What about this?
Eddie Tell her you can't find your racquet.

Brian looks out of the window. He starts to bob up and down, obviously "accompanying" Nancy outside

Joan enters from Room 1

Eddie quickly puts his glass down near the water jug

Joan Brian!

Brian reacts in horror, keeps his back to her

Brian You recognized me!
Joan Where are your clothes?
Brian I—I . . .
Eddie As soon as he knew you were here, he dropped *everything*.

Brian moves to Eddie's side as though for protection

Joan (*coming downstairs*) How dare you let him walk about like that when he's so ill?

Unseen by Joan, Nancy appears at the window and tosses in a tennis ball, then exits

Brian instinctively catches the ball, Eddie catches the painting in front of Brian. Brian looks down at the painting, realizes what he did, and nearly faints. Eddie takes the ball and tosses it back through the window

Eddie Those damned woodpeckers! (*To Brian*) Off you go then, old chap—mustn't keep the lady waiting, must we?
Joan *What* lady?

Eddie The lady—that is, the *old* lady—the old *fat* lady—who's waiting to give him his massage. (*He ushers the unwilling Brian towards the Staff Rooms*)
Joan In the *garden*?
Eddie In the garden. Yes. Well. That's why he was standing there with no clothes on. (*To Brian*) Wasn't it?
Brian Yes.
Joan What was?
Eddie Yes.
Joan What was?
Eddie Yes. He was just on his way to the treatment rooms when he happened to notice this old painting.

Eddie taps the canvas. Brian winces

Joan What about the painting.
Eddie Yes—what *about* it?
Brian He asked me to value it.
Eddie Absolutely.
Brian Never tell nowadays. Might be worth a fortune. Well, it is to *me* at the moment.

Eddie guides Brian to the Staff Rooms door

Eddie Let me know what you think as soon as you can, there's a good chap.

Brian backs out through the Staff Rooms door. It isn't easy, with the painting. He exits

Eddie closes the window

Joan Why did he have to go into the garden?
Eddie Didn't I say? I'm so sorry. (*He guides her towards the Treatment Rooms*) He's valueing the painting for me . . .
Joan *Why in the garden?*
Eddie Because of the light. Yes—the light. So much better at this time of year, don't you agree?

He ushers her into the Treatment Rooms

Joan Where are you taking me?
Eddie For some sun.
Joan In *here*?
Eddie Lamp—sun lamp—wonderful for the skin.
Joan Oh well—I suppose that while I'm here, I might as well . . .

Joan and Eddie exit.
Minnie enters from the Staff Rooms with the dummy

Minnie opens the cupboard door. She puts the dummy into the cupboard

and takes out Joan's suitcase, thinking it to be her own. As she does, she tips the pile of Brian's clothing on to the floor, but does not notice it. She opens the suitcase and reacts, surprised. She reaches in to pull out a woman's undergarment, She stares at it, uncomprehending

Mrs Court-Bending enters heartily through the main doors

Mrs Court-Bending Back again! (*She guffaws and rubs her hands*)

Minnie is still staring at the garment in her hands

I've just been in the woods for a tramp.
Minnie Did you get one?
Mrs Court-Bending Across to the jolly old Millington's place. They've got some old toys for the kiddies. Let's have 'em, I said. All in a good cause. (*Seeing the suitcase*) I see you've got it all ready for me then.
Minnie It was in the cupboard—Mr Edward must have put it there.
Mrs Court-Bending That's the spirit. Anything else?

Minnie goes to the bundle of Brian's clothing

Minnie There's only this.
Mrs Court-Bending Every little helps. (*She takes the clothing and puts it in the suitcase. She closes the lid*) Got to dash—committee meeting at six. I'll bring the case back—any other old rubbish gratefully received. All in a good cause. Cheer-oh. (*She clumps out with the suitcase, but turns at the doors*) You know—you've made someone—somewhere—jolly happy.

Mrs Court-Bending exits through the main doors

Minnie stands for a moment, her mind ticking over very slowly. Suddenly she hears voices from the garden

Joan (*off*) Where are you going *now*?

Eddie enters

Eddie I thought I heard Brian.

Eddie guiltily pulls Joan's dress from behind his back, then sees Minnie. Minnie dashes about, dusting, taking up the phones, opening the window

What are you *doing*?
Minnie Distributing myself, sir.
Eddie Well *don't*.

Minnie starts to exit sadly

Minnie!
Minnie Sir?
Eddie Get rid of this. (*He gives her Joan's dress*)

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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