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HOME AND BEAUTY

A Farce in Three Acts

by

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

SAMUEL  FRENCH

LONDON

NEW YORK TORONTO SYDNEY HOLLYWOOD

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ISBN 978-0-573-01184-9

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HOME AND BEAUTY

Produced at The Arts Theatre, London, on Thursday, August 31st, 1950, and transferred to St Martin's Theatre, London, on Wednesday, September 27th, 1950, with the following cast of characters:

(*in the order of their appearance*)

VICTORIA (*a dear little thing*)	Brenda Bruce
MISS DENNIS (*a manicurist*)	Marjorie Dunkels
TAYLOR (*the maid*)	Virginia Hewit
MRS SHUTTLEWORTH (VICTORIA'S *mother*)	Susan Richmond
LEICESTER PATON (*a wangler*)	John Boxer
MAJOR FREDERICK LOWNDES, D.S.O. (*a hero*)	Anthony Marlowe
MAJOR WILLIAM CARDEW, D.S.O. (*another hero*)	Hugh Burden
NANNIE (*the nurse*)	Peggy Ann Clifford
MRS POGSON (*a cook*)	May Hallatt
A. B. RAHAM (*a solicitor*)	Brian Oulton
MISS MONTMORENCY (*a maiden lady*)	Barbara Leake
CLARENCE (*an errand boy*)	Trevor Hill

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play passes in VICTORIA'S house at Westminster, London, during 1919.

ACT I. VICTORIA'S bedroom. Afternoon.

ACT II. The drawing-room. The following morning.

ACT III. The kitchen. Noon, the next day.

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HOME AND BEAUTY

ACT I

SCENE.—VICTORIA'S *bedroom in her house at Westminster, London. An afternoon in 1919.*

It is the kind of bedroom which is used only to sleep in, but might just as well be a sitting-room. Through an arch up C. *there is an alcove with the only door to the room* R. *of it. There is a window down* R. *and a fireplace down* L. *The furniture is graceful; attractive pictures hang on the walls; there are vases of flowers and it is all very comfortable, luxurious and modish. The bed with its hangings and its beautiful coverlet stands in an alcove* R., *above the window. A great lacquer dressing-table, crowded with the necessary aids to feminine beauty, stands under the window, with a chair in front of it. There is a long stool at the foot of the bed. A console table stands against the back wall of the alcove up* C. *There is a washstand against the back wall* L. *of the alcove. There is a small sofa* L.C. *with a stool* L. *of it and a small table* R. *of it. A comfortable armchair stands* C. *The floor is carpeted and at night the room is lit by electric-candle wall-brackets over the mantelpiece and a pendant light over the bed. A bright fire burns in the grate.*

(*See the Ground Plan at the end of the Play.*)

When the CURTAIN *rises* VICTORIA *is lying on the sofa having her hands manicured by* MISS DENNIS *who is seated on the stool* L. *of the sofa.* VICTORIA *is a pretty little thing and wears a lovely "confection" which is partly tea-gown and partly dressing-gown.* MISS DENNIS, *the manicurist, is a neat, trim person of twenty-five. She has a slight Cockney accent.*

MISS DENNIS (*evidently just ending a long story*). And so at last I said to him, "Oh, very well, 'ave it your own way."

VICTORIA. One has to in the end, you know.

MISS DENNIS. He's asked me five times, and I really got tired of saying "no". And then, you see, in my business you get to know all the ins and outs of married life, and my impression is that, in the long run, it don't really matter very much who you marry.

VICTORIA. Oh, I do so agree with you there. It all depends on yourself. When my first husband was killed, poor darling, I went all to pieces. My bust simply went to nothing. I couldn't wear a low dress for months.

MISS DENNIS. How dreadful.

VICTORIA. I simply adored him. But you know, I'm just as fond of my second husband.

MISS DENNIS. You must have one of those loving natures.

VICTORIA. Of course, I should never survive it if anything happened to my present husband, but if anything did—touch wood—you know, I couldn't help myself, I'd just have to marry again, and I know I'd love my third husband just as much as I loved the other two.

MISS DENNIS (*sighing*). Love is a wonderful thing.

VICTORIA. Oh, wonderful. Of course, I'd wait the year. I waited the year when my first was killed.

MISS DENNIS. Oh yes, I think one always ought to wait the year.

VICTORIA. I noticed you had an engagement ring on the moment you came in.

MISS DENNIS. I didn't really ought to wear it during business hours, but I like to feel it's there.

VICTORIA. I know the feeling so well. You turn it round under your glove, and you say to yourself, "Well, that's settled." Is he nice looking?

MISS DENNIS. Well, he's not what you might call exactly handsome, but he's got a nice face.

VICTORIA. Both my husbands have been very handsome men. You know, people say it doesn't matter what a man looks like, but that's all nonsense. There's nothing shows a woman off like a good-looking man.

MISS DENNIS. He's very fair.

VICTORIA. Of course, it's all a matter of taste, but I don't think I should like that myself. They always say fair men are deceitful. Both my husbands were dark, and they both had the D.S.O.

MISS DENNIS. That's funny, isn't it?

VICTORIA. I flatter myself there are not many women who've been married to two D.S.O.s. I think I've done my bit.

MISS DENNIS. I should just think you had. If it's not asking too much, I should like to know which of them you liked best.

VICTORIA. Well, you know, I really can't say.

MISS DENNIS. Of course, I haven't had the experience, but I should have thought you'd prefer the one who wasn't there. That almost seems like human nature, doesn't it?

VICTORIA. The fact is, all men have their faults. They're selfish, brutal, and inconsiderate. They don't understand how much everything costs. They can't *see* things, poor dears; they're cat-witted. Of course, Freddie's very unreasonable sometimes, but then so was Bill. And he adores me. He can hardly bear me out of his sight. They both adored me.

MISS DENNIS. That makes up for a great deal, I must say.

VICTORIA. I can't understand the women who complain that they're misunderstood. I don't want to be understood. I want to be loved.

(TAYLOR, *the maid, enters up* C.)

TAYLOR (*announcing*). Mrs Shuttleworth.

(MRS SHUTTLEWORTH *enters up* C. *She is* VICTORIA'S *mother and is elderly and grey haired. She is dressed in black outdoor clothes, and carries a muff.* TAYLOR *exits up* C.)

VICTORIA (*gushingly*). Darling Mother.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH (*moving above the sofa*). My precious child. (*She leans over the back of the sofa and kisses* VICTORIA.)

VICTORIA. This is Miss Dennis. It's the only moment in the day she was able to give me.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH (*graciously*). How do you do. (*She moves to* R. *of the table, puts her muff on the armchair and takes off her gloves.*)

MISS DENNIS. How do you do.

VICTORIA. You don't mind coming up all these stairs, do you, darling? You see, we have to be dreadfully economical with our coal. We tried to wangle more, but we couldn't manage it.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. Oh, I know. The coal controller was positively rude to me. Red tape, you know.

VICTORIA. They say we can only have two fires. Of course, we have to have one in the nursery, and I must have one in my bedroom. So I have to see people in here.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. And how are the precious darlings? (*She picks up her muff, moves to* L. *of the bed and puts her gloves and muff on it.*)

VICTORIA. Fred's got a slight cold, and Nannie thought he'd better stay in bed, but Baby's splendid. Nannie will bring him in presently.

MISS DENNIS. Are they both boys, Mrs Lowndes?

VICTORIA. Yes. But I'm going to have a girl next time.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. Fred will be two next month, Victoria.

VICTORIA. I know. I'm beginning to feel so old. Poor lamb, he wasn't born till three months after his father was killed.

MISS DENNIS. How very sad. You don't like the nails too red, do you?

VICTORIA. Not too red.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. She looked too sweet in mourning. (*She moves to the dressing-table.*) I wish you could have seen her, Miss Dennis. (*She picks up the hand-mirror and tidies her hair.*)

VICTORIA. Mother, how can you say anything so heartless? Of course, black does suit me. There's no denying that.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. I insisted on her going to *Mathilde.* Mourning *must* be well made, or else it looks nothing at all.

MISS DENNIS (*to* VICTORIA). Did you say your little boy's name was Fred? After his father, I suppose?

VICTORIA. Oh no, my first husband was called William. He particularly wanted the baby to be called Frederick after Major Lowndes. You see, Major Lowndes had been my husband's best man, and they'd always been such great friends.

MISS DENNIS. Oh, I see.

VICTORIA. Then, when I married Major Lowndes, and my second baby was born, we thought it would be nice to give it my first husband's name, and so we called it William.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH (*replacing the mirror on the dressing-table*). I was against it myself. I thought it would always remind the dear child of what she'd lost.

VICTORIA. Oh, but, Mother darling, I don't feel a bit like that about Bill. I shall never forget him. (*To* MISS DENNIS.) You see, (*she points to the double photograph on the console table up* C.) I have their photographs side by side.

MISS DENNIS. Some men wouldn't like that very much.

VICTORIA. Freddie has me now. He can't grudge it if I give a passing thought to that poor dead hero who's lying in a nameless grave in France.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH (*moving to the armchair* C.). Don't upset yourself, darling. (*She sits.*) You know how bad it is for your skin. (*To* MISS DENNIS.) She has such a soft heart, poor dear.

VICTORIA. Of course, now the war's over, it's different, but when Freddie was at the front I always thought it must be a consolation to him to think that if anything happened to him and I married again I should always keep a little corner in my heart for him.

MISS DENNIS (*rising*). There, I think that's all for today, Mrs Lowndes. Would you like me to come again on Friday? (*She collects her materials together from the stool, moves the stool down* L., *then moves above the table and packs up her case.*)

VICTORIA (*looking at her nails*). Please. (*She rises.*) You do them beautifully. There's something very satisfactory in a well-manicured hand. It gives you a sense of assurance, doesn't it? (*She moves to the fireplace.*) If I were a man I would never want to hold a hand that wasn't nicely manicured.

MISS DENNIS. The gentleman I'm going to marry said to me that the first thing that attracted him was the way my nails was polished.

VICTORIA. One never knows what'll take a man's fancy.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. Personally, I am a firm believer in first impressions. And that is why I say to all the girls I know, "Whenever you are being shown into a drawing-room bite both your lips hard, give them a good lick, put your head in the air, and then sail in." There's nothing men like more than a red moist mouth. I'm an old woman now, but I never go into a room without doing it.

MISS DENNIS. Fancy now, I never thought of that. I must try it and see.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. It may make all the difference to your life.

VICTORIA. Miss Dennis is engaged to be married, Mother.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH (*to* MISS DENNIS). Ah, my dear, don't make the common mistake of thinking that because you've got one man safe you need not make yourself attractive to others.

VICTORIA. On Friday next, then, Miss Dennis.

MISS DENNIS. Very well, Mrs Lowndes. (*She moves to the stool at the foot of the bed and picks up her handbag.*) Is there anything you're wanting just at the moment? (*She moves above the table.*)

VICTORIA. Nothing, thanks.

MISS DENNIS. I've got a new skin food that they've just sent me over from Paris. I would like you to give it a trial. I think it's just the thing for your complexion.

VICTORIA. I'm afraid to try anything I don't know. (*She looks at herself in the mirror over the mantelpiece.*) I've got such a delicate skin.

MISS DENNIS. It's been specially prepared for skins like yours, Mrs Lowndes. The ordinary skin food is well enough for the ordinary skin, but a really beautiful skin like yours wants something very extra-special in the way of food.

VICTORIA (*turning*). I expect it's frightfully expensive, and you know, they say we must economize. I suppose somebody's got to pay for the war.

MISS DENNIS. I'll make special terms for you, Mrs Lowndes. I'll only charge you fifty-nine and six for a three-guinea pot. It's a large pot, as large as that. (*She measures with her fingers a pot about three inches high.*) I promise you it's not an extravagance. A good skin food is an investment.

VICTORIA. Oh, well, bring it with you next time you come.

MISS DENNIS (*picking up her case*). I'm sure you won't regret it. (*She moves to the door* C.) Good afternoon, Mrs Lowndes. (*To* MRS SHUTTLEWORTH.) Good afternoon.

(*She exits up* C.)

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. I dare say she's right. They pick up a lot of experience, those women. I always say the same thing to girls, "Look after your skin, and your bills will look after themselves."

VICTORIA (*crossing to the dressing-table*). She was telling me that the Johnston-Blakes are going to divorce.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH (*without concern*). Really. (*She rises.*) Why? (*She moves to the fireplace and stands with her back to it.*)

VICTORIA (*sitting at the dressing-table*). He's been fighting for the last four years. He says he wants a little peace now. (*She combs and tidies her hair.*)

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. I'm afraid many of these men who've been away so long will have got out of the habit of being married. I dare say it was a mercy that poor Bill was killed.

VICTORIA (*turning in her chair and facing* MRS SHUTTLEWORTH). Mother darling, how can you say anything so dreadful?

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. Well, I must say I was thankful when Freddie got a job at the War Office. The difference between men and women is that men are not naturally addicted to matrimony. With patience, firmness, and occasional rewards you can train them to it just as you can train a dog to walk on its hind legs. But a dog would rather walk on all fours and a man would rather be free. Marriage is a habit.

VICTORIA (*turning to face the mirror*). And a very good one, Mother.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. Of course. But the unfortunate thing about this world is that good habits are so much easier to get out of than bad ones.

VICTORIA. Well, one thing I do know, and that is that Freddie simply adores being married to me.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. In your place, I should have married Leicester Paton.

VICTORIA (*rising*). Good heavens, why? (*She moves to the sofa and sits on it.*)

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. Have you never noticed that he wears spats? Men who wear spats always make the best husbands.

VICTORIA. It probably only means that he has cold feet. I expect he wears bedsocks, and I should hate that.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. Nonsense. It means that he has a neat and orderly mind. He likes things just so. Everything in its place and at the proper season. In fact, a creature of habit. I am convinced that after six months of marriage Leicester Paton would forget that he'd ever been a bachelor.

VICTORIA. I was a soldier's widow. I don't think it would have been very patriotic to marry a civilian.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. You girls all talked as though the war would last for ever. Heroism is all very well, but at a party it's not nearly so useful as a faculty for small talk.

(TAYLOR *enters up* C.)

TAYLOR. Mr Leicester Paton has called, madam. I said I didn't know if you could see him.

VICTORIA. Talk of the devil. Oh yes, bring him up here.

TAYLOR. Very good, madam.

(*She exits up* C.)

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. I didn't know you were seeing anything of him, Victoria.

VICTORIA (*with some archness*). He's been rather attentive lately.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH (*crossing to* R.). I knew I was right. (*She takes off her hat and puts it on the bed.*) I felt sure you attracted him.

VICTORIA. Oh, darling, you know I can never think of anyone but Freddie, but of course it's useful to have someone to run

errands for one. And he can wangle almost anything one wants.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. Butter?

VICTORIA. Everything, my dear, butter, sugar, whisky.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. Bite your lips, darling, and give them a good lick.

(VICTORIA *carries out the suggestion.*)

You missed the chance of your life.

VICTORIA. After all, he never asked me.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. Don't be silly, Victoria, you should have made him.

VICTORIA. You know that I adored Freddie. Besides, ration books hadn't come in then.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH (*moving to the chair at the dressing-table*). By the way, where is Freddie? (*She turns the chair to face* C. *and sits.*)

VICTORIA (*putting up her feet on the sofa*). Oh, my dear, I'm perfectly furious with him. He promised to take me out to luncheon, and he never turned up. He never telephoned or anything; not a word. I think it's too bad of him. He may be dead for all I know.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. Optimist.

(TAYLOR *enters up* C.)

TAYLOR (*announcing*). Mr Leicester Paton.

(LEICESTER PATON *enters up* C. *He is a small, fat man, very well pleased with the world and with himself. He is beautifully dressed and is obviously prosperous. You could tell at a mile that he had so much money that he did not know what to do with it. He is affable, gallant and easy.* TAYLOR *exits up* C.)

VICTORIA. I hope you don't mind being dragged up all these stairs. (*She puts out her right hand over the back of the sofa to* PATON.)

(PATON *moves to* R. *of the sofa and kisses* VICTORIA'S *hand.*)

We have to be so dreadfully economical with our coal. I can only afford to have a fire in my bedroom.

PATON. You're not going to tell me that you have any trouble about getting coal. (*He moves to* MRS SHUTTLEWORTH.) Why on earth didn't you let me know? (*He shakes hands with* MRS SHUTTLEWORTH.) How do you do?

VICTORIA. You don't mean to say you could get me some?

PATON (*moving above the armchair*). It's quite out of the question that a pretty woman shouldn't have everything she wants.

VICTORIA. I told Freddie that I felt sure he could wangle it somehow. What's the use of being at the War Office if you can't have some sort of a pull?

PATON (*taking a pencil from his pocket*). Leave it to me. (*He makes a note on his cuff.*) I'll see what I can do for you.

VICTORIA. You're a perfect marvel.

PATON. Now that these men are coming back from the front no-one would look at us poor devils who stayed at home if we didn't at least make ourselves useful.

VICTORIA. You only stayed at home because it was your duty.

PATON. I attested, you know; I didn't wait to be called up. But the Government said to me, "You're a ship-builder: go on building ships." So I built them ships.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. I think it was very noble of you.

PATON. And then they bring in a tax on excess profits. As I said to the Prime Minister myself, "It's trying one's patriotism rather high. It really is."

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. A little bird has whispered to me that the Government intends to show its appreciation of your great services in the next Honours List.

PATON (*drawing the armchair a little up* C.). Oh, one doesn't ask for that. (*He sits in the armchair.*) One's glad to have been able to do one's bit.

VICTORIA. How true that is. That's just what I feel.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. Victoria has worked like a dog, you know. It's a marvel to me how her health has stood it.

VICTORIA. I don't know how many committees I've been on. I've sold at twenty-three bazaars.

PATON. There's nothing that takes it out of one so much.

VICTORIA. At the beginning of the war I worked in a canteen, but I had to give that up, because I could never go out to lunch anywhere. I thought at one time of working in a hospital, but you know all the red tape there is in those places—they said I had no training.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. I'm sure you'd have made a wonderful nurse.

VICTORIA. I didn't propose to be the ordinary sort of nurse at all. I was quite content to leave that to those unfortunate females who make their living by it. But it doesn't want any particular training to be nice to those poor, dear, wounded boys, to shake out their pillows, and take them flowers, and read to them. It only wants sympathy.

PATON. I don't know anyone who has more.

VICTORIA (*with a flash of her eyes*). With people I like.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH. Have you stopped your teas, darling?

VICTORIA. Oh yes, after the Armistice.

PATON. You used to give teas to wounded soldiers?

VICTORIA. Yes, Tommies, you know. I think it's so important to cultivate the personal relation. I used to invite a dozen every Thursday. At first I had them in the drawing-room, but it made them shy, poor dears, so I thought it would be nicer for them if they had it in the servants' hall. I'm the only woman I know who never had the smallest trouble with her maids.

MRS SHUTTLEWORTH (*rising*). Darling, I think I'll go upstairs

and see how my dear little grandson is. I do hope it's not influenza.

(PATON *rises, moves to the door up* C. *and opens it.*)

VICTORIA. Yes, do, Mother. He'll be thrilled to see you.

(MRS SHUTTLEWORTH *exits up* C. PATON *closes the door then moves to* R. *of the sofa.*)

PATON. Is anything the matter with your little boy?

VICTORIA. Poor darling, he's got a cold.

PATON. I'm so sorry.

VICTORIA. I dare say it's nothing, but you know what a mother is: she can't help feeling anxious.

PATON. You're a wonderful mother——

VICTORIA. I adore my children.

PATON. —and a perfect wife.

VICTORIA. D'you think so?

PATON. Doesn't your husband?

VICTORIA. Oh, he's only my husband. His opinion doesn't count.

PATON. Does he know what a lucky man he is?

VICTORIA. If he does he's quite convinced that he deserves to be.

PATON. I envy him.

VICTORIA (*flashing a glance at him*). You don't think I'm quite detestable, then?

PATON. Shall I tell you what I think of you?

VICTORIA. No, don't, you'll only exaggerate. You know there are only two qualities that I flatter myself on: I'm not vain and I am unselfish.

(MAJOR FREDERICK LOWNDES, D.S.O., *enters up* C. *He is a tall, soldierly fellow in uniform, with red tabs and a number of ribbons on his tunic. He nods to* PATON *and shakes hands with him.*)

Freddie, where *have* you been all this time?

FREDERICK. I've been at the club.

VICTORIA. But you promised to take me out to luncheon.

FREDERICK. Did I? I forgot all about it. I'm so sorry. (*He moves to the dressing-table and takes a cigarette from the box on it.*)

VICTORIA. Forgot? I suppose something more amusing turned up.

FREDERICK. Well, I only said I'd come if I wasn't too busy.

VICTORIA. Were you busy?

FREDERICK. I was.

VICTORIA. Bill was never too busy to give me luncheon when I wanted it.

FREDERICK. Fancy that.

PATON. I think I'll be getting along. Now the war's over you fellows can take things easily. My work goes on just the same.

FREDERICK. That's a new car you've got, isn't it?

PATON. I have to get about somehow, you know.

FREDERICK. So do I, but being only a soldier I manage to do it on my flat feet.

PATON (*shaking hands with* VICTORIA). Good-bye.

VICTORIA. Good-bye. So nice of you to come and see me.

(PATON *exits up* C.)

I should be glad to know why you threw me over like that.

FREDERICK (*crossing below the sofa to the fireplace*). Are you obliged to receive visitors in your bedroom? (*He takes the box of matches off the mantelpiece and lights his cigarette.*)

VICTORIA. You don't mean to say you're jealous, darling? I thought you seemed grumpy. Is he put out? Let him come and give his little wife a nice kiss.

FREDERICK (*irritably*). I'm not in the least jealous.

VICTORIA. You silly old thing. You know it's the only room in the house that's got a fire.

FREDERICK (*crossing to the stool at the foot of the bed*). Why the dickens don't you have one in the drawing-room?

VICTORIA. My poor lamb, have you forgotten that there's been a war and there happens to be a shortage of coal? I will tell you exactly why we don't have a fire in the drawing-room. Patriotism.

FREDERICK (*sitting on the stool*). Patriotism be hanged. The place is like an ice-house.

VICTORIA. Darling, don't be unreasonable. After spending two winters in the trenches I shouldn't have thought you'd be such a slave to your comfort. I know you don't mean it when you say patriotism be hanged, but you shouldn't say things like that even in jest.

FREDERICK. I'm dashed if I can see why it would be less patriotic to have a fire in the drawing-room where we could all benefit by it, rather than here where it's no good to anyone but you.

VICTORIA (*opening her eyes very wide*). Darling (*she rises*), you're not going to ask me to do without a fire in my bedroom? (*She moves to the fireplace.*) How can you be so selfish? Heaven knows, I don't want to boast about anything I've done, but after having slaved my life out for four years I do think I deserve a little consideration.

FREDERICK (*rising and moving up* C.). I'll go and see the kid.

VICTORIA. And it's not as if I grudged you the use of my room. You can come and sit here as much as you like. Besides, a man has his club. He can always go there if he wants to.

FREDERICK (*turning and moving down* C.). I apologize. You're quite right. You're always right.

VICTORIA. I thought you wanted me to be happy.

FREDERICK. I do, darling.

VICTORIA. Before we were married, you said you'd make that the chief aim of your life.

FREDERICK (*smiling*). I can't imagine that a sensible man could want a better one.

VICTORIA (*beckoning to him*). Confess that you've been a perfect pig.

FREDERICK (*moving to her*). A brute beast, darling.

VICTORIA (*mollified*). D'you know that I asked you to give me a kiss just now? It's not a request that I'm in the habit of having ignored.

FREDERICK. I trust it's not one that you're in the habit of making to all and sundry. (*He kisses her.*)

VICTORIA. Now tell me why you forgot to take me out to luncheon today.

FREDERICK. I didn't forget. I was prevented. I—I haven't had any luncheon myself. I'll just (*he moves up* C.) ring and ask the cook to send me up something.

VICTORIA. My poor lamb, the cook left this morning.

FREDERICK (*stopping and turning*). Again?

VICTORIA. How d'you mean again? This is the first time she's left.

FREDERICK. Hang it all, she's only been here a week.

VICTORIA. You needn't get cross about it. It's much more annoying for me than for you.

FREDERICK (*irritably*). I don't know why on earth you can't keep your servants.

VICTORIA. No-one can keep servants nowadays.

FREDERICK. Other people do.

VICTORIA. Please don't speak to me like that, Freddie. (*She crosses to* R.) I'm not used to it.

FREDERICK (*moving down* C.). I shall speak to you exactly as I choose.

VICTORIA (*turning to him*). It's so petty to lose your temper just because you can't have something to eat. I should have thought after spending two years in the trenches you'd be accustomed to going without a meal now and then.

FREDERICK. For goodness' sake don't make a scene.

VICTORIA. It's not I who am making a scene. It's you who are making a scene.

FREDERICK. Victoria, I beg you to control yourself.

VICTORIA. I don't know how you can be so unkind to me. After all the anxiety I suffered on your account when you were in France I do think you might have a little consideration for me.

FREDERICK. Seeing that for the last year I've had a perfectly safe, cushy job at the War Office, I think you might by now have recovered from any anxiety you felt on my account.

VICTORIA. Must I remind you that my nerves were shattered by poor Bill's death?

FREDERICK. No, but I was confident you would.

VICTORIA. The doctor said I should need the greatest attention for several years. I don't believe I shall ever quite get over it. I should have thought even if you didn't love me any more you'd have a little human pity for me. That's all I ask, just the tolerant kindness you'd show to a dog who was fond of you. (*She moves above* FREDERICK, *then above the sofa and works herself into a passion.*) Heaven knows, I'm not exacting. I do everything I can to make you happy. I'm patience itself. Even my worst enemy would have to admit that I'm unselfish. (*She moves above him to* L. *of the bed.*)

FREDERICK (*over his left shoulder*). I . . . (*He turns and looks up* R. *but misses seeing her.*)

VICTORIA (*moving quickly above him to* R. *of the sofa; ignoring the interruption*). You weren't obliged to marry me. I didn't ask you to. You pretended you loved me. I would never have married you if it hadn't been for Bill. You were his greatest friend. You made me love you because you spoke so beautifully of him. (*She moves above him to* L. *of the bed.*)

FREDERICK (*turning and looking up* L.). But . . . (*He turns and looks up* R. *but misses seeing her again.*)

VICTORIA (*moving quickly above him to* R. *of the sofa; ignoring the interruption and going implacably on*). That's my mistake. I've loved you too much. You're not big enough to bear so great a love. Oh, what a fool I've been. I let myself be taken in by you and I've been bitterly punished. (*She moves below the sofa.*)

FREDERICK. Why . . .

VICTORIA (*heading off the words she sees he wants to speak*). Bill would never have treated me like that. (*She moves to* L. *of him.*) Bill wouldn't have taken my poor, loving heart and thrown it aside like an old hat. Bill loved me. He would have always loved me. I adored that man. He waited on me hand and foot. He was the most unselfish man I ever really cared for. I was mad ever to think of marrying you, mad, mad, mad. (*She crosses to* R.) I shall never be happy again. I would give anything in the world to have my dear, dear Bill back again.

FREDERICK (*moving to the fireplace*). I'm so glad you feel like that about it, because he'll be here in about three minutes.

VICTORIA (*turning to face him; startled*). What? What on earth d'you mean by that?

FREDERICK. He rang me up at the club a little while ago.

VICTORIA. Freddie! What are you talking about? Are you mad?

FREDERICK. No. Nor drunk.

VICTORIA. I don't understand. Who talked to you?

FREDERICK. Bill.

VICTORIA. Bill. Bill who?

FREDERICK. Bill Cardew.

VICTORIA. But, poor darling, he's dead.

FREDERICK (*moving to the sofa and sitting*). He showed no sign of it on the telephone.

VICTORIA. But, Freddie—Freddie. (*She moves to* R. *of the sofa.*) Oh, you're pulling my leg. It's too beastly of you. How can you be so heartless?

FREDERICK. Well, just wait and you'll see for yourself. (*He looks at his wrist-watch.*) In about two and a half minutes now, I should think.

VICTORIA (*coaxing him*). Now, Freddie, don't be vindictive. I dare say I was rather catty. I didn't mean it. You know I adore you. (*She sits in the armchair* C.) You can have a fire in your study and damn the fuel controller. I'm sorry for all I said just now. There, now, it's all right, isn't it?

FREDERICK. Perfectly. But it's not going to prevent Bill from walking into this room in about two minutes and a quarter.

VICTORIA (*rising and moving* R.). I shall scream. It's not true. Oh, Freddie, if you ever loved me, say it's not true.

FREDERICK. There's no need to take my word for it.

VICTORIA. But, Freddie darling, do be sensible. Poor Bill was killed at the Battle of Ypres. He was actually seen to fall. (*She moves to the stool at the foot of the bed.*) He was reported dead by the War Office. You know how distressed I was. I wore mourning and everything. (*She sits on the stool.*) We even had a memorial service.

FREDERICK. I know. It'll want a devil of a lot of explaining, turning up like this.

VICTORIA. I shall go stark, staring mad in a minute. How do you know it was Bill who spoke to you on the telephone?

FREDERICK. He said so.

VICTORIA (*rising*). That proves nothing. (*She moves down* R.) Lots of people say they're the Kaiser.

FREDERICK. Yes, but they speak from a lunatic asylum. He spoke from Harwich Station.

VICTORIA. I dare say it was somebody else of the same name.

FREDERICK. That's idiotic, Victoria. I recognized his voice.

VICTORIA. What did he say exactly?

FREDERICK. Well, he said he was at Harwich Station, and would be in London at three-thirteen. And would I break it to you?

VICTORIA. But he must have said more than that.

FREDERICK. No, not much.

VICTORIA (*sitting on the dressing-table chair*). For goodness' sake, tell me exactly what he said—exactly.

FREDERICK (*rising and moving to the fireplace*). Well, I was just coming along to take you out to luncheon, when I was told I was wanted on the telephone. A long-distance call—Harwich.

VICTORIA. I know. A seaport town.

FREDERICK. I strolled along and took up the receiver. I said, "Is that you, darling?"

VICTORIA. Why did you say that?

FREDERICK. That's always a good opening on the telephone. It puts the person at the other end at their ease.

VICTORIA. Idiot!

FREDERICK. Somebody said, "Is that you, Freddie?" I thought I recognized the voice, and I felt all funny. "Yes," I said. "It's me, Bill," he said, "Bill Cardew."

VICTORIA. For heaven's sake be quick about it.

FREDERICK. "Hulloa," I said, "I thought you were dead." "I thought as much," he answered. "How are you?" I said. "A-one," he said.

VICTORIA. What an idiotic conversation.

FREDERICK. Damn it all, I had to say something.

VICTORIA. You ought to have said a thousand things.

FREDERICK. We only had three minutes.

VICTORIA. Well, go on.

FREDERICK. He said, "I'm just tootling up to London. I'll be up at three-thirteen. You might go along and break it to Victoria." "Right-ho," I said. He said, "So long," and I said, "So long." And we rang off.

VICTORIA. But that was before luncheon. Why didn't you come at once and tell me?

FREDERICK. To tell you the truth I was a bit shaken by then. I thought the first thing was to have a double whisky and a small soda.

VICTORIA. And what did you do then?

FREDERICK (*moving to the sofa*). Well, I sat down to think. (*He sits on the sofa.*) I thought steadily for a couple of hours.

VICTORIA. And what have you thought?

FREDERICK. Nothing.

VICTORIA. It seems hardly worth while to have gone without your lunch.

FREDERICK. It's a devilish awkward position for me.

VICTORIA. For you? (*She turns to face the mirror.*) And what about me?

FREDERICK. After all, Bill was my oldest pal. He may think it rather funny that I've married his wife.

VICTORIA. Funny!

FREDERICK. On the other hand, he may not.

VICTORIA (*shaking her finger at him in the mirror*). Why didn't you tell me the moment you came in, instead of talking about heaven knows what?

FREDERICK. It wasn't a very easy thing to say. I was trying to find an opportunity to slip it in casually, don't you know.

VICTORIA (*turning; furiously*). Wasting precious time.

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