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Fish Out Of Water

A Comedy

Derek Benfield

Samuel French – London
New York – Sydney – Toronto – Hollywood



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This is the original 1963 version of *Fish Out of Water*. A revised version, published in 1986, is also available. The ISBN is 0 573 11187 1 and the cast is M3 F4.

Fish Out Of Water

This play was first produced at the New Theatre, Bromley, on 2nd April 1962 with the following cast:

BRIGADIER HUBBACK	..	..	..	..	..	Robert Lankesheer
MRS. HUBBACK	..	..	..	..	..	Zulema Dene
MARISA	..	..	..	..	..	Sheila Barker
DORA COWLEY	..	..	..	..	..	Rosemary Frankau
AGATHA HEPWORTH	..	..	..	..	..	Rose Power
FIONA FRANCIS	..	..	..	..	..	Carmen Hill
MR. MALLET	..	..	..	..	..	Peter Goss
JULIAN WHITTLE	..	..	..	..	..	Aidan Turner
LEN BARRETT	..	..	..	..	..	Tony Holland

Produced by DAVID POULSON

Setting by GLEN EDWARDS

The scene throughout is the lounge of an hotel on the Italian Riviera.

ACT ONE

Afternoon of a hot summer's day

ACT TWO

SCENE 1 The following morning, after breakfast

SCENE 2 Before lunch, the same day

ACT THREE

After dinner, the same evening

No character in this play is intended to portray any specific person, alive or dead.

Running time of this play, excluding intervals, is approximately one hour and fifty minutes.

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(See also page ii)

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PRODUCTION NOTE

FISH OUT OF WATER takes place in a sun-drenched hotel somewhere on the Italian Riviera. The sort of romantic, sweet-smelling spot we all long to escape to for a little peace and quiet after the bustle of London or Manchester or whatever. There are flowers everywhere, the sun is hot and the sea is crystal clear and beautifully blue. Into this idyllic setting strides Agatha Hepworth, a loud, outspoken, jovial cockney widow, and her timid, spinster sister, Fiona Francis. Agatha, rosy and beaming crushes all protests as she rounds up the hotel guests into communal games and joint enterprises of every kind. They came on holiday, she maintains, to enjoy themselves—and *she* is going to see that they do! With untiring energy she invades the private lives of all the characters with surprising and riotous results.

Fish Out of Water is a comedy, not a farce. The people are all real people, and what happens to them are the sort of things that could (and do) happen to us all on a holiday abroad. We have all met Agatha somewhere. However far you travel, be it Brittany or the Balkans, she somehow always manages to be there. In playing her, make sure you give her plenty of light and shade; find the places where you can drop the attack or she may become monotonous. And remember that Agatha is, in the main, a *happy* woman and must not be played as a stern-faced harridan. She is bubbling over with joy—a joy she is willing, or rather determined, to communicate to others.

Fiona Francis, on the other hand, is subdued and pessimistic. She has come on holiday very much against her will and sees disaster round every corner—that is, until she meets Love on the Beach in the person of Mr. Mallet. Fiona has an endearing quality, and she and Agatha provide excellent foils for each other.

The other characters are varied and offer plenty of scope to a good company. Julian Whittle, for instance, who has had enough of Italians, sunshine and, most of all, tiresome English tourists, is the local representative of a travel agency through which (unfortunately for him) Agatha and Fiona have booked. He has a dry sense of humour and a long-suffering manner. Throughout the play he gets progressively more and more exhausted, and there is a lot of fun to be had out of his dilemma.

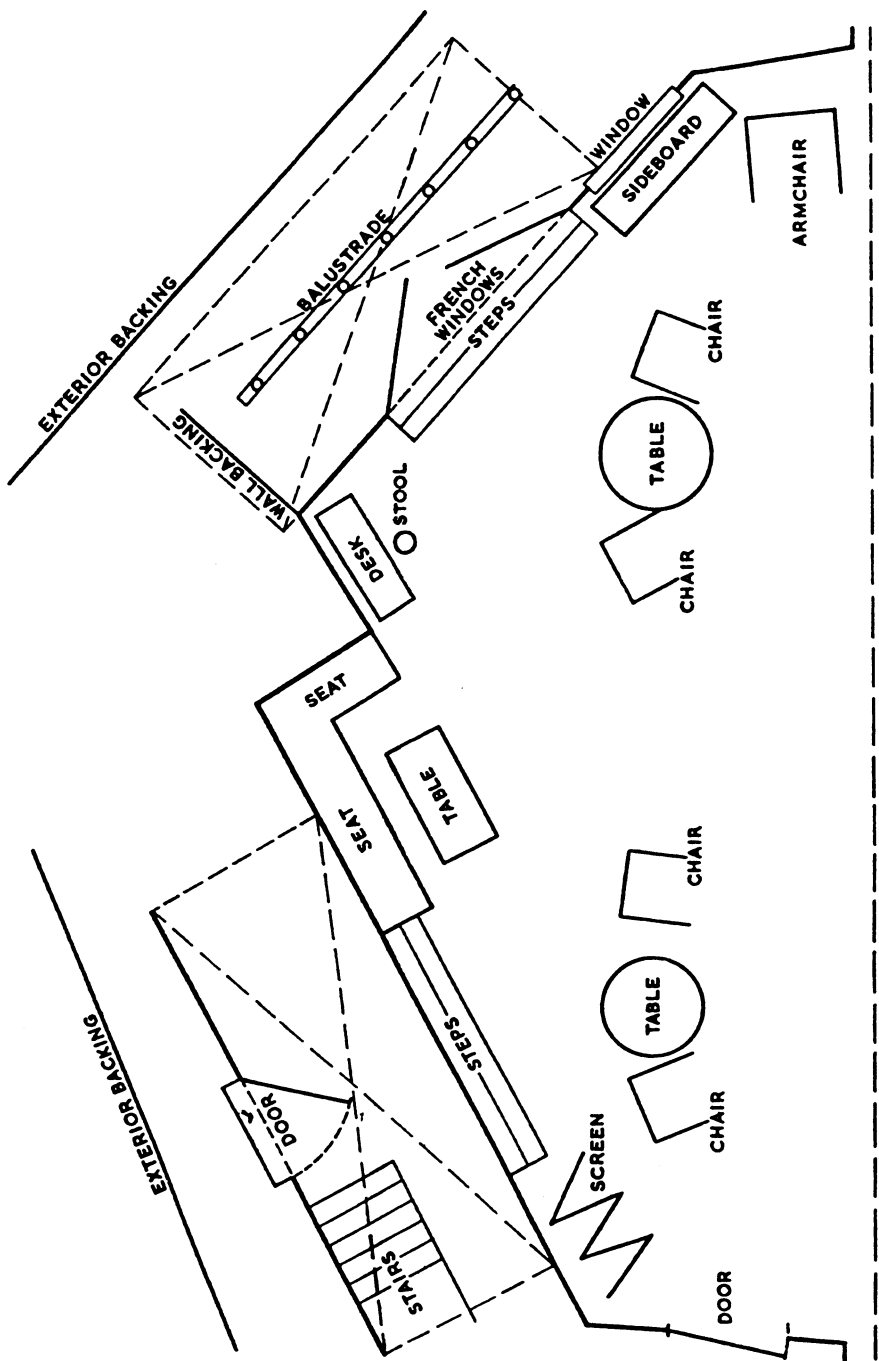
Mr. Mallet from the bank in Brighton is a bewildered little man who has somehow become separated from the rest of his coach party and whose high hopes of Continental travel have gone sour on him, but who eventually finds consolation in the arms of Fiona. Brigadier and Mrs. Hubback want only to be left alone to enjoy the sunshine that used to be reserved for the rich; or at least they *think* they do, until the Brigadier finds authority again in organizing a country-wide search for a missing tourist, and his wife remembers a long-forgotten talent for cricket. These two parts are very rewarding, but do not play him as too much of a buffoon, or her too much of a prig.

Dora Cowley is a bus conductress from Oldham and should have a decided North Country burr. She is by no means glamorous (we must know why Len prefers the Italian girl), but has a lovable quality of helplessness. There is a parallel between her and Fiona (as seen in Act Two, p.43); both spinsters, one young and hopeful, the other older and resigned. It is only at the end of the play that the "transformation" takes place and Cinderella goes off to the Ball.

Len Barrett is a bright, effervescent young cockney who has come on holiday for the "birds", but only seems to find Agatha. It is essential that he be played with charm and that we should immediately like him or we shall not be in accord with Dora's feelings for him. The only remaining character is Marisa. Dark, vivacious, and as Italian as can be!

The setting for the play should reflect as far as possible the description in my opening paragraph. The more luxurious and relaxing the setting, the greater the effect when Agatha and Fiona appear.

DEREK BENFIELD



FISH OUT OF WATER

ACT ONE

The lounge of an hotel on the Italian Riviera.

The main entrance is from an archway down two steps U.R.C., beyond which can be seen the start of the staircase leading up and off to the R. and the door to the street. There is a way below the staircase which leads to the proprietor's office, etc. Two further steps at an angle U.L.C. lead up to the french windows which open on to a palm-bedecked terrace beyond which is the sea. Below the french windows is another smaller window, and a door D.R. leads to the dining-room, kitchen and bar. In the corner U.C. is a padded seat with a table in front of it. There are two other tables, one L.C. and the other R.C., each with chairs L. and R. of it. There is also a chair in the corner D.L. Other furniture, dressing and electrical fittings at the discretion of the producer. There is a bell-push D.L.

It is afternoon on a day in summer and the sun is scorching down outside. MRS. HUBBACK is asleep in the wicker arm-chair R. of table L.C. After a moment her husband, BRIGADIER HUBBACK, bustles in from the archway carrying a bathing-towel. He is wearing a tropical suit. He crosses to her.

HUBBACK. Four o'clock, my dear!

(She wakes with a start.)

MRS. H. What about it?

HUBBACK. Thought I might go down to the beach.

MRS. H. Whatever for? It's far too hot.

HUBBACK. I'd like to get a bit brown before I go back. I shall feel jolly silly coming all the way to Italy and going back white. Chap I know got sunburnt at Eastbourne last year. Came back looking like a Hindu.

MRS. H. Nobody sunbathes in the afternoon out here, Charles. They all sleep.

HUBBACK. All right, I tell you what—let's pop down to the village and get a cup of tea. It's quite shady there. Place I saw this morning called itself Ye Olde English Tea Room. Might be worth investigating.

MRS. H. I'd rather stay here.

HUBBACK. But they don't serve tea in the hotel.

MRS. H. I think they will in future. I've been talking to Mario in the kitchen.

HUBBACK. You won't get far with him. He doesn't understand English.

MRS. H. I think he understood me. I spoke very loudly. If not, you must remember I did bring my own kettle.

HUBBACK. You can't very well brew up in the bedroom!

MRS. H. Well, they wouldn't let me in the kitchen.

HUBBACK. I do feel—when in Rome and all that.

MRS. H. Precisely. And that's why I shall continue to doze for as long as the natives do. *(She settles herself to sleep again.)*

(HUBBACK sighs, puts down his bathing-things on corner seat U.C. as MARISA comes in from the dining-room D.R. She is a strikingly pretty Italian girl with a good figure. She carries some flowers which she puts in a vase on table R.C. HUBBACK brightens considerably as he sees her.)

HUBBACK *(whispering)*. Ah, Marisa! *(Takes a look at MRS. H., then crosses eagerly to MARISA.)* Almost tea-time, isn't it?

MARISA *(whispering)*. I will bring it now.

HUBBACK *(whispering)*. You will? Oh, good. Lovely day.

MARISA *(whispering)*. Yes. I have just been to the beach. You will go for a bathe?

MRS. H. He'll do nothing of the sort.

HUBBACK. Thought you were dozing, m'dear.

MARISA. I will bring tea.

MRS. H. If you please.

(MARISA goes out D.R. He watches her go with undisguised enthusiasm.)

HUBBACK. Pretty little thing.

MRS. H. Yes, you would notice that. *(He quickly conceals his approval of MARISA and shrugs off towards the french windows.)* I don't know what's the matter with you men. The temperature goes above eighty and you all become quite impossible.

(DORA COWLEY comes in from the archway U.R. She is fair, about 23, and speaks with a North Country dialect. She is not by any means pretty, but there is an appealing quality of helplessness about her.)

DORA. Oh, hullo, Brigadier! *(He quickly indicates MRS. H. and DORA instantly becomes more subdued.)* Hullo, Mrs. Hubback.

MRS. H. Good afternoon.

HUBBACK. Going for a swim?

DORA. I might later. Rather sunbathe, really.

HUBBACK (*moving down L. of table L.C.*). How's your friend?

DORA (U.R.C.). Rene? She's still terrible. The minute she set foot here she went down like ninepence. It's the food, y'know. Well, it's not like what you get back home, is it? (*Sits chair R. of table R.C.*) You'd think they'd consider what we're used to, wouldn't you? You know, sort of cater more for the tourists.

HUBBACK (*good-humouredly*). If you'd wanted fish and chips you should have stayed in England.

DORA. Oh, I quite like it all. But poor Rene—one mouthful of dinner that first evening and off to her room she went. And do you know, she's had nothing but chicken noodle soup ever since!

(MARISA returns from D.R. with a tray of tea-things which she puts down on the table L.C.)

MARISA (*as she crosses*). I hope you will find everything all right.

HUBBACK. I'm sure we will. Here, let me help you.

MRS. H. (*without looking at him*). It's all right, Charles. She can manage.

(HUBBACK shrugs at MARISA, who smiles sympathetically. MRS. H. looks at them and he quickly turns on innocence and sits L. of table L.C.)

MARISA (*to L. of DORA*). You would like some tea, miss?

DORA. No, thanks. Not for me.

MARISA. How is your friend? She is better, I hope?

DORA. I'm afraid not.

MARISA. What shall I get her for dinner tonight?

DORA. Chicken noodle, I suppose.

(MARISA goes off D.R. MRS. H. takes lid off the teapot, examines the tea without enthusiasm and stirs it vigorously. During the next few lines she is pouring tea, etc.)

You been out here before?

HUBBACK. Not Italy. We usually go to France.

DORA. You mean you go every year?

HUBBACK. Most years, yes. (*He takes up a biscuit, but MRS. H. slaps his hand and he drops it.*)

DORA. This is my first time. We've got a scheme now at our depot.

HUBBACK. Your—depot?

DORA. Yes. I'm a clippie.

HUBBACK. A what?

DORA. A bus conductress.

HUBBACK. Good heavens! I've never met a bus conductress before. I mean, I've never seen one without her uniform on. (MRS. H. gives him a weary look.) Oh, you know what I mean!

DORA. We all pay in so much a week. It's ever such a good idea. You ought to try it. As soon as I get back I start all over again.

HUBBACK. Well, I wonder what the new intake will be like. Quite a few went home after lunch, so there should be some more arriving this afternoon.

MRS. H. If they're anything like the ones who left they'll be frightful. That man from Cleethorpes had the loudest laugh I've ever heard.

DORA. It's awful the first day you arrive, isn't it? Everyone staring at you as you come into the dining-room.

HUBBACK. Well, we're all a bit shy at first, y'know. Natural English reticence. Rather nice, I think.

(Gets a stony look from his wife.)

During the past ten days I've seen a lot of 'em come and go, y'know. It's wonderful to see them arrive— all white and tired and sheepish. They come in through that door so timidly, as if they'd no right to be here. *(Sound of voices outside.)* Hullo, that sounds like someone! *(He rises and moves above table L.C.)* You watch 'em as they come in and you'll see what I mean. Hardly speak above a whisper.

(AGATHA HEPWORTH appears in the open doorway. She is a cheerful cockney woman of about 45. She has a loud voice and is beaming with joy.)

AGATHA. This is the 'otel Floreat?

HUBBACK. Er—yes, it is.

AGATHA *(shouting off)*. All right, Fiona, this is it!

(She advances into the room, beaming with delight as she takes in her new surroundings. She is wearing a thick tweed suit and a hat, and carries a week-end case and a handbag.)

(To the room in general.) Oh, it's lovely, isn't it? Just like the picture in the brotcher.

HUBBACK *(moving to L. of AGATHA)*. Er—good afternoon.

AGATHA. Good afternoon. 'ere you are—you'd better take that. *(Hands HUBBACK her case.)* There are some more outside. Fiona's just seeing to them. *(To the door to call.)* Fiona! What are you doing? Come on in 'ere! *(She returns to the astonished HUBBACK.)* She's so slow. Doesn't know if it's pancake Tuesday or Maffeking night. I expect you'll want to see my passport and so on?

HUBBACK. Well—

AGATHA. No? You're the first one who's said that. All the way 'ere, nothing but passport out, passport away. I could 'ave a whole arsenal amongst my luggage, but as long as my passport's all right everyone's 'appy! Marvellous, isn't it? *(To the door again.)* What's

she doing out there? Fiona! Just bring the luggage inside. You don't 'ave to unpack it on the pavement! (*Returns to the BRIGADIER again.*)

HUBBACK. Mrs.—er—

AGATHA. 'Epworth. Agatha 'Epworth. British subject.

HUBBACK. Yes, but—

AGATHA. Oh, I'm sorry! I forgot! You don't speak English. Silly of me. (*Elocuting and gesturing.*) What—is—the—number—of—my room? Number—of—room?

(HUBBACK gazes at her in amazement, and she takes out a phrase-book and thumbs through it.)

Che numero—ha la mia camera?

HUBBACK. No, no, no! I—

AGATHA. Don't tell me you 'aven't got any rooms!

HUBBACK. No, no!

AGATHA. Well, you'll 'ave to find one, won't you? 'ere I am and 'ere I stay! (*Consults phrase-book.*) *Ecco-mi fermero!* I've got my little pink form and that's all I need.

MRS. H. Mrs. Hepworth, this is my husband.

AGATHA. Your 'usband? You mean you're not—

HUBBACK. I'm staying here.

AGATHA. Oh, I'm ever so sorry. How could I do a thing like that! Do forgive me. 'ere, you'd better give me that back. (*Makes to take back her case.*)

HUBBACK. It's quite all right. I'll put it down here. (*Puts down the case U.C.*)

AGATHA. Thank you. That is kind. (*To MRS. H.*) You must think I'm awful.

(*MRS. H. gives her a look that does not either confirm or deny.*)

HUBBACK (*dropping down to above table L.C.*). Not at all. My name is Hubback. Brigadier Hubback. And this is my wife.

AGATHA. Brigadier! Well, I never! And I thought you were—(*Laughs loudly and advances on MRS. H.*) How do you do, Mrs. Hubback? I'm ever so pleased to meet you. (*She shakes her hand vigorously.*)

MRS. H. (*icily*). How do you do?

AGATHA (*seeing DORA and crossing to her*). And you must be Miss Hubback. I shouldn't wonder!

DORA. Er—no—er—actually—

MRS. H. This young lady simply happens to be staying here.

AGATHA. There I go again, putting my foot right in it.

DORA. My name's Dora Cowley.

AGATHA. Hullo, Dora. I say, you're ever so brown. Doesn't she look nice?

HUBBACK (*beaming*). She certainly does!

MRS. H. Charles!

(HUBBACK retires to D.L. suitably subdued.)

AGATHA. You just in the middle of tea? I came at the right time, didn't I? Where's she got to? (*To door.*) Fiona! (*Returning to C.*) At this rate she'll get 'ere just in time to go 'ome again!

(*There is a slight pause and then FIONA FRANCIS comes in through the door. She is cockney and pessimistic, and has obviously come on holiday very much against her will. She is about 40, and is laden down with two suitcases, a grip, a carrier bag, a brown-paper parcel and an umbrella. She comes slowly to R. of AGATHA.*)

Well—whatever took you so long?

FIONA. I'm sorry, Agatha. I was collecting the cases.

AGATHA. You took your time about it. Well, don't stand there holding them in your arms. What are you trying to do—hatch them?

FIONA. What shall I do with them?

AGATHA (*patiently*). Put them down somewhere.

HUBBACK. Here, let me help you.

FIONA. Oh, thank you.

(HUBBACK crosses below MRS. H. up to R. of FIONA and helps her to put her things down U.L. of the archway. AGATHA watches FIONA with patient tolerance.)

HUBBACK. The girl will be back in a moment, then she'll have them moved up to your rooms.

FIONA. Thank you.

AGATHA. You'd better come and sit down.

FIONA. Yes, I will. I'm quite exhausted. (*She sits L. of table R.C.*)

AGATHA. I don't know why. You've done nothing all day. This is my sister, Fiona. The kind gentleman over there is Colonel Hubback.

HUBBACK (*as he passes above AGATHA to the french windows*). Er—Brigadier, actually.

AGATHA. Sorry—of course, Brigadier. And this is 'is wife.

HUBBACK } (*together*). How do you do?
MRS. H. }

FIONA. How do you do?

AGATHA. And over there's Dora Cowley.

DORA. Hullo! (*Rising.*) I'll go and find Marisa. I expect you'd like some tea.

AGATHA. Thank you, love. That would be nice.

(DORA goes off D.R.)

Well, we got 'ere, eh, Fiona?

FIONA. Yes, thank 'eaven. I'm surprised I'm all in one piece.

AGATHA. Now don't be like that. She's done nothing but grumble all the way 'ere.

FIONA. It took such a long time on the train.

AGATHA. What did you expect me to do—get out and push it? I told you we ought to fly, but you wouldn't.

HUBBACK (*dropping down L.*). Why not? It's much quicker, y'know.

FIONA. It ain't safe.

AGATHA. You're the one who ain't safe. You ought to be kept in a cage. (*To above table R.C.*)

(DORA returns with MARISA. She remains D.R. and MARISA crosses to below chair R. of table R.C.)

DORA. Here she is, Mrs. Hepworth.

AGATHA. Thank you, dear.

MARISA. *Buon giorno*. Welcome to the Hotel Floreat. We are very glad to have you stay with us.

FIONA (*to AGATHA, moved*). Oh, there! Isn't that nice? (*To MARISA*.) Thank you, dear. It's very sweet of you to say so. I must say you know how to be polite here anyway. (*To AGATHA*.) Wasn't it a sweet thing to say, Agatha? "We are very glad to have you stay with us." I do think that was nice. I really do.

AGATHA. All right, all right! You don't 'ave to go raving mad! I don't know. For three hours in the coach you've said nothing, and now all of a sudden you can't stop.

MARISA. I have ordered some tea for you. Afterwards I will show you to your room.

AGATHA. Thank you, dear. (*Consults phrase-book.*) *Grazie*.

MARISA (*with a smile*). *Prego*. Do you have your form from the agency, please?

AGATHA. The pink one? Oh, yes, I've got it 'ere. (*Looks in handbag.*) Got so many bits and pieces 'ere—Passport, no—Rail tickets, no—Itinerary, no—Now where 'ave I put it? (*Suddenly fixes her gaze on FIONA.*) Fiona! You've got it!

FIONA (*cowering*). No, Agatha, I haven't!

AGATHA. I distinctly remember I gave it to you.

FIONA. No, you didn't. You said you couldn't trust me with it. It was just after we'd fixed up about the insurance. We were getting on to the train and you said, "I'd better have that, Fiona, in case anything 'appens to you".

AGATHA (*round to L. of FIONA*). Where is it?

FIONA. I haven't got it, Agatha—!

AGATHA. Well, if you 'aven't got it you may as well start going 'ome now!

FIONA (*proffering her bag*). Look, there's nothing 'ere—!

(AGATHA *looks in FIONA's bag*. *She produces a pink slip of paper.*)

AGATHA (*glaring at FIONA*). What's this, then? Your birth certificate?

(*Crosses below table to MARISA.*) There we are, dear.

MARISA. *Grazie.*

AGATHA. Oh—er—what was that you said just now?

MARISA (*laughing*). *Prego.*

AGATHA. Eh?

HUBBACK. It's like saying "Don't mention it".

AGATHA. I see. Well—prego, then, dear.

(MARISA *goes off D.R., taking the pink form*. AGATHA *is below chair R. of table R.C.*)

FIONA. I didn't remember that I'd got it.

AGATHA. I should think you didn't.

FIONA. I never thought.

AGATHA. That's nothing new.

MRS. H. Is your husband coming on later, Mrs. Hepworth?

AGATHA. I 'ope not.

MRS. H. Why?

AGATHA. He's dead. (*She sits R. of table R.C., takes off a shoe and caresses her foot.*)

MRS. H. Oh, dear. I'm sorry.

AGATHA. No need to be. He was a mean old skinflint was my Harold.

If he could get out of paying he would—and did. As a result, when he died he left a sackful. And he left it all to me. Best day's work he ever did. That's why me and Fiona's come out 'ere. If he knew how I was spending his money he'd turn in his grave!

FIONA. So I should think. Waste of money, I call it.

AGATHA. And I don't want you starting that again!

FIONA. I didn't want to come out 'ere in the first place.

AGATHA. Then why did you?

FIONA. What's wrong with Eastcliffe?

AGATHA. I'll tell you what's wrong with Eastcliffe. It's common!

That's what it is—common! Same old faces year after year till I got sick of it. We've come 'ere for a change, Fiona Francis—to get away from it all.

MRS. H. Yes, that was the reason I came.

AGATHA. And you were right, Mrs. Hubback. You were right!

FIONA. I knew a woman went abroad once. She was bitten by a bug.

They brought 'er back in a box.

AGATHA. You're a little ray of sunshine, aren't you?

DORA (*to above table R.C.*). You'll like it here. It's ever so nice. It's a lovely sandy beach.

FIONA. What about the food?

DORA. Well, it's not like you get in England.

FIONA. I'm not eating none of them octopuses!

AGATHA. You don't get octopuses 'ere! Really, can't you even read the brotcher! Octopuses is Spain!

FIONA. I bet you can't tell what you're eating half the time. If they eat frog's legs in France, 'eaven knows what we'll get 'ere!

AGATHA. You're not going to get anything like that.

FIONA. How can I be sure? I bet you they'll disguise it.

AGATHA. Well, if they disguise it you won't know, will you?

FIONA. I may not know, but my stomach soon will!

AGATHA. After twenty years of your shepherd's pie I reckon your stomach's ready for anything.

DORA. It's what I call rich cooking. You know what I mean? Spices and oil and that sort of thing.

HUBBACK. And there's a lot of pasta, naturally.

FIONA. I'm not 'aving none of them!

AGATHA. Oh, do be quiet. You make me tired.

DORA. The first few days are a bit tricky. But I expect you've brought your Alka-Seltzer. (*Away up to seat U.C., where she sits and glances at a magazine.*)

FIONA. My what?

AGATHA. Now don't encourage 'er, Dora. She's bad enough, 'eaven knows.

FIONA. You mean I'm going to be ill?

(*FIONA is goggling.*)

AGATHA. Oh, look, now you've set 'er off!

(*MARISA comes in with a tray of tea for two which she puts down on table R.C.*)

HUBBACK. Have a nice cup of tea. You'll feel fine after that.

FIONA. I don't know that I want any tea. I think I'd like to go to my room—(*Starts to rise.*)

AGATHA (*the voice of thunder*). You'll 'ave some tea and like it! (*FIONA sits again. AGATHA turns to MARISA with a sweet smile.*) Thank you, dear, that's lovely. Grazie.

(*MARISA goes off upstairs, taking some of the baggage with her from U.C.*)

AGATHA pours milk and then proceeds to pour the tea. It is very weak and she shakes the pot around and tries again. She pours from cup to cup and back again, N.A.A.F.I.-wise. She hands a cup to FIONA.)
'ere you are, Fiona. You can't complain about that.

FIONA (*pessimistically*). I 'aven't tasted it yet.

AGATHA (*producing tea bag from inside the pot*). Well, it's Tetley's Tea Bags the same as you 'ave at 'ome, so get on with it!

FIONA. What's this in little packets? (*Holding up a cellophane package.*)

AGATHA. Sugar, of course. What do you think?

FIONA. All wrapped up like that? Well, I never. They never have it like that in the Kardomah.

AGATHA. Seems a nice 'otel, I must say. Very friendly. I'm all for that—a nice, friendly atmosphere where we can all be one big 'appy family!

(*Mrs. H. rises.*)

MRS. H. If you'll excuse me, I think I'll go up to my room.

AGATHA. Yes, of course we'll excuse you, dear.

HUBBACK. How about going down for a bathe, m'dear?

MRS. H. Not now, Charles.

HUBBACK. It's lovely out.

MRS. H. Then we'll go for a walk. I'll be ready in a moment. (*Makes for the archway.*)

HUBBACK. Righto. I'll wait here for you.

(*He gets a look from Mrs. H. and follows her off obediently.*)

AGATHA looks at FIONA, who is still gazing at her tea without drinking it.)

AGATHA. What are you waiting for? The starting-gun?

FIONA. I don't know if I ought to.

AGATHA. A cuppa tea won't 'urt you.

FIONA. Are you sure it's all right?

AGATHA. 'course it's all right! What do you think they do out 'ere—poison you? Get on with it.

FIONA. Do you think I ought to take this pill now?

AGATHA. That's for travel sickness. You was supposed to take that before you left!

(*From the french windows a small, troubled little man comes in nervously.*)

He is of indeterminate middle age and his name is MR. MALLET. He comes to U.L.C. and as he is unnoticed he coughs gently. FIONA and AGATHA turn in unison to look at him.)

MALLET. Excuse me. Are you Progressive?

AGATHA. I beg your pardon?

MALLET. Are you with Progressive Tours?

AGATHA. Oh, no. I'm Eagle.

MALLET. Oh, dear. (*Indicating FIONA.*) And your—er—?

AGATHA. She's my sister and she's not progressive at all.

MALLET. And—er—this young lady?

DORA. I'm Universal!

MALLET. Oh, dear.

DORA. What's the matter?

MALLET. They've lost me.

AGATHA. 'oo 'ave?

MALLET. Progressive Tours. I thought I might find them here. (*Coming nearer.*) You see, we were in a coach—thirty-five of us—and we stopped at Monte Carlo. The driver said to meet again at seven-thirty, but when I got back I found they'd gone without me. I've been following them ever since.

AGATHA. That is 'ard luck. Are you sure you didn't make a mistake about the time?

MALLET. No, never! I work at the bank in Brighton. I've been planning this holiday for months, and now this happens. It was silly, wasn't it? Wasn't it silly? See! I've got all the details here. (*Takes out a sheaf of papers and thrusts them at AGATHA.*) This is my itinerary. It's all quite clear. We meet at Victoria at 22.15 on the Tuesday—Depart Victoria 22.45—arrive Newhaven—

AGATHA. Yes, I'm sure that's very interesting.

MALLET. See—I've ticked off each timing as we went along. I'm like that, you see—methodical. And everything was going just like clockwork. And then all of a sudden—Monte Carlo and disaster. It was silly, wasn't it. Wasn't it silly?

AGATHA. I'm sure it's very inconvenient.

MALLET. It's not just the inconvenience. It's my reputation. In all my twenty years at the bank, I've never been so much as a ha'penny out. I shall never face the chief cashier again.

AGATHA. Of course you will. You mustn't get upset. We all 'ave our little troubles.

MALLET. I've been saving for this day—saving as hard as I could. I've planned it all. And now look at me—lost. (*To DORA.*) You haven't seen anyone from Progressive?

DORA. Well, I wouldn't know them if I saw them, would I? You'd better ask the proprietor. He could tell you. (*Leading him to the archway.*)

MALLET. Yes, yes—I'd better do that.

DORA. The office is just through there on the right.

MALLET. Thank you. Thank you. Excuse me, won't you? (*He turns in the doorway.*) Oh, by the way, my name's Mallet. J. C. Mallet. Silly name, isn't it? Isn't it silly? (*Exit MR. MALLET.*)

DORA. Poor little chap. (*Goes to put magazine back U.C.*)

AGATHA. Ought to be taken about on a chain. Like a few other people I could mention. Feel better for your tea, then, Fiona?

FIONA. Oh, yes, it was quite nice, really.

AGATHA. You want to be careful. You nearly broke into a smile then.

(*Goes to the french windows.*) Well, this is a nice little spot, isn't it?

DORA (*follows to R. of AGATHA*). It's lovely down there on the beach.

I've never seen such sand. And the sea! They go water ski-ing, you know—just like on the pictures! You'd better try it.

AGATHA. I think I'm a bit on the 'eavy side for that sort of thing, dear.

We might persuade Fiona to 'ave a go.

FIONA. I'm not doing anything dangerous.

AGATHA. Just a little joke. Do you go water ski-ing, Dora?

DORA. Oh, yea. I'm quite good at it, really. I expect that's because of my job. You soon get a sense of balance on the buses.

AGATHA. Oh, you're a bus conductress?

DORA. Yes.

FIONA. She doesn't look like one.

AGATHA. Oh, blimey, you don't expect her to come out 'ere in her uniform, do you? Do you like your job, dear?

DORA. It's all right. You get tired, though. I must walk miles in a day. Of course, you do meet some funny people during your day's work.

FIONA. If you come to work on our route you'll meet a few more.

(*With a glance at AGATHA.*)

AGATHA. Oh? Getting bold, aren't we? I reckon the sun's gone to your 'ead already.

DORA. The other day a chap asked for Oldham. I told him we didn't go there and he got quite cross and said, "Well, it says so on the front." I soon put him in his place, though. I said, "It says Nestle's Milk on the back, but it doesn't mean to say we've been to Switzerland."

AGATHA. Do you all go down on the beach together, then? You know, in a sort of party.

DORA. Oh, no.

AGATHA. Why not?

DORA. Everyone keeps very much to themselves.

AGATHA. Well, I never! We'll soon see about that. I expect they want jollyng up a bit! Just needs someone to break the ice, that's all. You just wait till the morning!

(*HUBBACK and his wife return from the archway. He is now wearing a panama hat and she has sun-glasses. They come to U.C.*)

All ready for your little stroll, then, General?

HUBBACK. Brigadier.

AGATHA. Oh, yes.

HUBBACK. Just as far as the newspaper kiosk and back. It's no more than a mashie shot away. See what's happening in dear old England.

AGATHA. That's right. (*Crossing below them to FIONA.*) You finished your tea, Fiona?

FIONA. Yes, Agatha.

AGATHA. Come on, then. We'd best go and unpack.

FIONA. Yes, Agatha. (*Moves U.S. and starts to collect the carrier bag, parcel, etc.*)

AGATHA (*to R. of the HUBBACKS*). I was just saying to Dora 'ere, won't it be fun all getting to know each other? We must organize lots of games and things on the beach tomorrow.

(*BRIGADIER and MRS. HUBBACK are shattered into silence.*)

Come along, then, Fiona. And do try and cheer up.

(*AGATHA and FIONA go off upstairs.*)

HUBBACK. She's a—a bright sort of person, isn't she?

DORA. I like her. I think she's going to be rather fun. Just what we need around here.

MRS. H. What do you mean by that?

DORA. Nothing. I was just thinking. I'm going on to the beach. 'bye!

(*Exit DORA by the french windows. HUBBACK eases L., watching her go.*)

MRS. H. (*aghast*). Did you hear what she said?

HUBBACK. She said she was going on to the beach.

MRS. H. Not her—the other one.

HUBBACK. Oh.

MRS. H. (*distastefully*). Beach games! (*Moves down to C.*)

HUBBACK. I don't expect she really meant it.

MRS. H. I knew something like this would happen. I said we should have gone to the South of France as usual.

HUBBACK. I don't think it's as bad as all that.

MRS. H. Don't you? Sometimes, Charles, I envy you your tolerance.

HUBBACK (*to L. of MRS. H.*). We can always go along to that other bit of beach. She can't find us there.

MRS. H. Can't she? I tell you, Charles, there'll be no more peace. That woman is liable to creep up on us, beaming all over her face, at any time from now on. Something will have to be done.

HUBBACK. Will it?

(*She turns to him suddenly.*)

MRS. H. You'll have to do something about it.

HUBBACK. Will I? Yes, of course—rather! I'll think of something, don't you worry. Let's go and get the paper.

MRS. H. All right. But do try to think of something other than the cricket scores!

(They are making for the archway as MR. MALLET wanders in, still in a cloud of depression.)

MALLET. Excuse me. Are you Progressive Tours? Please say yes.

HUBBACK }
MRS. H. } *(together)*. No!

MALLET. But you must help me. I'm lost.

HUBBACK. So are we—completely!

(HUBBACK and his wife go out by the archway.)

MALLET *(brightening)*. Oh, good! Then I'm not the only one! *(And he happily follows them off.)*

(A car is heard drawing up as MALLET disappears, followed by angry voices, one English, one Italian.)

After a moment LEN BARRETT appears at the open doorway, calling to someone outside. He is a brash, effervescent young cockney with a good deal of charm. He carries a suitcase and a grip.)

LEN. You think yourself lucky, mate! Blimey, after a drive like that you ought to pay me!

(A torrent of angry Italian from outside.)

Yes, and the same to you!

(He moves down into the room and is putting down his cases U.C. by the corner seat as MARISA comes down the stairs to his R.)

MARISA. *Buon giorno, signor.*

LEN. Oh, don't say you don't speak English either. *(Sees her and melts.)*

You don't need to speak anything.

MARISA. Good afternoon.

LEN. Yes—it is now.

MARISA. You are just arriving?

LEN. I didn't think I was going to the way that bloke was driving.

Talk about Brands Hatch.

MARISA. You did not come on the coach with the others?

LEN. Not likely! There was a noisy old bag leading off at everyone.

Oh, can she rabbit! I didn't fancy listening to her all the way, so I thought I'd take a taxi and have a butcher's at the scenery.

MARISA. Did you enjoy the scenery?

LEN. Enjoy it? I didn't see it. He didn't even slow down to go round the bends! And all the time talking fifteen to the dozen and looking over his shoulder at me! I said to him, "Mate", I said, "you keep your eyes on the bloomin' road. I want to get there, y'know!"

MARISA *(laughing)*. You will get used to that.

LEN. You mean they all drive like that over 'ere?

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