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THE WINSLOW BOY

A Play in Two Acts

by Terence Rattigan

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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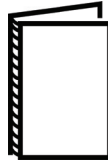


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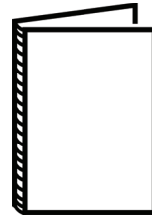
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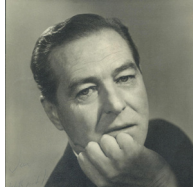
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



(1911–1977)

Born in London on the 10th June 1911, Terence Rattigan was educated at Harrow (Scholar) from 1925 to 1930 and Trinity College, Oxford (History Scholarship) BA to 1933. He served as a flight Lieutenant in the Central Command, RAF from 1940 to 1945. In 1934 he had become a full-time playwright.

His many successful plays include *French Without Tears*, *After The Dance*, *Flare Path*, *Love in Idleness*, *While The Sun Shines*, *The Winslow Boy*, *The Browning Version*, *Harlequinade*, *Adventure Story*, *Who is Sylvia?*, *The Deep Blue Sea*, *The Sleeping Prince*, *Separate Tables*, *Variation on a Theme*, *Ross*, *Man and Boy*, *A Bequest to the Nation*, *In Praise to the Nation*, *Cause Célèbre*.

Terence Rattigan still holds the record of being the only playwright to have notched more than 1000 performances for two separate plays, namely, *French Without Tears* and *While The Sun Shines*.

During the war years, he had three plays running on Shaftesbury Avenue: *Flare Path* at the Apollo, *While The Sun Shines* at the Globe and *Love in Idleness* at the Lyric.

He wrote screenplays of *French Without Tears*, *The Way To The Stars*, *Journey Together*, *While The Sun Shines*, *The Winslow Boy*, *The Browning Version*, *The Prince and The Showgirl*, *Separate Tables*, *The Sound Barrier*, *The Man Who Loved Redheads*, *The Deep Blue Sea*, *The Final Test*, *The VIPs*, *The Yellow Rolls Royce*, *Goodbye Mr Chips*, *Conduct Unbecoming*, *A Bequest To The Nation* – and collaborated on *The Quiet Wedding*, *The Day Will Dawn*, *English Without Tears*, *Uncensored*, *Brighton Rock*, *Bond Street*. His television plays include: *Heart to Heart*, *Adventure Story*, *High Summer*, *After the Dance* was shown in

the performance series on BBC 2 in 1993 and *The Deep Blue Sea* was recorded for the same series. In 1958 he was awarded a CBE, and in 1971 he became Knight Bachelor. Sir Terence Rattigan died in 1977.

For further information on Terence Rattigan, visit www.terencerattigan.com.

To join the Terence Rattigan Society, visit
www.theterencerattigansociety.co.uk.

THE WINSLOW BOY

The play was first produced at the Theatre Royal, Brighton, on Monday, 25th February, 1946, and subsequently at the Lyric Theatre, London, on Thursday, 23rd May, 1946, with the following cast of characters:

In the order of their appearance.

RONNIE WINSLOW	Michael Newell
VIOLET	Kathleen Harrison
GRACE WINSLOW	Madge Compton
ARTHUR WINSLOW	Frank Cellier
CATHERINE WINSLOW	Angela Baddeley
DICKIE WINSLOW	Jack Watling
JOHN WATHERSTONE	Alastair Bannerman
DESMOND CURRY	Clive Morton
MISS BARNES	Mona Washbourne
FRED	Brian Harding
SIR ROBERT MORTON	Emlyn Williams

Directed by Glen Byam Shaw.

Decor by Michael Weight.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place in Arthur Winslow's house in Kensington, London, and extends over a period of two years preceding the war of 1914–1918.

ACT I

Scene One—A Sunday morning in July.

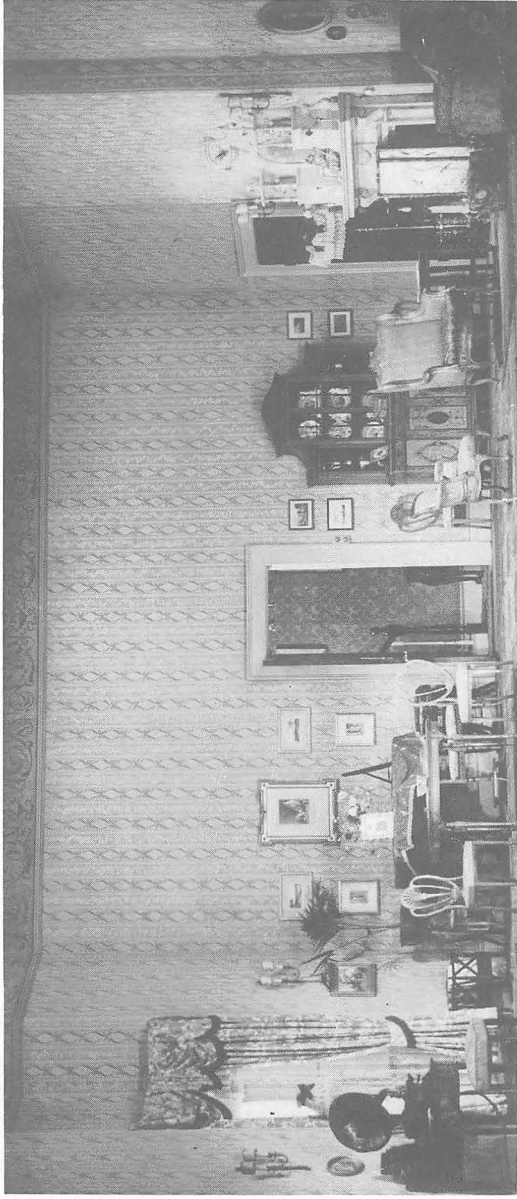
Scene Two—An afternoon in April (nine months later).

ACT II

Scene One—An evening in January (nine months later).

Scene Two—An afternoon in June (five months later).

The play was inspired by the facts of a well-known case, but the characters attributed to the individuals represented are based on the author's imagination and are not necessarily factual.



Photograph by Alexander Bender

ACT I

Scene One

***SCENE**—The drawing-room of a house in Courtfield Gardens, South Kensington, at some period not long before the war of 1914–1918. The furnishings betoken solid but not undecorative upper middle-class comfort. It is a Sunday morning in July.*

For details of scene, see Photograph and Ground Plan.

*Church bells are heard. As the Curtain rises they fade. **RONNIE**, a boy of about fourteen, is staring with wide, unblinking eyes at a portrait of himself on the piano. He is dressed in the uniform of an Osborne naval cadet. There is something rigid and tense in his attitude, and his face is blank and without expression. He turns and wanders aimlessly across to the fireplace. There is a sound from the hall. He looks despairingly round as though contemplating flight. **VIOLET**, an elderly maid, enters up centre. She carries a tray with a cigarette box, ashtrays and match box on it. At the sight of **RONNIE** she stops in the doorway in astonishment.*

VIOLET Master Ronnie!

RONNIE (*with ill-managed sang-froid*) Hello, Violet.

VIOLET (*moving down to the table right centre*) Why, good gracious! We weren't expecting you back till Tuesday. (*She puts the tray on the table*)

RONNIE Yes, I know.

VIOLET (*moving to right of GRACE's chair*) Why ever didn't you let us know you were coming, you silly boy? Your mother should have been at the station to meet you. The idea of a child like you wandering all over London by yourself. I never did. How ever did you get in? By the garden, I suppose— (*She moves to the table right centre*)

RONNIE No. The front door. I rang and cook opened it.

VIOLET Where's your trunk and your tuckbox? (*She puts the cigarette box, matches and one ashtray on the table*)

RONNIE Upstairs. The taximan carried them up—

VIOLET Taximan? You took a taxi?

RONNIE *nods.*

All by yourself? Well, I don't know what little boys are coming to, I'm sure. What your father and mother will say, I don't know—

RONNIE Where are they, Violet?

VIOLET Church, of course.

RONNIE (*vacantly*) Oh, yes. It's Sunday, isn't it? (*He moves towards the table right centre*)

VIOLET (*crossing to fireplace with two ashtrays*) What's the matter with you? What have they been doing to you at Osborne? (*She puts the ashtrays on the mantelpiece*)

RONNIE (*turning to her; sharply*) What do you mean?

VIOLET They seem to have made you a bit soft in the head, or something. (*She fusses with the cushions in the armchair down left*) Well—I suppose I'd better get your unpacking done—Mr. Dickie's been using your chest of drawers for all his dress clothes and things. I'll just clear 'em out and put 'em on his bed—that's what I'll do. (*She straightens up and turns to RONNIE*) He can find room for 'em somewhere else.

RONNIE (*taking a step towards GRACE's chair*) Shall I help you?

VIOLET (*scornfully*) I know *your* help. With *your* help I'll be at it all day. No, you just wait down here for your mother and father. (*She crosses to the table right centre, and picks up the tray*) They'll be back in a minute.

RONNIE *nods and turns hopelessly to the fireplace.*
VIOLET *looks at his retreating back, puzzled.*

Well?

RONNIE (*turning*) Yes?

VIOLET Don't I get a kiss or are you too grown-up for that now? (*She moves to centre*)

RONNIE Sorry, Violet. (*He goes up to her and is enveloped in her ample bosom*)

VIOLET That's better. My, what a big boy you're getting! (*She holds him at arm's length and inspects him*) Quite the little naval officer, aren't you?

RONNIE (*smiling forlornly*) Yes. That's right.

VIOLET Well, well, I must be getting on—

VIOLET *releases him and goes out up centre. She closes the door.*

RONNIE *resumes his attitude of utter dejection. He takes out of his pocket a letter in a sealed envelope. After a second's hesitation, he opens it, and reads the contents. The perusal appears to increase his misery. He takes two or three quick steps towards the hall door. Then he stops, uncertainly. There is the sound of voices in the hall. RONNIE, with a strangled sob, runs to the window and down the iron steps into the garden.*

The door up centre opens. ARTHUR WINSLOW, RONNIE's father, enters. He is a man of about sixty with a rather deliberately cultured patriarchal air. He carries a prayer-book and is leaning heavily on a stick. He makes for the fireplace. He is followed by RONNIE's mother, GRACE. She

is about ten years younger and has the faded remnants of prettiness. She too, carries a prayer-book.

GRACE (*entering*) But he's so old, dear. From the back of the church you really can't hear a word he says. (*She comes above the table right centre, and puts down her prayer-book on it*)

CATHERINE, **RONNIE's** sister, enters. *She is approaching thirty and has an air of masculinity about her which is at odd variance with her mother's intense femininity. She carries a handbag. She makes for the armchair down left. DICKIE, RONNIE's brother, follows her in. He is an Oxford undergraduate, large, noisy and cheerful. He hovers up centre.*

ARTHUR He's a good man, Grace.

GRACE But what's the use of being good, if you're inaudible?

CATHERINE A problem in ethics for you, father. (*She takes the book from the table down left, sits on the arm of the armchair and reads*)

ARTHUR, *at the fireplace, looks round at the open french windows.*

ARTHUR There's a draught, Grace.

GRACE *goes to the windows and closes them.*

GRACE Oh dear—it's coming on to rain. (*She moves to the settee, taking off her hat and coat. She puts them on the settee*)

DICKIE I'm on mother's side. The old boy's so doddery now he can hardly finish the course at all. I timed him to-day. It took him seventy-five seconds dead from a flying start to reach the pulpit, and then he needed the whip coming round the bend. I call that pretty bad going.

ARTHUR I'm afraid I don't think that's very funny, Richard.

DICKIE Oh, don't you, father?

ARTHUR Dodderly though Mr. Jackson may seem now, I very much doubt if, when he was at Oxford, he failed in his pass mods.

DICKIE (*coming down below the table right centre; aggrieved*)
Dash it—father—you promised not to mention that again this vac— (*He sits on the downstage edge*)

GRACE You did, you know, Arthur. (*She comes down to the desk*)

ARTHUR There was a condition to my promise—if you remember—that Dickie should provide me with reasonable evidence of his intentions to work.

GRACE takes a tin of cigarettes from the desk and fills the box on the table right centre.

DICKIE Well, haven't I, father? Didn't I stay in all last night—a Saturday night—and work?

ARTHUR You stayed in, Dickie. I would be the last to deny that.

GRACE You *were* making rather a noise, dear, with that old gramophone of yours. I really can't believe you could have been doing much work with that going on all the time.

DICKIE Funnily enough, mother, it helps me to concentrate.

ARTHUR Concentrate on what?

DICKIE Work, of course.

ARTHUR That wasn't exactly what you appeared to be concentrating on when I came down to fetch a book—sleep, may I say—having been rendered out of the question, by the hideous sounds emanating from this room.

DICKIE Edwina and her brother just looked in on their way to the Graham's dance—they only stayed a minute.

GRACE What an idiotic girl that is! Oh, sorry, Dickie—I was forgetting. You're rather keen on her, aren't you?

ARTHUR You would have had ample proof of that fact, Grace, if you had seen them in the attitude in which I found them last night.

DICKIE We were practising the Bunny Hug.

GRACE The what, dear?

DICKIE The Bunny Hug. It's the new dance.

CATHERINE (*helpfully*) It's like the Turkey Trot—only more dignified. (*She leaves the arm and sits in the chair*)

GRACE Oh, I thought that was the tango.

DICKIE No. More like a Fox Trot, really. Something between a Boston Glide and a Kangaroo Hop.

ARTHUR We appear to be straying from the point. Whatever animal was responsible for the posture I found you in has little to do with the fact that to my certain knowledge you have not yet done one single stroke of work so far this vacation.

DICKIE Oh. Well, I do work awfully fast, you know—once I get down to it.

ARTHUR Indeed? That assumption can hardly be based on experience, I take it.

DICKIE Dash it, father! (*He rises and crosses to the desk*) You are laying in to me, this morning. (*He sits on the stool*)

ARTHUR I think it's time you found out, Dickie, that I'm not spending two hundred pounds a year keeping you at Oxford, merely that you may make a lot of useless friends and learn to dance the Bunny Hop.

GRACE *moves to the desk and replaces the cigarette tin.*

DICKIE Hug, father.

ARTHUR The exact description of the obscenity is immaterial.

GRACE (*patting DICKIE on the head*) Father's quite right, you know, dear. You really have been going the pace a bit, this vac.

DICKIE Yes, I know, mother—but the season's nearly over now.

GRACE (*looking to the piano, at RONNIE's portrait; with a sigh*)
I wish you were as good about work as Ronnie.

DICKIE (*hotly*) I like that. That's a bit thick, I must say. All Ronnie ever has to do with his footling little homework is to add two and two, while I—

ARTHUR Ronnie, may I remind you, is at least proving a good deal more successful in adding two and two than you were at his age.

DICKIE (*rising and crossing to centre; now furious*) Oh yes, I know. I know. He got into Osborne and I failed. That's going to be brought up again.

GRACE Nobody's bringing it up, dear.

DICKIE Oh yes they are. It's going to be brought up against me all my life. Ronnie's the good little boy, I'm the bad little boy. You've just stuck a couple of labels on us that nothing on earth is ever going to change.

GRACE Don't be so absurd, dear—

DICKIE It's not absurd. It's quite true. Isn't it, Kate?

CATHERINE *looks up.*

CATHERINE I'm sorry, Dickie. I haven't been listening. Isn't what quite true?

DICKIE That in the eyes of mother and father nothing that Ronnie does is ever wrong, and nothing that I do is ever right?

CATHERINE *rises and crosses, with her book, to below GRACIE's chair. She faces DICKIE for a moment before she speaks. She leaves her handbag on the chair.*

CATHERINE If I were you, Dickie, dear, I'd go and have a nice lie down before lunch.

DICKIE *(after a pause)* Perhaps you're right. *(He goes towards the door up centre)*

ARTHUR If you're going to your room, I suggest you take that object with you. *(He points to the gramophone on the desk)*

CATHERINE *sits in GRACE's chair and reads.*

It's out of place in a drawing-room.

DICKIE, *with an air of hauteur, crosses to the desk, picks up the gramophone and carries it to the door up centre.*

It might help you to concentrate on the work you're going to do this afternoon.

DICKIE *stops at the door, and then turns slowly.*

DICKIE *(with dignity)* That is out of the question, I'm afraid.

ARTHUR Indeed? Why?

DICKIE I have an engagement with Miss Gunn.

ARTHUR On a Sunday afternoon? You're escorting her to the National Gallery no doubt?

DICKIE No. The Victoria and Albert Museum.

DICKIE *goes out with as much dignity as is consistent with the carrying of a very bulky gramophone. ARTHUR picks up "Punch" from the table by his chair and sits in the chair.*

GRACE How stupid of him to say that about labels. *(She turns to the window)* There's no truth in it at all—is there, Kate?

CATHERINE *(deep in her book)* No, mother.

GRACE Oh dear, it's simply pelting. *(She turns from the window and crosses to CATHERINE)* What are you reading, Kate?

CATHERINE Len Rogers' Memoirs.

GRACE Who's Len Rogers?

CATHERINE A Trades Union Leader.

GRACE Does John know you're a radical?

CATHERINE Oh, yes.

GRACE And a suffragette?

CATHERINE Certainly.

GRACE (*with a smile*) And he still wants to marry you?

CATHERINE He seems to.

GRACE Oh, by the way, I've told him to come early for lunch—so that he can have a few words with father first.

CATHERINE Good idea. (*To ARTHUR*) I hope you've been primed, have you, father? (*She rises, leaves her book in the chair and goes to ARTHUR*)

ARTHUR What's that?

CATHERINE (*sitting on the right arm of ARTHUR's chair*) You know what you're going to say to John, don't you? You're not going to let me down and forbid the match, or anything, are you? Because I warn you, if you do, I shall elope.

ARTHUR (*taking her hand*) Never fear, my dear. I'm far too delighted at the prospect of getting you off our hands at last.

CATHERINE (*smiling*) I'm not sure I like that "at last."

GRACE Do you love him, dear?

CATHERINE John? Yes, I do.

GRACE You're such a funny girl. You never show your feelings much, do you? You don't behave as if you were in love.

CATHERINE How does one behave as if one is in love?

ARTHUR One doesn't read Len Rogers. One reads Byron.

CATHERINE I do both.

ARTHUR An odd combination.

CATHERINE A satisfying one.

GRACE I meant—you don't talk about him much, do you?

CATHERINE No. I suppose I don't.

GRACE (*sighing*) I don't think you modern girls have the feelings our generation did. It's this New Woman attitude.

CATHERINE (*rising and facing GRACE*) Very well, mother. I love John in every way that a woman can love a man, and far, far more than he loves me. Does that satisfy you?

GRACE (*embarrassed*) Well, really, Kate darling—I didn't ask for anything quite like that— (*To ARTHUR*) What are you laughing at, Arthur?

ARTHUR (*chuckling*) One up to the New Woman.

GRACE Nonsense. (*She turns and goes towards the window*) She misunderstood me, that's all. (*At the window*) Just look at the rain! (*She turns to CATHERINE*) Kate, darling, does Desmond know about you and John?

CATHERINE I haven't told him. (*She picks up her book*) On the other hand, if he hasn't guessed, he must be very dense.

ARTHUR He *is* very dense.

GRACE Oh, no. He's quite clever, if you really get under his skin.

ARTHUR Oddly enough, I've never had that inclination.

CATHERINE *smiles. She crosses downstage to the desk.*

GRACE (*moving to the settee*) I think he's a dear. (*She turns towards CATHERINE*) Kate, darling, you *will* be kind to him, won't you? (*She picks up her coat and hat*)

CATHERINE (*patiently*) Yes, mother. Of course I will.

GRACE Poor Desmond! He's really a very good sort— (*She breaks off suddenly and stares out of the window*) Hullo! There's someone in our garden. (*She crosses to the window*)

CATHERINE (*going to the window*) Where?

GRACE (*pointing*) Over there, do you see?

CATHERINE No.

GRACE He's just gone behind that bush. It was a boy, I think.
Probably Mrs. Williamson's awful little Dennis.

CATHERINE (*turning into the room*) Well, whoever it is must
be getting terribly wet.

She puts her book on the desk.

GRACE Why can't he stick to his own garden?

There is a sound of voices outside in the hall.

Is that John?

CATHERINE It sounded like it.

They both listen for a moment.

GRACE Yes. It's John. (*To CATHERINE*) Quick! In the dining-
room!

CATHERINE All right. (*She dashes across to the door up left*)

GRACE Here! You've forgotten your bag. (*She darts to the chair
down left, picks up the bag and takes it to CATHERINE at
the door*)

*CATHERINE takes the bag and goes out into the dining-
room.*

ARTHUR (*startled*) What on earth is going on?

GRACE (*in a stage whisper*) We're leaving you alone with John.
When you've finished, cough or something.

ARTHUR (*testily*) What do you mean, or something?

GRACE I know. Knock on the floor with your stick—three times.
Then we'll come in.

ARTHUR You don't think that might look a trifle coincidental?

GRACE Sh!

GRACE *disappears into the dining-room. At the same moment VIOLET enters up centre.*

VIOLET *(announcing)* Mr. Watherstone.

JOHN WATHERSTONE *comes in. He is a man of about thirty, dressed in an extremely well-cut morning coat and striped trousers, an attire which, though excused by church parade, we may well feel has been donned for this occasion. He moves down left of GRACE's chair to ARTHUR. VIOLET goes out.*

ARTHUR How are you, John? I'm very glad to see you.

JOHN How do you do, sir?

ARTHUR Will you forgive me not getting up? My arthritis has been troubling me rather a lot, lately.

JOHN I'm very sorry to hear that, sir. Catherine told me it was better.

ARTHUR It was, for a time. Now it's worse again. Do you smoke? *(He indicates the cigarette box on the table right centre)*

JOHN Yes, sir. I do. *(He crosses to the table)* Thank you. *(He takes a cigarette, and adds hastily:)* In moderation, of course.

ARTHUR *(with a faint smile)* Of course.

There is a pause while JOHN lights his cigarette. ARTHUR watches him.

Well, now. I understand you wish to marry my daughter.

JOHN Yes, sir. That's to say, I've proposed to her and she's done me the honour of accepting me.

ARTHUR I see. I trust when you corrected yourself, your second statement wasn't a denial of your first?

JOHN *looks puzzled.*

I mean, you do *really* wish to marry her?

JOHN Of course, sir.

ARTHUR Why, of course? There are plenty of people about who don't wish to marry her.

JOHN I meant, of course, because I proposed to her.

ARTHUR That, too, doesn't necessarily follow. However, we don't need to quibble. We'll take the sentimental side of the project for granted. As regards the more practical aspect, perhaps you won't mind if I ask you a few rather personal questions. (*He waves JOHN to sit in GRACE's chair*)

JOHN (*sitting*) Naturally not, sir. It's your duty.

ARTHUR Quite so. Now your income: are you able to live on it?

JOHN No, sir. I'm in the regular army.

ARTHUR Yes, of course.

JOHN But my army pay is supplemented by an allowance from my father.

ARTHUR So I understand. Now your father's would be, I take it, about twenty-four pounds a month.

JOHN (*surprised*) Yes, sir, that's exactly right.

ARTHUR So that your total income—with your subaltern's pay and allowances plus the allowance from your father, would be, I take it, about four hundred and twenty pounds a year.

JOHN (*more surprised*) Again, exactly the figure.

ARTHUR Well, well. It all seems perfectly satisfactory. I really don't think I need delay my congratulations any longer. (*He extends his hand*)

JOHN *rises and gratefully takes ARTHUR's hand.*

JOHN Thank you, sir, very much.

ARTHUR I must say, it was very good of you to be so frank and informative.

JOHN Not at all.

ARTHUR Your answers to my questions deserve an equal frankness from me about Catherine's own affairs. I'm afraid she's not—just in case you thought otherwise—the daughter of a rich man.

JOHN I didn't think otherwise, sir.

ARTHUR Good. Well, now— (*He suddenly cocks his head on one side and listens*)

There is the sound of a gramophone playing "HITCHEY-KOO" from somewhere upstairs.

Would you be so good as to touch the bell?

JOHN *crosses to the fireplace and rings the bell. It is heard distantly. He turns and stands with his back to the fire.*

Thank you. Well, now, continuing about my own financial affairs. The Westminster Bank pay me a small pension—three hundred and fifty to be precise—and my wife has about two hundred a year of her own. Apart from that we have nothing, except such savings as I've been able to make during my career at the bank—the interest from which raises my total income to about eight hundred pounds per annum.

VIOLET *comes in up centre.*

VIOLET You rang, sir?

ARTHUR Yes, Violet, my compliments to Mr. Dickie and if he doesn't stop that cacophonous hullabaloo at once, I'll throw him and his infernal machine into the street.

VIOLET Yes, sir. What was that word again? Cac-something—

ARTHUR Never mind. Say anything you like, only stop him.

VIOLET Well, sir, I'll do my best, but you know what Master Dickie's like with his blessed old ragtime.

ARTHUR Yes, Violet, I do.

VIOLET I could say you don't think it's quite nice on a Sunday.

ARTHUR (*roaring*) You can say I don't think it's quite nice on any day. Just stop him making that confounded din, that's all.

VIOLET Yes, sir.

VIOLET *goes out.*

ARTHUR (*apologetically*) Our Violet has no doubt already been explained to you?

JOHN I don't think so. Is any explanation necessary?

ARTHUR I fear it is. She came to us direct from an orphanage a very long time ago, as a sort of under-between maid on probation, and in that capacity she was quite satisfactory; but I'm afraid, as parlourmaid, she has developed certain marked eccentricities in the performance of her duties—due, no doubt, to the fact that she has never fully known what they were. Well, now, where were we? Ah yes. I was telling you about my sources of income, was I not?

JOHN Yes, sir.

ARTHUR Now, in addition to the ordinary expenses of life, I have to maintain two sons—one at Osborne, and the other at Oxford—neither of whom, I'm afraid, will be in a position to support themselves for some time to come—one, because of his extreme youth and the other because of—er—other reasons.

The gramophone stops suddenly.

So, you see, I am not in a position to be very lavish as regards Catherine's dowry.

JOHN No, sir, I quite see that.

ARTHUR I propose to settle on her one sixth of my total capital—which worked out to the final fraction is exactly eight hundred and thirty-three pounds six and eightpence. But let us deal in round figures and say eight hundred and fifty pounds.

JOHN I call that very generous, sir.

ARTHUR Not as generous as I would have liked, I'm afraid.
However—as my wife would say—beggars can't be choosers.

JOHN Exactly, sir.

ARTHUR Well, then, if you're agreeable to that arrangement, I don't think there's anything more we need discuss.

JOHN No, sir.

ARTHUR Splendid.

There is a pause. ARTHUR takes his stick and raps it, with an air of studied unconcern, three times on the floor. They wait. Nothing happens.

JOHN (*crossing above the table right centre*) Pretty rotten weather, isn't it?

ARTHUR Yes. Vile. (*He raps again. There is a pause. Again nothing happens*) Would you care for another cigarette?

JOHN No, thank you, sir. I'm still smoking.

ARTHUR takes up his stick to rap again, and then thinks better of it. He struggles out of his chair and goes slowly but firmly to the door up left. He throws open the door.

(*in apparent surprise*) Well, imagine that! My wife and daughter are in here of all places. Come in, Grace. Come in, Catherine. John's here.

GRACE *comes in.* **CATHERINE** *follows.*

GRACE (*crossing ARTHUR*) Why, John—how nice!

JOHN *steps forward and they meet centre. They shake hands.*

My, you do look a swell! Doesn't he, Kate, darling?

CATHERINE (*between ARTHUR and GRACE*) Quite one of the Knuts.

There is a pause.

GRACE (*unable to repress herself; coyly*) Well?

ARTHUR Well, what?

GRACE How did your little talk go?

ARTHUR (*testily*) I understood you weren't supposed to know we were having a little talk.

GRACE Oh, you are infuriating! Is everything all right, John?

JOHN *nods, smiling.*

Oh, I'm so glad. I really am.

JOHN Thank you, Mrs. Winslow.

GRACE May I kiss you? After all, I'm practically your mother now.

JOHN Yes. Of course.

JOHN *allows himself to be kissed, ARTHUR crosses up centre and comes down between JOHN and GRACE.*

ARTHUR (*to JOHN*) While I, by the same token, am practically your father, but if you will forgive me—

JOHN (*smiling*) Certainly, sir.

ARTHUR Grace, I think we might allow ourselves a little modest celebration at luncheon. Will you find me the key of the cellars?

ARTHUR *turns and goes out through the door up centre.*

GRACE (*following him*) Yes, dear. (*She turns at the door; coyly*) I don't suppose you two will mind being left alone for a few minutes, will you?

GRACE *follows her husband out.*

CATHERINE Was it an ordeal?

JOHN I was scared to death.

CATHERINE My poor darling— (*She goes quickly to him*)

They kiss.

JOHN The annoying thing was that I had a whole lot of neatly turned phrases ready for him and he wouldn't let me use them.

CATHERINE Such as?

JOHN *brings her down centre.*

JOHN Oh—how proud and honoured I was by your acceptance of me, and how determined I was to make you a loyal and devoted husband—and to maintain you in the state to which you were accustomed—all that sort of thing. All very sincerely meant.

CATHERINE Anything about loving me a little?

JOHN (*lightly*) That I thought we could take for granted. So did your father, incidentally. (*He sits on the edge of the table right centre*)

CATHERINE I see. (*She gazes at him*) Goodness, you do look smart!

JOHN Not bad, is it? Poole's.

CATHERINE What about *your* father? How did he take it?

JOHN All right.

CATHERINE I bet he didn't.

JOHN Oh, yes. He's been wanting me to get married for years. Getting worried about grandchildren, I suppose.

JOHN *holds out his hand to her.* CATHERINE *takes it and goes to him.*

CATHERINE He disapproves of me, doesn't he?

JOHN Oh, no. Whatever makes you think that?

CATHERINE He has a way of looking at me through his monocle that shrivels me up.

JOHN He's just being a colonel, darling, that's all. All colonels look at you like that. Anyway, what about the way your father looks at me! Tell me, are all your family as scared of him as I am?

CATHERINE Dickie is, of course; and Ronnie, though he doesn't need to be. Father worships him. I don't know about mother being scared of him. Sometimes perhaps. I'm not—ever.

JOHN You're not scared of anything, are you?

CATHERINE Oh yes. Heaps of things.

JOHN Such as?

CATHERINE *(with a smile)* Oh... They're nearly all concerned with you.

RONNIE *looks cautiously in at the french windows. He now presents a very bedraggled and woe-begone appearance, with his uniform wringing wet, and his damp hair over his eyes.*

JOHN You might be a little more explicit...

RONNIE *(in a low voice)* Kate!

CATHERINE *turns and sees him.*

CATHERINE *(amazed)* Ronnie! What on earth—

RONNIE Where's father? *(He stands in the bay)*

CATHERINE I'll go and tell him— *(She makes a slight move towards the door)*

RONNIE *(urgently)* No, don't; please, Kate, don't!

CATHERINE *stops up centre, puzzled.*

CATHERINE What's the trouble, Ronnie?

RONNIE, *trembling on the edge of tears, does not answer her. JOHN rises and breaks centre. He looks slightly puzzled.*

(as she goes to him) You're wet through. You'd better go and change.

RONNIE No.

CATHERINE *(gently)* What's the trouble, darling? You can tell me.

RONNIE *looks at JOHN.*

You know John Watherstone, Ronnie. You met him last holidays, don't you remember?

RONNIE *remains silent, obviously reluctant to talk in front of a comparative stranger.*

JOHN *(tactfully)* I'll disappear. *(He moves to the door up centre)*

CATHERINE *(pointing to the door up left)* In there, do you mind?

JOHN *goes out quietly up left RONNIE crosses below the table right centre.*

Now, darling, tell me. What is it? Have you run away?

RONNIE, *his back to her, shakes his head, evidently not trusting himself to speak.*

(she comes down to him) What is it, then?

RONNIE *pulls out the letter from his pocket and slowly hands it to her. CATHERINE reads it quietly.*

Oh, God!

RONNIE *(turning to her)* I didn't do it.

CATHERINE *re-reads the letter in silence.*

Kate, I didn't. Really, I didn't.

CATHERINE (*abstractedly*) No, darling. (*She seem uncertain of what to do*) This letter is addressed to father. Did you open it?

RONNIE Yes.

CATHERINE You shouldn't have done that—

RONNIE I was going to tear it up. Then I heard you come in from church and ran into the garden—I didn't know what to do—

CATHERINE (*still distracted*) Did they send you up alone?

RONNIE They sent a Petty Officer up with me. He was supposed to wait and see father, but I sent him away. (*Indicating the letter*) Kate—shall we tear it up, now?

CATHERINE No, darling.

RONNIE We could tell father term had ended two days sooner—

CATHERINE No, darling.

RONNIE I didn't do it, Kate, really I didn't—

DICKIE comes in up centre. He does not seem surprised to see RONNIE.

DICKIE (*coming down centre, cheerfully*) Hullo, Ronnie, old lad. How's everything?

RONNIE turns away from him.

CATHERINE (*to DICKIE*) You knew he was here?

DICKIE Oh yes. His trunks and things are all over our room. Trouble?

CATHERINE Yes.

DICKIE I'm sorry. (*He crosses to the desk and examines some gramophone records*)

CATHERINE You stay here with him. I'll find mother.

DICKIE All right.

CATHERINE goes out up centre. *There is a pause.*

What's up, old chap?

RONNIE Nothing.

DICKIE Come on—tell me.

RONNIE It's all right.

DICKIE Have you been sacked?

RONNIE *nods.*

Bad luck. What for?

RONNIE I didn't do it.

DICKIE (*reassuringly*) No, of course you didn't.

RONNIE Honestly, I didn't.

DICKIE That's all right, old chap. No need to go on about it.
I believe you.

RONNIE You don't.

DICKIE Well, I don't know what it is they've sacked you for, yet—

RONNIE (*in a low voice*) Stealing.

DICKIE (*evidently relieved*) Oh, is that all? Good Lord! I didn't
know they sacked chaps for *that*, these days.

RONNIE I didn't do it.

DICKIE Why, good heavens, at school we used to pinch everything
we could jolly well lay our hands on. All of us. (*As he speaks
he quietly approaches RONNIE*) I remember there was one
chap—Carstairs his name was—captain of cricket, believe
it or not—absolutely nothing was safe with him—nothing
at all. Pinched a squash racket of mine once, I remember—
(*He puts his arm on RONNIE's shoulder*) Believe me, old
chap, pinching's nothing. Nothing at all. I say—you're a
bit damp, aren't you?

RONNIE I've been out in the rain.

DICKIE You're shivering a bit, too, aren't you? Oughtn't you to go and change? I mean, we don't want you catching pneumonia—

RONNIE I'm all right.

GRACE comes in up centre. CATHERINE follows. GRACE comes quickly to RONNIE. He sees her, turns away from DICKIE and runs into her arms.

GRACE There, darling! It's all right, now.

RONNIE begins to cry quietly, his head buried in her dress.

RONNIE *(his voice muffled)* I didn't do it, mother.

GRACE No, darling. Of course you didn't. We'll go upstairs now, shall we, and get out of these nasty wet clothes?

RONNIE Don't tell father.

GRACE No, darling. Not yet. I promise. Come along, now.

She leads him up centre towards the door.

Your new uniform, too. What a shame!

GRACE and RONNIE go out up centre.

DICKIE I'd better go and keep *cave* for them. Ward off the old man if he looks like going upstairs. *(He goes to the door up centre)*

CATHERINE *nods.*

I say—who's going to break the news to him eventually? I mean, someone'll have to.

CATHERINE Don't let's worry about that now.

DICKIE Well, you can count me out. In fact I don't want to be within a thousand miles of that explosion.

DICKIE goes out up centre. **CATHERINE** moves to the door up left and opens it.

CATHERINE (*calling*) John. (*She leaves the door open and comes down to the fireplace*)

JOHN comes in.

JOHN (*entering*) Bad news? (*He comes down by ARTHUR's chair*)

CATHERINE nods.

That's rotten for you. I'm awfully sorry.

CATHERINE (*violently*) How can people be so cruel?

JOHN (*uncomfortably*) Expelled, I suppose?

JOHN gets his answer from **CATHERINE's** silence, while she recovers herself.

CATHERINE God, how little imagination some people have! Why should they torture a child of that age, John? What's the point of it?

JOHN What's he supposed to have done?

CATHERINE Stolen some money.

JOHN Oh.

CATHERINE Ten days ago, it said in the letter. Why on earth didn't they let us know? Just think what that poor little creature has been going through these last ten days down there, entirely alone, without anyone to look after him, knowing what he had to face at the end of it! And then, finally, they send him up to London with a Petty Officer. Is it any wonder he's nearly out of his mind?

JOHN It does seem pretty heartless, I know—

CATHERINE Heartless? It's cold, calculated inhumanity. God, how I'd love to have that Commanding Officer here for just two minutes. I'd—I'd— (*She crosses below JOHN and turns up centre*)

JOHN (*gently*) Darling—it's quite natural you should feel angry about it, but you must remember, he's not really at school. He's in the Service.

CATHERINE What difference does that make?

JOHN Well, they have ways of doing things in the Service which may seem to an outsider horribly brutal, but at least they're always scrupulously fair. You can take it from me, that there must have been a very full enquiry before they'd take a step of this sort. What's more, if there's been a delay of ten days, it would only have been in order to give the boy a better chance to clear himself— (*He pauses*)

CATHERINE is silent. She turns away and moves above the table right centre.

I'm sorry, Catherine darling. I'd have done better to keep my mouth shut. (*He crosses to her*)

CATHERINE No. What you said was perfectly true—

JOHN It was tactless of me to say it, though. I'm sorry.

CATHERINE (*lightly*) That's all right.

JOHN Forgive me? (*He lays his arm on her shoulder*)

CATHERINE Nothing to forgive.

JOHN Believe me, I'm awfully sorry. (*He pauses*) How will your father take it?

CATHERINE (*simply*) It might kill him—

There is the sound of voices in the hall.

Oh, heavens! We've got Desmond to lunch. I'd forgotten—

JOHN Who?

CATHERINE (*crossing above JOHN to the door up centre*) Desmond Curry—our family solicitor. Oh, Lord! (*In a hasty whisper*) Darling—be polite to him, won't you?

JOHN Why? Am I usually so rude to your guests?

CATHERINE No, but he doesn't know about us yet—

JOHN Who does?

CATHERINE (*left of the door; still in a whisper*) Yes, but he's been in love with me for years—it's a family joke—

VIOLET *comes in up centre.*

VIOLET (*announcing*) Mr. Curry.

DESMOND CURRY *comes in up centre. He is a man of about forty-five, with the figure of an athlete gone to seed. He has a mildly furtive manner, rather as if he had just absconded with his firm's petty cash, and hopes no one is going to be too angry about it. JOHN, when he sees him, cannot repress a faint smile at the thought of him loving CATHERINE. VIOLET goes out.*

CATHERINE Hullo, Desmond. (*They shake hands*) I don't think you know John Watherstone—

DESMOND No—but, of course, I've heard a lot about him— (*He turns to JOHN*)

JOHN How do you do?

JOHN *wipes the smile off his face, as he meets CATHERINE's glance. He and DESMOND shake hands. There is a pause.*

DESMOND Well, well, well. I trust I'm not early.

CATHERINE No. Dead on time, Desmond—as always.

DESMOND Capital. Capital.

There is another pause.

JOHN }
CATHERINE } (*together*) Pretty ghastly this rain.
Tell me, Desmond—

JOHN I'm so sorry.

CATHERINE It's quite all right. I was only going to ask how you did in your cricket match yesterday, Desmond.

DESMOND Not too well, I'm afraid. My shoulder's still giving me trouble—

There is another pause.

(at length) Well, well. I hear I'm to congratulate you both—

CATHERINE Desmond—you know?

DESMOND Violet told me, just now—in the hall. Yes—I must congratulate you both.

CATHERINE Thank you so much, Desmond.

JOHN Thank you.

DESMOND Of course, it's quite expected, I know. Quite expected. Still, it was rather a surprise, hearing it like that—from Violet in the hall.

CATHERINE We were going to tell you, Desmond dear. It was only official this morning, you know. In fact you're the first person to hear it.

DESMOND Am I? Am I, indeed? Well, I'm sure you'll both be very happy.

CATHERINE	} (<i>murmuring together</i>)	{	Thank you, Desmond.
JOHN			Thank you.

DESMOND Only this morning? Fancy.

GRACE comes in up centre.

GRACE (*coming between DESMOND and CATHERINE*) Hullo, Desmond dear.

DESMOND Hullo, Mrs. Winslow.

GRACE (*to CATHERINE*) I've got him to bed—

CATHERINE *drops down below the table right centre and sits in the chair right of it.* JOHN *follows her and stands below the table. They both take cigarettes.*

CATHERINE Good.

DESMOND Nobody ill, I hope?

GRACE No, no. Nothing wrong at all—

ARTHUR *comes in up centre. He carries a bottle under his arm and has a corkscrew.*

ARTHUR Grace, when did we last have the cellars seen to?

GRACE *(breaking up left)* I can't remember, dear.

ARTHUR Well, they're in a shocking condition. *(He turns and shuts the door)* Hullo, Desmond. How are you? You're not looking well.

DESMOND Am I not? I've strained my shoulder, you know.

ARTHUR Well, why do you play these ridiculous games of yours? Resign yourself to the onrush of middle age, and abandon them, my dear Desmond. *(He moves to the fireplace. He prepares to draw the cork)*

DESMOND Oh, I could never do that. Not give up cricket. Not altogether.

JOHN *(making conversation)* Are you any relation of D. W. H. Curry who used to play for Middlesex?

DESMOND *(whose moment has come)* I am D. W. H. Curry.

GRACE *(coming down to her chair)* Didn't you know we had a great man in the room? *(She sits)*

JOHN Gosh! Curry of Curry's match?

DESMOND That's right. *(He comes down centre)*

JOHN Hat trick against the Players in—what year was it?

DESMOND 1895. At Lord's. Twenty-six overs, nine maidens, thirty-seven runs, eight wickets.

JOHN Gosh! Do you know you used to be a schoolboy hero of mine?

DESMOND Did I? Did I, indeed?

JOHN Yes. I had a signed photograph of you.

DESMOND Yes, I used to sign a lot once, for schoolboys, I remember.

ARTHUR Only for schoolboys, Desmond? (*He rings the bell*)

DESMOND I fear so—yes. Girls took no interest in cricket in those days.

JOHN Gosh! D. W. H. Curry—in person. Well, I'd never have thought it.

DESMOND (*sadly*) I know. Very few people would nowadays.

CATHERINE (*quickly*) Oh, John didn't mean that, Desmond.

DESMOND I fear he did. (*He pats his protuberant stomach*) This is the main trouble. Too much office work and too little exercise, I fear.

ARTHUR Nonsense. Too much exercise and too little office work.

VIOLET *comes in up centre.*

VIOLET You rang, sir?

ARTHUR Yes, Violet. Bring some glasses, would you?

VIOLET Very good, sir.

VIOLET *goes out.*

ARTHUR I thought we'd try a little of the Madeira before luncheon—we're celebrating you know, Desmond—

GRACE *furtively indicates* DESMOND.

(*he adds hastily*) —my wife's fifty-fourth birthday.

GRACE Arthur! Really!

CATHERINE It's all right, father, Desmond knows—

DESMOND Yes, indeed. It's wonderful news, isn't it? I'll most gladly drink a toast to the—er—to the—

ARTHUR (*politely*) Happy pair, I think, is the phrase that is eluding you.

DESMOND Well, as a matter of fact, I was looking for something new to say.

ARTHUR (*murmuring*) A forlorn quest, my dear Desmond.

GRACE (*protestingly*) Arthur, really! You mustn't be so rude.

ARTHUR I meant, naturally, that no one—with the possible exception of Voltaire—could find anything new to say about an engaged couple—

DICKIE *opens the door up centre. He allows VIOLET to enter with the tray of glasses, then follows her in. VIOLET comes to the table by ARTHUR's chair and puts the tray on it.*

Ah, my dear Dickie—just in time for a glass of Madeira in celebration of Kate's engagement to John— (*He begins to pour out the wine*)

DICKIE Oh, is that all finally spliced up now? Kate definitely being withdrawn to stud? Good egg! (*He crosses above the table to CATHERINE and kisses her; then crosses below her to JOHN and shakes hands*)

ARTHUR Quite so. I should have added just now—with the possible exception of Voltaire and Dickie Winslow. (*To VIOLET*) Take these round, will you, Violet?

There is a general buzz of conversation. VIOLET takes the tray first to GRACE, then to CATHERINE, then to JOHN. ARTHUR puts the bottle on the table at his right.

CATHERINE Are we allowed to drink our own healths?

DICKIE *takes a glass.*

ARTHUR I think it's permissible.

GRACE No. It's bad luck.

VIOLET *offers a glass to* DESMOND.

JOHN We defy augury. Don't we, Kate?

GRACE You mustn't say that, John dear. I know. You can drink each other's healths. That's all right.

VIOLET *goes to* ARTHUR.

ARTHUR Are my wife's superstitious terrors finally allayed? Good. *(He takes a drink)*

VIOLET *moves above* ARTHUR's chair. *She puts the bottle on the tray and the tray on the table.*

(toasting) Catherine and John.

*All drink—*CATHERINE and JOHN *to each other.* VIOLET *lingers, smiling.*

(seeing VIOLET) Ah, Violet! We mustn't leave you out. You must join this toast.

VIOLET Well—thank you, sir.

ARTHUR *pours her out a glass.*

Not too much, sir, please. Just a sip.

ARTHUR Quite so. *(He holds out the glass)* Your reluctance would be more convincing if I hadn't noticed you'd brought an extra glass—

VIOLET *(taking the glass from* ARTHUR) Oh, I didn't bring it for myself, sir. I brought it for Master Ronnie— *(She extends her glass)* Miss Kate and Mr. John. *(She takes a sip)*

ARTHUR You brought an extra glass for Master Ronnie, Violet?

VIOLET *(mistaking his bewilderment)* Well—I thought you might allow him just a sip, sir. Just to drink the toast. He's that grown-up these days.

DESMOND *is staring gloomily into his glass. The others are frozen with apprehension.*

ARTHUR Master Ronnie isn't due back from Osborne until Tuesday, Violet.

VIOLET Oh no, sir. He's back already. Came back unexpectedly this morning, all by himself.

ARTHUR No, Violet. That isn't true. Someone has been playing a joke.

VIOLET Well, I saw him in here with my own two eyes, sir, as large as life just before you come in from church—and then I heard Mrs. Winslow talking to him in his room—

ARTHUR Grace—what does this mean?

CATHERINE (*rising and crossing to centre between GRACE and DESMOND; instinctively taking charge*) All right, Violet. You can go—

VIOLET Yes, miss.

VIOLET *goes out up centre.*

ARTHUR (*to CATHERINE*) Did *you* know Ronnie was back?

CATHERINE Yes—

ARTHUR And you, Dickie?

DICKIE Yes, father.

ARTHUR Grace?

GRACE (*helplessly*) We thought it best you shouldn't know—for the time being. Only for the time being, Arthur.

ARTHUR (*slowly*) Is the boy ill?

No one answers. ARTHUR looks from one face to another in bewilderment.

Answer me someone! Is the boy very ill? Why must I be kept in the dark like this? Surely I have the right to know. If he's ill I must be with him—

CATHERINE (*steadily*) No, father. He's not ill. (*She takes a step closer to GRACE*)

ARTHUR *suddenly realises the truth from the tone of her voice.*

ARTHUR Will someone tell me what has happened, please?

GRACE *looks at CATHERINE with helpless enquiry.*
CATHERINE *nods.* GRACE *takes the letter from her dress.*

GRACE (*timidly*) He brought this letter for you—Arthur.

ARTHUR Read it to me, please—

GRACE Arthur—not in front of—

ARTHUR Read it to me, please.

GRACE *again looks at CATHERINE for advice, and again receives a nod.* ARTHUR *is sitting with his head bowed.*
GRACE *begins to read.*

GRACE “Confidential. I am commanded by My Lord's Commissioners of the Admiralty to inform you that they have received a communication from the Commanding Officer of the Royal Naval College at Osborne, reporting the theft of a five shilling postal order at the College on the 7th instant, which was afterwards cashed at the post office. Investigation of the circumstances of the case leaves no other conclusion possible than that the postal order was taken by your son, Cadet Ronald Arthur Winslow. My Lords deeply regret that they must therefore request you to withdraw your son from the College.” It's signed by someone—I can't quite read his name—

She turns away quickly to hide her tears. CATHERINE *puts a comforting hand on her shoulder.* ARTHUR *has*

not changed his attitude. There is a pause. The gong sounds in the hall outside.

ARTHUR (*at length*) Desmond—be so good as to call Violet.

DESMOND *goes up centre, opens the door and steps into the hall. The gong stops. He returns at once and holds the door. VIOLET enters.*

Violet, ask Master Ronnie to come down and see me.

GRACE (*rising*) Arthur—he's in bed.

ARTHUR You told me he wasn't ill.

GRACE He's not at all well.

ARTHUR Do as I say, Violet.

VIOLET Very good, sir.

VIOLET *goes out, closing the door.*

ARTHUR Perhaps the rest of you would go in to luncheon?
Grace, would you take them in?

GRACE (*hovering*) Arthur—don't you think—

ARTHUR (*ignoring her*) Dickie, will you decant that bottle of claret I brought up from the cellar?

DICKIE Yes, father. (*He puts his empty glass on the table right centre*)

ARTHUR I put it on the sideboard in the dining-room.

DICKIE (*crossing below JOHN and up centre to the door up left*)
Yes, father.

DICKIE *goes out up left.*

ARTHUR Will you go in, Desmond? And John?

DESMOND *and JOHN move to the door up left and go out. CATHERINE follows them to the door and waits. GRACE is still hovering.*

GRACE Arthur?

ARTHUR Yes, Grace?

GRACE Please don't—please don't— (*She stops, uncertainly*)

ARTHUR What mustn't I do?

GRACE Please don't forget he's only a child—

ARTHUR *does not answer her.*

CATHERINE Come on, mother.

GRACE *goes up to CATHERINE at the door. She looks back at ARTHUR. He has still not altered his position and is ignoring her. She goes into the dining-room followed by CATHERINE. ARTHUR does not move after they are gone. After an appreciable pause there comes a timid knock on the door up centre.*

ARTHUR Come in.

RONNIE *appears in the doorway. He is in a dressing-gown. He stands on the threshold.*

Come in and shut the door.

RONNIE *closes the door behind him.*

Come over here.

RONNIE *walks slowly up to his father. ARTHUR gazes at him steadily for some time, without speaking.*

(*at length*) Why aren't you in your uniform?

RONNIE (*murmuring*) It got wet.

ARTHUR How did it get wet?

RONNIE I was out in the garden in the rain.

ARTHUR Why?

RONNIE (*reluctantly*) I was hiding.

ARTHUR From me?

RONNIE *nods.*

Do you remember once, you promised me that if ever you were in trouble of any sort you would come to me first?

RONNIE Yes, father.

ARTHUR Why didn't you come to me now? Why did you have to go and hide in the garden?

RONNIE I don't know, father.

ARTHUR Are you so frightened of me?

RONNIE *does not reply.* ARTHUR *gazes at him for a moment, then holds up the letter.*

In this letter it says you stole a postal order.

RONNIE *opens his mouth to speak.* ARTHUR *stops him.*

Now I don't want you to say a word until you've heard what I've got to say. If you did it, you must tell me. I shan't be angry with you, Ronnie—provided you tell me the truth. But if you tell me a lie, I shall know it, because a lie between you and me can't be hidden. I shall know it, Ronnie—so remember that before you speak. (*He pauses*) Did you steal this postal order?

RONNIE (*without hesitation*) No, father. I didn't.

ARTHUR *takes a step towards him.*

ARTHUR (*staring into his eyes*) Did you steal this postal order?

RONNIE No, father. I didn't.

ARTHUR *continues to stare into his eyes for a second, then relaxes.*

ARTHUR Go on back to bed.

RONNIE *goes gratefully to the door up centre.*

And in future I trust that a son of mine will at least show enough sense to come in out of the rain.

RONNIE Yes, father.

RONNIE *goes out.* ARTHUR *crosses down right to the desk. He picks up the telephone.*

ARTHUR *(into the telephone)* Hullo. Are you there? *(He speaks very distinctly)* I want to put a trunk call through, please. A trunk call... Yes... The Royal Naval College, Osborne... That's right... Replace receiver? Certainly. *(He replaces receiver and then, after a moment's meditation, turns and crosses briskly up left and goes out into the dining-room)*

Quick curtain.

Scene Two

SCENE—The same, nine months later. It is about six o'clock, of a spring evening.

DICKIE *is winding up his gramophone which, somehow or other, appears to have found its way back into the drawing-room and is now on the piano. A pile of books and an opened notebook on the desk provide evidence of interrupted labours. He has a book in one hand. He starts the gramophone and it emits a scratchy and muffled rendering of "Alexander's Ragtime Band". DICKIE listens for a few seconds with evident appreciation, then essays a little pas seul, at the same time reading the book. CATHERINE comes in up centre. She is in evening dress, and carries a cloak, gloves, bag and scarf. DICKIE goes to the gramophone and stops it. He puts the book on the piano.*

DICKIE Hullo? Do you think the old man can hear this upstairs?

CATHERINE I shouldn't think so. I couldn't. *(She puts her things on the chair left of the door)*

DICKIE Soft needle and an old sweater down the horn. Is the doctor still with him? *(He changes the record)*

CATHERINE *nods.*

What's the verdict, do you know?

CATHERINE I heard him say father needed a complete rest—
She moves down to the fireplace.

DICKIE Don't we all?

CATHERINE *(indicating the books on the desk)* It doesn't look as if you did. *(She looks at her hair in the mirror)* He said he ought to go to the country and forget all his worries.

DICKIE Fat chance there is of that, I'd say.

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