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HAPPY BIRTHDAY

A COMEDY

MARC CAMOLETTI

Adapted by

BEVERLEY CROSS

SAMUEL  FRENCH

LONDON

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY

First presented by John Gale at the Apollo Theatre, London, on the 18th April 1979 with the following cast of characters:

Jacqueline	Elizabeth Counsell
Robert	Ian Lavender
Bernard	Christopher Timothy
Brigit 1	Julia Foster
Brigit 2	Malou Cartwright

The play directed by Roger Redfarn
Setting by Peter Rice

The action takes place in the living-room of a house in the country

ACT I Early evening
ACT II After dinner, the same night

Time—the present

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(See also page ii)

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ACT I

The living-room of a comfortable house in the country. Early evening

The front door, kitchen, bathroom and three bedrooms all open directly into the room. (*See plan of set on p. 71*)

When the CURTAIN *rises the room is empty. Mozart is playing softly from the record-player. After a moment the phone starts to ring. Jacqueline enters from the bathroom, a hairbrush in her hand, and goes to answer the telephone, which is by the fireplace*

Jacqueline Hello? . . . Yes, this is she. . . . Yes. That's right. . . . Who? . . . Ah, the agency—you've managed to find someone? . . . Marvellous! . . . Not quite a housekeeper, and not quite a charwoman? . . . Something between the two? . . . A temporary? . . . Well, never mind. My husband and I are expecting a guest for the week-end. Can she come today? . . . Wonderful! . . . Later—and the money is agreed. Fine. And what's her name? . . . Brigit? That's very suitable. . . . Sweet. Thank you very much, I'm terribly grateful. Good-bye.

Jacqueline replaces the telephone and exits to the bathroom

There is a ring at the front doorbell

Jacqueline enters, switches off the music, and opens the door. Robert stands there with a suitcase and a bunch of roses, and wearing a hat

Robert It's me. I've arrived.

Jacqueline pulls him inside, kicks the door shut behind him, and kisses him

Where is he?

Jacqueline Down below, in the cellar.

Robert Good.

She tries to kiss him again

Hold it! Just a minute. What if he decides to come up?

Jacqueline Not possible—he's only just gone down. I just can't believe you're here. It's marvellous. Sheer bliss. Why don't you put your case down? How do you feel?

Robert What?

Jacqueline Is it bliss for you too?

Robert Certainly. If it wasn't bliss I wouldn't be here, would I? I mean, it's terribly dangerous. We must be mad.

Jacqueline Not at all. I tell you, when he told me that he'd invited you down here I could hardly speak I was so excited, so happy. I kissed him for sheer joy—you know what I mean?

Robert Of course. I nearly kissed him too . . .

Jacqueline I kept wanting to ask him to invite you but I didn't dare. Maybe he read my mind—I was completely knocked sideways when he thought up the invitation all on his own.

Robert Well, he was very determined I should come. Insisted on it. Not that I objected that much.

Jacqueline I didn't object at all.

Robert No, you kissed him. He doesn't suspect anything, does he?

Jacqueline Not a thing. He happens to like you very much.

Robert Not quite in the same way as you do.

Jacqueline I hope not.

Robert I'm his oldest friend.

Jacqueline Now don't start getting broody and guilty already–the main thing is that you're here. I was praying that I'd be here alone when you arrived.

Robert That's very touching. But look, we must be very careful. Let's not do anything stupid.

Jacqueline No.

Robert In our situation, even the simplest teeniest thing could give us away. A glance, a touch of the hand . . .

Jacqueline Don't fret, I'll be as careful as a mouse. Would you like to get rid of that case?

Robert Yes. For you. (*He hands her the flowers*)

A door slams off in the kitchen. Robert jumps away, retaining the flowers

Jacqueline Ah! Now then. Here we go. The man himself . . .

Robert Already?

Bernard enters from the kitchen

Bernard Robert, old chap, you're here!

Robert Yes, yes, I've arrived. Just arrived. Arrived a second ago. Just got here.

Jacqueline Yes. A moment ago. You can see that—he's still got his hat on. (*She takes his hat off*)

Robert I'm so sorry.

Bernard That's all right. You make yourself at home. You do just as you like, old chap. It's marvellous to see you, isn't it, darling?

Jacqueline Bliss.

Robert Marvellous to see you too—both of you.

Bernard You're looking very well.

Robert So are you—both of you.

Bernard Thank you.

Robert Not at all. It's splendid, absolutely splendid—and so nice to see both of you again and looking so well on it. I can't thank you enough for inviting me here.

Bernard Oh, come on! An old friend like you. (*To Jacqueline*) If only you knew him as well as I do.

Jacqueline Yes? . . .

Bernard I mean, underneath that shy façade he's really a very extraordinary fellow. (*He boxes Robert playfully on the shoulder*)

Jacqueline Yes, darling, so you've said before . . .
Robert I was only hoping that I wouldn't be putting you out.
Bernard Putting us out? Are you joking, or digging for compliments?
Robert Not at all.
Bernard Then there's nothing to discuss. We are enchanted to see you, aren't we, darling?
Jacqueline Of course.
Robert Me too—enchanted.
Bernard Then that's all right then, so we're all happy. All lovely. So what more could any of us want?
Jacqueline I'd like a glass of champagne.
Bernard And so you shall. Whenever you like.
Jacqueline One thing we mustn't forget—someone must go to the village because everything will be shut there tomorrow.
Bernard No. And another thing—I don't think it's absolutely vital to use the little glasses, do you?
Jacqueline Then we'll use the big ones, all right?
Bernard Absolutely all right.
Jacqueline Absolutely!
Robert Just a minute—what are we talking about? I'm somewhat confused.
Jacqueline Glasses—for the champagne.
Bernard Let's live a little—after all it's the first time you've ever been here.
Robert I'm overwhelmed—so pretty and everything arranged with such a flair. Perfectly charming.
Bernard Praise Jacqueline—she did it all.
Robert Oh, I can see that. Certainly. One only has to look about one. Quite perfect.
Jacqueline I'm delighted it pleases you, but really I don't deserve——
Bernard Of course you do. Have you shown Robert his room?
Jacqueline I was just about to before you came in.
Bernard Fine. Then it's through there—or through there. (*He points in turn to the bedroom down* L *and up* L) You can have whichever one you like.

Jacqueline signals to Robert to take the bedroom down L

Robert Well, how about that one? (*He points down* L)
Bernard You couldn't have chosen better. Make yourself at home.
Jacqueline I'm sure you'd like to unpack your things and all that.
Robert Well, yes—that would be very nice.
Bernard And when you've done all that, if you find it too small or too cluttered, we can always shift you somewhere else.
Robert I wouldn't dream of it. I'm sure it's just fine.

Jacqueline puts Robert's hat on his head

Robert gives her the roses and exits down L

Jacqueline (*closing the door*) The agency called. We're in luck—they're sending us a temporary. Let's hope she's competent.

Bernard Let's hope she's better than the last one.
Jacqueline I didn't choose her. (*She gets a vase from the fire and takes it to the table*)
Bernard No-one in their right mind would have chosen her. Broke all the china and her cooking nearly poisoned me. And ugly into the bargain.
Jacqueline (*arranging the roses loosely*) Ugly? Funny—I thought she looked like your mother... Anyway, she'll be here in an hour. She's called Brigit.
Bernard Brigit? Why is she called Brigit?
Jacqueline I don't know. What's wrong with Brigit?
Bernard Nothing I suppose. It's an unusual name.
Jacqueline Rubbish. I know lots of Brigits.
Bernard Do you?
Jacqueline Of course I do. I had an aunt Brigit, she was a very nice person.

Robert enters

Robert What an attractive room.
Jacqueline You'll be all right in there?
Robert As right side up as a billiard ball. This really is a very lovely house.
Jacqueline Yes, I only wish we were able to spend more time here. And if only living in the country was less complicated—I must finish that list for the village shop. Would you excuse me?
Robert Of course.
Bernard Make sure you get everything down.
Jacqueline I will. I won't be long.
Bernard Take your time, darling.
Jacqueline All right, darling.

Jacqueline exits to the kitchen with the vase and roses

Bernard Take a seat, old boy. And how about a drink?
Robert (*sitting*) Yes, that would be very nice——
Bernard Scotch?
Robert Very nice. Thank you—but no ice.

Bernard starts to mix and pour drinks

Bernard It really is good to see you, Robert, old chap. Marvellous
Robert Just how I feel, Bernard. Wonderful.
Bernard I'm glad you think like that because I really need your help, old man. (*He goes to Robert with two drinks and gives him one*)
Robert My help? Whatever for?
Bernard (*confidentially*) I'll tell you. Listen. We've known each other a long time, haven't we?
Robert A long time. Let me see, it was . . .
Bernard It doesn't matter about *how* long. The point is, over the years, we've seen a lot of each other.
Robert A great deal. But I'm not sure that I quite understand . . .
Bernard Please. I'm being serious—desperately serious. This is what friendship is all about. I have something to tell you—but strictly between you and me. A confidence. A secret. I can rely on you?

Robert I think so. I hope so. Depends what it is.
Bernard I want you to swear, cross your heart, all that sort of thing.
Robert Scout's honour?
Bernard Don't be flippant. This is frightfully important.
Robert Sorry.
Bernard That's all right. I just want to impress on you the need for absolute secrecy.
Robert All right. I'll swear—on what do you want me to swear?
Bernard Your word of honour. As a gentleman.
Robert Very well.
Bernard Well, it's like this—I haven't behaved like a gentleman.
Robert Ah! . . . Good.
Bernard Why do you say "Ah! Good"?
Robert I don't know why. Nerves, I suppose. I just happened to say "Ah! . . . Good." I don't know why I said "Ah! . . . Good." It's just one of those things that happen.
Bernard All right. But you see, old chap, I've got myself into this situation with this—this girl.
Robert Ah! . . . Good.
Bernard You're doing it again.
Robert Am I?
Bernard I'm the one who should be nervous.
Robert Sorry.
Bernard But this situation, this complicated situation is the reason I've asked you to come here—because I *need* you.
Robert Ah! . . . Good.
Bernard Please don't keep saying "Ah! . . . Good."
Robert Sorry—my nerves. And I'm very confused. This situation of yours and all that. I mean, what is it to do with me?
Bernard Simple.
Robert Is it?
Bernard Very simple. I just couldn't think up an excuse, a story to tell Jacqueline. You see, I invited her here so that I can be with her. It's her birthday, you see.
Robert She didn't tell me it was her birthday.
Bernard Who didn't?
Robert Jacqueline didn't.
Bernard Not Jacqueline's birthday—Brigit's birthday.
Robert Who's Brigit?
Bernard That's her name.
Robert Whose name?
Bernard The name of my—well, her name. The name of . . . Let's just say it's her name.
Robert Ah! . . . Good. Yes. Yes. Yes. Brigit. But what's it got to do with me?
Bernard Isn't it clear?
Robert No. Not very.

Bernard I've invited you so that she could come too.
Robert Come too? Here?
Bernard Exactly.
Robert But you're stark raving mad. Come here? Actually invite your mistress to come here?
Bernard No, not at all. Not a bit like that. It's you who've invited her here.
Robert I've never even met her.
Bernard Look, I couldn't invite Brigit myself because Jacqueline knows nothing at all about Brigit. I couldn't just invite a girl down here because it's her birthday. Jacqueline's no fool.
Robert No.
Bernard She'd know something fishy was going on. She'd guess. That's why you've invited Brigit down.
Robert Why?
Bernard Because she's *your* mistress.
Robert What!
Bernard Yes. Your mistress.
Robert (*rising*) Oh, no. No. Oh, no, no, no, no.
Bernard Why not? (*He rises*)
Robert Because—because it's just not on. No, no. None of that. No, no.
Bernard Why not?
Robert Because—because it would never work, that's what.
Bernard Of course it will. It'll work very well.
Robert Never. There's no way.
Bernard Why not?
Robert Why not? Why not? Think about it. Right here in front of your wife; in front of Jacqueline? It can't be done. I mean, what about me? What sort of position would I be in?
Bernard No skin off your nose at all. You're a bachelor. Perfectly in order for you to have a mistress. And what could be more normal than for you to want to bring her down here?
Robert Oh, nothing wrong at all. Except for the fact that I haven't got a mistress.
Bernard That's got nothing to do with it. The point is nobody knows anything at all about your private life. That side of your personality is as much a mystery to me as it is to Jacqueline. She'll think it perfectly ordinary and natural that you should have a mistress. She won't be in the least surprised.
Robert I'm not so sure. But anyway, I don't like it. It's just not my line. I'm just not that sort of chap. I don't want to do it.
Bernard Don't want to? But it's too late not to want to.
Robert What do you mean, too late?
Bernard I've worked it all out with Brigit. (*He goes and pours himself a drink*) It's all agreed. When she gets here, she's going to behave exactly as if she was your girl-friend.
Robert She can do what she likes. But don't count on me to go along with it. I'm not going to be an accomplice to your deceiving your wife. It's

just not on, old man. Anyway, she'll see through it like a flash. It just won't work. (*He finishes his drink and puts his glass on the fireplace*)

Bernard Why not?

Robert Why not? Why not? Why do you keep saying "why not" all the time? Just stop it, will you. It's very irritating.

Bernard I repeat myself because I am totally baffled as to why you should refuse to render me this small service.

Robert Because it's impossible.

Bernard Why?

Robert Please, enough of the "whys", "why nots", and "whyever nots". Use your brains for a moment. It just can't possibly work.

Bernard It'll work like a charm.

Robert No——

Bernard Why ever not?

Robert Because nothing rings true—if I *had* a mistress, then it stands to reason we would have arrived together; at the same time.

Bernard Not necessarily. I told her to take the train so that you would get here before her, so that I'd have time to put you in the picture. I've worked it all out very carefully.

Robert I came by car.

Bernard I know you did. What's that got to do with it?

Robert Suppose I'd had an accident?

Bernard But you didn't. Here you are . . .

Robert Not for long . . .

Bernard Why not?

Robert Because I'm not going to stay.

Bernard Why not?

Robert Look, do you mind. I'm up to here with your "whys" and "why nots". It's getting to be a habit with you—a mania.

Bernard Now keep calm, old man. No need to get in a paddy.

Robert I'm not in a paddy. But if you like I'll tell you why—why I'm not going to stay. It's because of this fellow in town. A client—just remembered, frightfully important—can't think how I came to forget him . . .

Bernard What's wrong with him?

Robert Nothing to do with you. You're in insurance—what do you know about escalators?

Bernard Nothing at all.

Robert Then there's nothing to discuss.

Bernard I don't agree. I've always been fascinated by escalators. Tell me about your client.

Robert His escalator won't work.

Bernard Oh! Why not?

Robert Technical reasons. That's why I've got to go back to town in double quick time. Poor chap up there on the third floor can't get down.

Bernard Why doesn't he use the lift?

Robert That doesn't work either.

Bernard Why not?

Robert I've had enough. Where's my suitcase?

Robert exits to the bedroom down L

Bernard You can't do this to me. And even if you do go, I'm still going to have to tell Jacqueline about you and Brigit.

Robert enters, wearing his hat, with his case

Robert I've never even met the wretched woman!

Bernard Now's your chance. I mean, put yourself in my shoes, old man. I'm not going to tell my wife that Brigit's *my* girl-friend, am I?

Robert That's your problem. You tell her what you like. It's nothing to do with me. But I insist you don't involve me. You can't go telling her she's my mistress when I'm not going to be here. No tales behind my back . . . It wouldn't be right.

Bernard Whether you're here or up your escalator, I'm not going to change my story now.

Robert You'll have to—I refuse to have anything to do with such a sordid and complicated tissue of lies—and if you say "why not", so help me, I'll punch you right on the nose!

Jacqueline enters from the kitchen with the roses properly arranged

Jacqueline (*putting the vase on the table*) My darlings! We simply don't have anything! Isn't it frightful living in a house when you don't actually live there all the time—if you know what I mean. You always think everything's there, and when you arrive for the week-end it isn't there at all.

Robert Well, you don't have to trouble on my account, because I'm going.

Jacqueline Going? What do you mean, going?

Bernard Yes, I can't think what's come over him, but he absolutely insists . . .

Jacqueline But whatever for?

Robert I've just explained it all to Bernard. There's this client of mine in town. I'd forgotten all about him. Absolutely essential that I return at once, otherwise he won't get down till Monday.

Jacqueline It's ridiculous.

Bernard That's just what I've been saying.

Jacqueline But, Robert dear, we were so looking forward to having you here. (*To Bernard*) Have you say anything to upset him?

Bernard Only "why not".

Jacqueline What?

Robert Please stop. Never mind . . .

Jacqueline But I do mind. Terribly. Please, for me—forget your client and stay.

Robert Absolutely impossible.

Jacqueline But everything's ready. I've planned a marvellous little dinner —just for the three of us.

Bernard For four.

Jacqueline For three—but there's certainly enough to eat if you men want to eat for four.

Robert No . . .

Bernard Nothing to worry about. Jacqueline's made a list . . .
Jacqueline You're not on a diet, or anything like that, are you?
Robert No.
Bernard There you are, then.
Robert Not at all. There's really no point in going on and on, because I'm leaving.
Bernard It's not going to make any difference, you know.
Jacqueline What on earth are you two talking about?
Bernard Oh, it's just that Robert is so old-fashioned . . .
Robert I'm not old-fashioned.
Bernard Of course you are. So silly in this day and age . . .
Robert Where's my hat? (*He goes to the hat stand looking for his hat*)
Bernard There you are, you see. Can't go without his hat. Old-fashioned. And as shy as a schoolboy. (*To Jacqueline*) You see, what did I tell you?
Jacqueline You haven't told me anything. One moment he's here for the week-end, next moment he wants to go. You say he's old-fashioned and shy—why is he suddenly shy? He's never been shy before.
Robert I'm not shy . . . (*He goes to the fire, still looking for his hat*)
Bernard Of course you are. Just because you've had to confess the truth about your private life—your intimate life.
Jacqueline What intimate life?
Robert Don't listen to him.
Bernard He's told me all about this—this liaison.
Jacqueline What liaison?
Robert I forbid you to listen, Jacqueline.
Bernard You see—just look at him! A bundle of nerves! Can't bring himself to speak of it in front of you . . .
Robert But I never said anything . . .
Bernard It's too late denying it now. If you wanted to keep it all a secret you shouldn't have said anything. Not that it's any business of mine. Your private life is your private life. That you've got a mistress is nothing to do with me.
Jacqueline A mistress!
Robert No, no . . .
Bernard You see, darling—he just can't bring himself to say anything in front of you. It's ludicrous—I mean, why make a drama out of it? We weren't born yesterday. We know all about the way we live now, don't we?
Jacqueline I don't know. I suppose—that's to say . . .
Bernard Of course we do. Come on Robert don't be coy. Just tell her what you told me a moment ago.
Robert I told you nothing.
Bernard Yes you did—all about your girl-friend.
Jacqueline My God . . .
Bernard He's got a girl-friend.
Jacqueline He told you that?
Bernard Just before you came in—what was her name? Bertha? Bernadette? Brenda?

Robert Brigit.
Bernard Ah! You see! That's it, that's the name, Brigit.
Jacqueline Who's Brigit?
Bernard His mistress.
Jacqueline His what? (*To Robert*) It's not true!
Bernard Certainly it's true. He told me all about her—I can't understand why he can't bring himself to tell you all about her.
Jacqueline I don't believe a word of it.
Bernard Why not?
Jacqueline Because—well, I don't know why not. I don't understand why he should tell you and not want to tell me.
Bernard That's what I mean . . .
Jacqueline It's not right. It's despicable. It's the action of a cad!
Bernard Why are you so prudish all of a sudden?
Jacqueline Prudish? I'm not in the least prudish.
Bernard Then don't look so stern—I mean, it's nothing to do with you if he wants to bring his girl-friend here.
Jacqueline It has everything to do with me.
Robert Of course it has. You can see it has. She's made the list, made the bed, put out the towels—expecting one person and now has to sort everything out all over again for two persons.
Bernard Pooh! Details! Not important—I think she's jealous.
Jacqueline Jealous? Me? Jealous of who?
Bernard Of her.
Robert What are you talking about?
Jacqueline Yes. What are you talking about?
Bernard Well, it's obvious. When he arrived on his own you were delighted to see him. Now that you know he's not really on his own, you're suddenly furious.
Jacqueline (*furiously*) Me? Me, furious?
Bernard Well, aren't you? If I didn't know you as well as I do I might begin to suspect that there was something going on between you.
Jacqueline Between who?
Bernard Between you two.
Jacqueline Me and Robert?
Robert Me and Jacqueline?
Bernard Yes.
Jacqueline But that's silly . . .
Robert Silly. Stupid. Absolute nonsense.
Jacqueline How on earth could there be anything between us?
Robert Quite. What about Brigit? I mean, I'm all involved with her, aren't I?
Jacqueline Yes. Apropos of Brigit—where is she?
Robert Ask Bernard.
Jacqueline Why should he know? She's your—your . . .
Bernard He did tell me, but I've forgotten.
Robert We've both forgotten.
Jacqueline How frightfully casual.

Bernard You said something about a train.
Robert Did I? Oh, yes—the train. You see, we didn't leave town at the same time. I came by car.
Bernard That's it. That's what he said—didn't you, Robert? You said she'd be coming on the train—later.
Robert I suppose so. Yes. On the train—later.
Jacqueline Which train? What time does it get in?
Robert Ah! Now I'm not quite . . .
Bernard He's not quite sure. I asked him all that before but he didn't know, did you, old chap?
Robert No. I didn't know. I didn't even know there was a train.
Bernard And because he didn't know, he told her to take a taxi when she got to the station. That's what you said, didn't you, old chap?
Jacqueline Well, if he didn't know there was a train, how did he know there was a station?
Bernard I told him.
Jacqueline But you didn't know . . .
Bernard Of course I know there's a station. And if you ask me, she's bound to be on the six-fifteen—do you think that's the one, old boy?
Robert How should I know, old chap?
Bernard Because it's the last through train.
Robert Then I expect that's the one what's-her-name will be on.
Jacqueline Brigit.
Robert Pardon?
Jacqueline Her name's Brigit.
Bernard Of course it is. So that's all perfectly clear now. Brigit will be on the six-fifteen, she'll get the taxi from the station. We'll go and do the shopping, then we'll all have the drinks and a lovely dinner together. Just the four of us. So you make yourself comfortable, old man, and we'll just whizz down to the village before the shops shut. (*He takes Robert's hat and case and puts them by the stool*)
Robert Please can I come with you?
Bernard No, you'd better stay here. She may have caught the five-ten and someone ought to be here to greet her. And as she's your girl-friend, it ought to be you. I mean, it's only polite.
Robert Yes . . .
Bernard Why don't you get the list, darling.
Jacqueline Yes. Right.

Jacqueline exits to the kitchen

Bernard There you are, old chap. Worked like a charm. What did I tell you?
Robert I think it was a mess.
Bernard I thought we carried it off very well.
Robert Jacqueline was livid.
Bernard Maybe. But none the less, you are—you're committed. And as soon as she gets here, I'm counting on you to go along with the game—the plan.

Robert But what if she turns up while you're in the village? While I'm all on my own?

Bernard (*taking his driving gloves and glasses from the hat stand*) She *will* turn up while you're on your own. I told her to catch the five-ten.

Robert Now, just a minute . . .

Jacqueline enters with her handbag and a shopping-basket

Jacqueline I'm ready, but if you want to stay with Robert, darling, I can probably manage on my own.

Bernard No, no. I wouldn't dream of it. Lots of things to carry, and it'll be faster if we both go.

Jacqueline But what's he going to do all on his own?

Bernard He can do what he likes. Watch television. Look at the garden. Ring his client and tell him to use the staircase. Whatever—the main thing is he's *not* leaving. Are you, old chap?

Robert I—I think I'll have another drink. (*He goes to the fire*)

Bernard Help yourself. See you later. (*To Jacqueline*) Come along, darling.

Bernard exits through the front door, leaving it open

Jacqueline Right away, darling. (*She turns to Robert*) I've just one thing to say to you.

Robert To me?

Jacqueline Yes, to you. I think you're the most despicable, underhand, scheming philanderer I've ever met. I despise you. I hate you. How could you?

Robert But, Jacqueline—darling . . .

Jacqueline Don't you ever "darling" me again. Save that for Brenda.

Robert Brigit. Actually, the name's Brigit.

Jacqueline I don't care! How could you? How dare you? I *hate* you!

Jacqueline exits by the front door, slamming it after her

Robert Oh dear. (*He goes to the barometer, which points at "rain", and taps it*) "Outlook Rain." I might have guessed. (*He goes to the fire and pours himself a drink. He looks at his watch and then at his suitcase, then downs his drink. He goes to the suitcase, puts on his hat, picks up the case and goes to the front door*)

The doorbell rings

Robert returns and exits down L. *A cry of annoyance escapes him, and he returns without the hat and case*

The doorbell rings again. He goes and opens the front door

Brigit stands in the doorway. She carries a large straw shopping-basket filled with unshapely parcels

Brigit Have I come to the right place?

Robert I'm afraid you have . . .

Brigit Well, that's all right then. Pleased to meet you. Good evening.

Robert Good evening.

Brigit I'm . . .
Robert Brigit.
Brigit That's right. I've come to help out.
Robert I know . . .
Brigit Just temporary—a couple of days.
Robert If you can keep it up that long.
Brigit No problem. Can I come in?
Robert Oh, certainly. Please—I didn't think you'd get here so quickly.
Brigit (*coming down into the room*) I nearly didn't get here at all—no sign of a taxi and then I'd gone and missed the bus.
Robert Really?
Brigit Yes. So I started out to walk and then some bloke came along and gave me a lift in his car.
Robert Really?
Brigit Lucky, eh? I didn't want to lug this much further, I can tell you. Can I put it down now?
Robert Oh, yes. Please do put it down.
Brigit (*sitting in the armchair with her bag on her lap*) Anyway—I hopped in the car and this bloke dropped me at the door. Much quicker in the long run than coming by bus. That's why I got here so quickly.
Robert Good.
Brigit So where is she?
Robert Where's who?
Brigit Herself. The lady of the house.
Robert She's not here. That's to say, she's gone out with himself—I mean gone out with Bernard. Shopping. She made a list.
Brigit So who are you?
Robert Me? Well, I'm Robert—Bernard's friend. Robert . . .
Brigit Pleased to meet you, I'm sure.
Robert I must get one thing clear from the beginning. And you've got to believe me. I had nothing to do with this whole preposterous idea.
Brigit What idea?
Robert Of getting you to come down here.
Brigit I was told to come on the telephone.
Robert Certainly you were. I know you were. But I have to tell you, that I find Bernard's whole approach totally despicable.
Brigit Really?
Robert I find the whole thing distasteful.
Brigit Really?
Robert Definitely. I mean, do you understand what you're letting yourself in for? It's not going to be easy, you know.
Brigit Really?
Robert Please don't keep saying "really". It's going to be jolly hard work.
Brigit (*rising*) Well, we'd better get going then, hadn't we? Where is it?
Robert Where's what?
Brigit The kitchen.
Robert What do you want to do in the kitchen?
Brigit Oh, if it's all going to be so difficult, I'd better look around and see

what's what, and what's where. Get stuck right in. I mean, what about the vegetables?

Robert I don't know about the vegetables. I'm sure it's very nice of you to want to help . . .

Brigit All part of the service.

Robert Very nice. But I tell you what . . .

Brigit What?

Robert I don't know where the kitchen is.

Brigit Well, let's look around and perhaps we'll find it. (*She opens the bedroom door down* R) Not in there.

Robert Do you really think you should go poking about? It's not our house, you know.

Brigit I know it isn't.

Robert Then maybe it would be better if we waited till they came back.

Brigit Just as you like—but I can't just hang around here chatting. If you won't let me find the kitchen, maybe you won't mind if I get the gear on.

Robert What gear?

Brigit For getting on with the job—where can I get undressed?

Robert Undressed?

Brigit Sure. Why not. I haven't lugged all this stuff with me just for the fun of it, you know.

Robert No?

Brigit No way.

Robert But surely you don't have to start getting undressed now?

Brigit Why not?

Robert We don't have to start pretending immediately.

Brigit Pretending what?

Robert Well—you know.

Brigit No. I'm sorry. I don't know.

Robert I'm Robert.

Brigit You said that before.

Robert I'm Bernard's friend.

Brigit I know who you are.

Robert Then you know what we have to do.

Brigit Do I?

Robert To begin with, there are lots of things you've got to know about me.

Brigit Really?

Robert Where I live, for instance. How I live.

Brigit Why have I got to know about that?

Robert It's essential. How much has Bernard told you?

Brigit About what?

Robert About me.

Brigit Nothing at all.

Robert He must be raving mad. He should have briefed you—put you in the picture.

Brigit But it was all decided very quickly.

Robert I know that. But I didn't know anything at all until twenty minutes ago. So we've got to work fast.

Brigit If you say so.
Robert For starters—we've got to give the impression that we know each other extremely well.
Brigit Have we?
Robert It's vital. I'm in the escalator business. I drive a Volkswagen. I'm thirty-two years old.
Brigit No kidding.
Robert Thirty-two—how old did you think I was?
Brigit I wouldn't have said you were a day past forty.
Robert I've had my appendix out.
Brigit That's nice—but what's it got to . . .
Robert The sort of thing you ought to know . . .
Brigit It's very interesting, but I don't see what it's got to do with me.
Robert A detail—small but essential. When you sleep with someone you know about things like that.
Brigit When who sleeps with who?
Robert You and me.
Brigit Look. I'm not quite sure what we're getting into here——
Robert It wasn't my idea, but now we're both here, we're going to have to sleep in the same bedroom, aren't we? But you don't have to worry about a thing—you can have the bed, I'll take the floor. Unless we can work out something else.
Brigit Like what?
Robert Well, there's another bedroom. Perhaps I can say that you've got a migraine, or I've got hay fever, something like that—anything, it doesn't really matter what—the only essential thing is that however or wherever we sleep we keep up the appearance of so-called lovers.
Brigit Why do we have to pretend to be lovers?
Robert Hasn't he told you anything?
Brigit Nothing. Nobody's told me anything at all.
Robert The man's a lunatic—how could he be so careless? You mean to say you really don't know what the plan is? What's going to happen? What you're supposed to do?
Brigit I don't know what's going to happen but I do know what I'm supposed to do—I think. The usual arrangement—board, lodging and the going rate for the job.
Robert The going rate? You mean he's actually going to pay you?
Brigit It is normal, you know, sir!
Robert Is it? I've never done it before—have you ever done it before?
Brigit I don't know if I've ever done it before—it all depends on what I'm asked to do.
Robert To pretend to be my mistress.
Brigit Just pretend to be your mistress.
Robert Pretend. Nothing more, I promise you. Pretending will be quite sufficient.
Brigit You're acting very strange, you know.
Robert I'm in a very strange position.
Brigit Why are you?

Robert Because—well, you see, it's all frightfully complicated, but Bernard doesn't know—no, I don't think I can tell you. It's too much of a muddle.

Brigit If you can't tell me, what on earth am I supposed to say?

Robert Nothing. You mustn't say anything, not a single word. Just keep quiet and watch me. If anybody asks you a question just repeat what I've said. That is, whatever I say if somebody asks me a question.

Brigit Well, I've been in some funny houses, and met some very weird people in my time. Look, I'll tell you what I'll do. If you make it worth my while, I'll go along with it.

Robert You want money?

Brigit I think all this deserves more than the going rate.

Robert Well, I didn't really think a remuneration would be involved.

Brigit Life must go on, you know.

Robert How much do you want?

Brigit It's obviously worth a good deal more than the going rate.

Robert What *is* the going rate?

Brigit Let me see. (*She starts to count on her fingers*)

A car is heard approaching

Robert Wait, wait a minute, I can hear a car. Whatever the going rate is, we'll pay you double. Bernard and I will pay you double. Right? (*He goes to the window*)

Brigit Right!

Robert Yes, yes, it's them. Their car. They're back . . . Now sit down over there and look as though we've known each other very well for a very long time.

Brigit No need to panic. (*She sits with her bag as before*)

Robert Just act naturally, but not too naturally. (*He sits, then sees her bag, takes it off her lap and sits again*)

Brigit For double the going rate, I'll do anything you like.

Robert Just call me "darling".

Brigit Yes, darling.

The front door opens and Jacqueline enters carrying the shopping

Robert rushes to meet her

Robert Jacqueline, you mustn't carry all that, let me help you.

Jacqueline You keep away from me. I can manage perfectly well, thank you very much. (*She sees Brigit*) Ah. So your, your friend has arrived, has she?

Robert Yes—yes, just a minute ago. She's just arrived—haven't you, darling? You've just arrived haven't you?

Brigit (*rising*) Yes, darling. Just now, darling.

Jacqueline I think you should introduce us, Robert.

Robert Yes, of course. I'd like you to meet Brigit.

Bernard enters with another pile of parcels

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