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SF PERUSALS

THE ENQUIRY

A Play

by

CHARLOTTE HASTINGS

SAMUEL  FRENCH

LONDON
NEW YORK TORONTO SYDNEY HOLLYWOOD

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ISBN 978 0 573 01114 6

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CHARACTERS

Kate Walmer	*a prisoner*
Probyn	*chief officer*
Collins	*prison officer*
Frances Treadgold	*deputy governor*
Marcy	*a prisoner*
Marian Oates	*governor's clerk*
Laura Fenn	*governor*
Janet Graham M.D.	*medical officer*
Gow	*a prisoner*
Rev. John Shillitoe (The Rev. John)	*chaplain*
Valentine	*a prisoner*
Tom Walmer	*Kate's husband*

The action passes in the Governor's office in a women's open prison in the Midlands

ACT I	Thursday morning
ACT II	
Scene 1	Friday afternoon
Scene 2	Half an hour later
ACT III	Five minutes later

The author expresses her thanks and appreciation to Dr Christine Saville and C. H. Shoemake, Esq., O.B.E., for help with details of prison procedure.

PRODUCTION NOTE

This play is set in a busy modern prison. The pace must never flag. Dialogue must not hold up action. The Governor must cope with the routine and the paperwork even in a crisis. Therefore all the movements have been carefully worked out in the script, with entrances and exits timed to keep a continuous flow. If the players and producers will follow these directions they will find that many difficulties are smoothed away and the play will develop a pattern of movement especially designed for manipulating a large cast—even on a small stage—without fear of getting in each other's way or holding up the vital action. It is recommended that the green walls be used for the setting. Otherwise the stage may be extremely colourless, since the prisoner's clothes are dull, the uniforms of the prison officers dark, and the remaining characters may not wear bright colours.

COSTUME

The four prisoners wear straight-cut belted dresses of grey denim with white collars and cuffs edged with navy blue. Skirts must be two inches below the knee. KATE wears a navy blue woollen cardigan in Act I only. MARCY wears a scarlet cardigan throughout which gives a much-needed note of colour. VALENTINE and GOW do not wear cardigans. MARCY and GOW who do special work, wear yellow armbands on the right arm. They all wear thick black stockings and plain black lace-up shoes. Any prisoners with long hair must have it either tied back or pinned up. No jewellery is allowed in prisons except a wedding ring—in this case KATE and MARCY. COLLINS wears prison officer's uniform and wears her peaked cap throughout the play. PROBYN can wear a plain dark suit and white blouse. (If there is a breast pocket in the suit, a whistle chain can be showing.) She should wear black nylons and smart—but low-heeled—shoes. The CHAPLAIN wears a black cassock with a leather belt in Act I. After that he wears the clerical collar and black vest which has two pockets in it, to be used for his watchchain. The GOVERNOR, DEPUTY GOVERNOR and the GOVERNOR'S CLERK may wear smart clothes but nothing flashy, no very short skirts and no undue display of jewellery. The bruise on KATE's face should be only slight and for the last act it is better to remove it altogether, since in the "flashback" scene the time is eighteen months earlier—and there is no opportunity to change make-up during this part of the play.

The costumes used in this play may be hired from Charles H Fox Ltd, 25 Shelton Street, London WC2H 9HX

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THE ENQUIRY

ACT I

The Governor's office in a women's open prison in the Midlands

The prison is a modern building and the Governor's office, though plain, is cheerful. The walls are a pleasant shade of sage green, with white skirtings. Doors and window-frames are also white and the doors are polished mahogany without panels. Three tall windows are angled along one side, giving an impression of height with only sky and clouds visible. The upstage window opens outwards. There is a door to the corridor in the back wall, which opens inwards, and the sign "Governor's Office" can be seen on reverse. The wall seen through the door gives the prison atmosphere outside the pleasant office: it is painted cream above and lighter green below: there are three signs one below the other: "Deputy Governor" and "Chief Officer" pointing off one way, "Medical Officer" pointing off the other. Another door leads off a side wall

Immediately the CURTAIN *rises, someone screams loudly off, and chaos breaks out—shouting, banging, running feet*

Kate Walmer rushes in from the corridor, with Chief Officer Probyn behind her

Kate leaps on to the window-seat up stage, flings open the window and turns. At this moment a whistle blows loudly off, and there is a dead silence, into which she shouts her first line

Kate Don't touch me or I'll jump . . . !

Kate is twenty-seven and would be attractive if not distraught. She wears prison uniform of grey denim dress with a white collar and cuffs, black shoes and stockings and a navy cardigan. Probyn is in her early forties, pleasant and capable. She does not wear uniform, but a plain well-cut navy suit, plain crisp white blouse, black stockings and shoes. She stands holding the door open

Probyn Walmer, get down and don't be a fool!
Kate If you touch me, I'll jump.

Officer Collins runs in from the corridor panting. She is fortyish, strongly built. She wears prison officers' uniform and peaked cap

Collins Miss Treadgold's coming up . . . (*She stops, seeing Kate*)

Probyn (*not taking her eyes off Kate*) Go down and tell them to get a safety net. Come back and wait outside—hurry!
Collins Yes, Chief.

Collins runs out

Probyn (*moving briskly to the window-seat*) Now, Walmer, you've not given any trouble before. Why start now?
Kate Keep away! (*She swings the window wider and nearly overbalances. She clutches the curtain*)
Probyn Stand still—don't look down! Do you hear me? Don't look down.

Kate slowly turns her head

That's better. Keep your eyes on me. Now, steady—(*she makes a cautious move forward, holding out her hand*) take my hand . . .
Kate No!

Frances Treadgold, the Deputy Governor, enters from the corridor. She is in her late thirties and attractive. She carries a clipboard of papers

Frances (*matter-of-factly*) Well, Kate, if you want to break your neck, that's your choice. You might remember—quite apart from the trouble you'll cause us—your husband will have to live with it afterwards—

Kate goes rigid against the curtains

—and the children.

There is a pause. Then Kate turns and hides her face in the curtains. She sobs harshly once. Frances closes the door and goes to the desk

She won't do it now. Leave us alone.
Probyn It's a risk.
Frances I'll take the responsibility. (*She looks at her papers*)

There is a knock on the main door and Marcy hurries in. She is seventy, small and spry. She wears prison uniform, with a red cardigan which has a yellow armband on the right sleeve. She carries a large florist's bouquet in cellophane

Marcy Please, ma'am—(*seeing Kate*)—ow . . .
Probyn (*quickly*) Not now, Marcy.
Marcy But these is for the Governor . . .
Frances Put them on the table, would you, Chief.

Probyn takes the flowers from Marcy and goes to the alcove table. Marcy runs to the door

Frances Oh, Marcy, fetch some coffee. Hot and very strong. Get Gow to make it.

Marcy Gow make coffee? D'you want it mucked up with an egg whisk and parsley floating on top . . .
Probyn Marcy.
Marcy Yes, Chief?
Probyn Move!
Marcy (*hurriedly*) Yes, Chief.

Marcy gives one last look at Kate then scuttles out. Probyn follows, closing the door behind her

Frances flicks the intercom

Frances Miss Oates? Will you bring up the correspondence? We're a little disorganized here, but don't let it worry you. Thanks. (*She takes a bunch of keys from the desk drawer and goes to the cabinet, talking all the time*) Come down when you're ready, Kate. I shan't ask you again. (*She unlocks the drawer and finds a file*) Whatever is wrong, it can't be worth killing yourself, or getting maimed—which might be worse. I suggest we sit down and talk things out. (*She relocks the cabinet and returns to the desk with the file. She puts the keys in the desk drawer*) We're here to help you. Just remember that.

There is knock at the main door

Come. (*She sits at the desk*)

Marian Oates, the clerk, enters, carrying a basket of papers. She is young and efficient

Come in, Marian, the Governor will be back from London any moment. Are we fairly clear?

Marian puts the basket on the desk. She glances at Kate and away again

(*Quietly*) Take no notice. (*Briskly*) So what have we got?
Marian These are for the Governor's signature. (*She puts a folder of letters on the desk*)
Frances Right.
Marian A couple of orders, if you would just initial them. (*She takes two sheets from the basket and gives them to Frances*)
Frances (*reading them briefly, initialling them, and handing them back*) Next.
Marian I could cope with this, but I thought you'd better see it first. (*She gives Frances an open letter from the basket*)
Frances Oh, no, not the Professor again?
Marian I'm afraid so. I suppose he means well, but . . .
Frances I'm sure he does. I'm equally sure our inmates wouldn't particularly appreciate a monthly illustrated lecture on the significance of the male element in early Greek sculpture.
Marian (*smiling*) They might appreciate the slides. (*She hands over a card*)

Frances Yes, indeed—a *very* well developed gentleman. Good heavens, within ten minutes we'd be sedating the entire audience. (*She returns the card*) The usual. The Governor regrets—but thank you most sincerely—make it flowery. Then file it and hope that's the last of him.

Kate suddenly slides to her knees on the sill, her face still hidden in the curtains. Frances and Marian glance over, then at each other. Frances nods

Anyone on report?
Marian One. Gow. She's specially asked to see the Governor.
Frances That's her privilege. Has Mrs Fenn got a memo?
Marian In the file.
Frances Anything else?
Marian Only the Governor's personal letters. (*She puts a pile of unopened letters on the desk*)

There is a knock on the main door

Frances Come in. Thank you, Marian.

Marian goes to the door

Marcy enters and stands aside. She carries a tray of coffee

Marcy Morning, miss.
Marian Good morning, Marcy.

Marian goes out, shutting the door

Marcy goes to the desk and sees Kate

Marcy Blimey—she still up there . . .
Frances (*writing*) That will do, Marcy. Just put the tray here.

Marcy puts the tray on the desk, goes to the door and turns

Marcy Please, miss . . .
Frances (*continuing to work*) What is it?
Marcy You wouldn't have a fag, miss dear, would you?
Frances How many have you got already?
Marcy Not a whiff, I swear it. I'll turn out my pockets if you like.
Frances Last time, I remember, you had them in your pants.
Marcy Not any more, miss dear. When they get warm it spoils the flavour.
Frances Oh, really. Here. (*She pushes over the cigarette box*)

Marcy pounces on it

(*Warningly*) One only!
Marcy Thank you, miss dear. You're all right, you are. (*She runs to the door and turns with the cigarette in her hand*) Miss dear, you wouldn't have a king-size, would you? You can cut them in half and make two . . .
Frances No, I would not. Take that and get out before I take it back.

Marcy (*hastily*) Yes, miss dear. And bless and thank you for a good, kind . . .
Frances Move!
Marcy Yes, miss.

Marcy glances at Kate, rolls up her eyes and scuttles out

Frances (*blotting her writing*) Come and have some coffee, Kate. You needn't talk unless you want to.

After a second, Kate slowly gets off the sill and moves to the middle of the room, keeping a hand to the right side of her face

That's better. (*She gets up and moves to Kate, between her and the window*) Shall we sit down? It's very good coffee. Gow's special. (*She puts an arm round Kate*)
Kate (*jerking violently away*) No . . . ! (*She runs for the window*)

Frances catches her firmly, pulling one arm behind her back

(*Screaming*) Let me go! (*She wrenches herself free, trips and falls, supporting herself with her hands*)

Laura Fenn enters by the main door, followed by Probyn carrying a suitcase. Laura is nearly sixty, tall and with a considerable air of authority. She is handsome in a dark, strong-featured way; her face is severe but softened by the calm eyes and sensitive mouth. She is well dressed in a dark travelling suit, hatless, a short fur jacket over her shoulders, and she carries a handbag and gloves

Laura Good morning, Frances. Would you close the window, please.

Frances closes the window. Laura goes to the desk to put down her bag and gloves

I should have been here earlier—(*casually, in passing*)—get up, Kate—but the train was delayed at Langton, so of course I missed the connection. (*She gives Probyn her coat*) Thank you, Chief. Please stay within call a little longer.
Probyn Yes, madam.

Probyn goes out, closing the door

Laura (*going and sitting at the desk*) Kate, I do not speak merely for the pleasure of hearing myself do so. I told you to get up.

Kate does not move. Frances steps towards her, but Laura checks her

Get up, Kate.

Kate slowly gets up

Stand over here. In front of the desk.

Kate stands resting one hand on the upright chair, her back to the audience, head bent, shoulders drooping

Thank you. (*She takes her spectacles from her bag and puts them on. To Frances*) Is there anything important in the correspondence?

Frances No. Miss Oates has dealt with most of it. The letters are in the file.

Laura. Good. (*She sorts quickly through the private letters without opening them, then sits back*) Now, Kate. Why . . . ?

Kate does not answer

Answer me, Kate. (*With sudden authority*) And stand upright when I speak to you.

Kate jerks upright away from the chair, but keeps her head bent

That's better. I'll ask you again. Why?

Kate (*very low*) I—wanted to die.

Laura That is often easy, but seldom expedient. And if you answer one question by posing another, we shall get nowhere. So. Why did you want to die?

Kate It doesn't matter.

Laura You have only eight weeks before your release. Therefore it matters very considerably. Have you had bad news from home?

Kate shakes her head

Have you been feeling ill?

Kate shakes her head

You know that in an emergency you may ask to see me at any time. Did you do that?

Kate No, madam.

Laura Or to see Miss Treadgold?

Kate (*woodenly*) No, madam.

Laura (*to Frances*) Please ask Miss Probyn to come in. You may sit down, Kate.

Kate sits in front of the desk, still with her back to the audience and her head bent. Frances goes to the door and opens it to bring in Probyn

Probyn enters and stands in front of the door

Thank you, Chief, before this incident how recently had you seen Walmer?

Probyn This morning, ma'am. At breakfast.

Laura Did she appear in any way upset?

Probyn No, ma'am. I spoke to her about some work. She was perfectly normal.

Laura I see. (*She refers to the clipboard*) After breakfast you should have cleaned your room and reported to your working party for gardening duty. What happened then?

Kate does not answer

(*Abruptly*) Take your hand from your face.

Kate does not move. Laura goes to her, pulls her hand away and tilts up her face

Where did you get that bruise?

Kate remains silent

Now come along, Kate.

Kate I must have knocked it on the window catch.

Laura Miss Treadgold, I think you're about the same height.

Frances gets on the sill, opens the window and leans against it. It is obvious she is nowhere near the catch

So that won't do, Kate, will it?

Kate drops her head. Her hair, which is fairly long and has already come loose, falls across her face. Laura, who has been watching her intently, takes an elastic band from the desk tray and holds it out

Laura Put your hair off your face.

Kate slowly does so. As she puts an arm behind her head, she winces slightly

Have you hurt your arm?

Kate (*too quickly*) No, madam. (*She pauses, still with her hand behind her head, looking straight at Laura*)

Laura (*gently but firmly*) All right, Kate. Take off your cardigan.

Kate swings round on the chair to face Laura, For the first time her face is fully seen

Kate Please, madam . . .

Laura Take off your cardigan and unfasten your dress.

Kate Don't make me . . .

Laura It would be more dignified for you if I did not have to ask the Chief Officer.

Probyn takes a step forward. Kate immediately turns away and unfastens her cardigan. She takes it off and puts it on the desk. She unzips her dress to the waist and sits still, hands in her lap, head bent. Laura moves behind her and gently draws her dress down, exposing her shoulders. Frances and Probyn move down to see. They all look at one another. Laura picks up the telephone. Probyn gently drapes the cardigan over Kate's shoulders

(*On the telephone*) This is the Governor. Put me through to the hospital, please . . . Hullo—is Dr Graham there this morning? . . . Good. This is an emergency. Please ask her to come to my office at once. She had better bring a sedative . . . Yes, immediately . . . Thank you. (*She sits at her desk and opens the letter file*) We can't hold things up. Would you mind giving me a hand? I don't want Miss Oates here just now.

Frances Of course.

Laura starts signing letters. Frances blots each one and puts it in the envelope. Laura hands her one letter

Laura You might glance at that. I think you'll want to check that reference from your file.

A bell clangs loudly off. Under the windows hurrying feet are heard. A voice calls, "Into your lines. Smartly there." The whistle blows again and feet are heard marching away. Laura goes to the window and looks down as the sounds die out

(*Half to herself*) The answer's down there somewhere . . .

There is a knock at the main door

Come in. (*She sits at the desk*)

Dr Graham enters. She is a brisk, plump little Scotswoman of about fifty-five—very down to earth. She wears a white coat

Dr Graham Good morning, Governor.

Laura Thank you for coming so promptly, Doctor. Something for you to look at.

Probyn removes Kate's cardigan and stands back. Dr Graham moves behind Kate

Dr Graham M'm. Been in the wars, haven't we? All right, dear—just relax a moment. Could we have a glass of water, please?

Probyn goes to the main door

Collins is outside

Probyn speaks to Collins, then closes the door

We'll just have a look, shall we? (*She puts on her spectacles and stands looking at Kate's back. Then she draws the dress up*)

Kate flinches

No, I won't touch you. That's it. Now let's see your face. (*She turns Kate's chair so that she is back to the audience*) Right—turn to the light. You're lucky, my girl, it won't be a black eye. Now, can you tilt your head back—keep quite still. (*She takes a small torch from her pocket and examines Kate's eyes, then feels her pulse*)

There is a knock on the main door. Probyn opens it

Collins is outside with a carafe of water and a tumbler

Probyn takes them and shuts the door

Dr Graham Any headache?

Kate shakes her head

Good. Ah, thank you, Chief. Now, where did I put . . . (*She searches in her pockets and produces a bottle of tablets*) Here we are. Dress her up and give her a couple of these. Keep her warm. (*She gives Probyn the bottle and jerks her head to Laura and Frances to follow her out of hearing*)

Probyn helps Kate to dress and gives her the tablets and water

Nasty little business. Do we know who did it?

Laura Not yet.

Dr Graham Have to find out, eh? And she won't tell you, naturally.

Laura How serious is it?

Dr Graham Oh, not bad. No head injury. She'll be a bit stiff for a day or two. Probably going to be more serious for you than for her.

Laura I'm afraid so.

Dr Graham Well, that's your department. I think we'll have her in hospital for twenty-four hours. Tuck her up and keep her warm. Settle her down, you know.

Laura May I talk to her first? Before she has time to—to harden up? What about shock?

Dr Graham Certain amount, of course. How long would you want?

Laura A quarter of an hour?

Dr Graham Shouldn't do any harm. Provided you go easy. Give her a hot drink. Is that coffee there?

Frances It will be cold by now—shall I order some more?

Laura Would you, please?

Frances Do you particularly want me for the moment? I do have one or two urgent things . . .

Laura No, no—carry on. I do want a chat with you later. Perhaps I could ring down.

Frances Yes, of course. I'll send someone back with this.

Frances exits with the coffee-pot

Dr Graham (*briskly*) Well, that's that. You'll want me later, I've no doubt.

Laura It looks like it.

Dr Graham Yes. Very unpleasant. Do all I can, of course. Still, it's all in a day's work. I'll have a word with Matron. (*She picks up the pills and smiles at Kate*) Cheer up, dear. You'll live.

Dr Graham exits

Laura Thank you, Chief. I'll send for Miss Collins in about a quarter of an hour. Ask her to bring a top coat. She's to go over to the hospital.

Probyn Yes, madam.

Probyn exits

Laura Are you fairly comfortable now?

Kate Yes, thank you, madam.

Laura sits at her desk

(*Abruptly*) Madam . . .

Laura Yes, Kate?

Kate Do I have to go into hospital?

Laura Dr Graham thinks it would be best. (*Pausing*) It would be better still if you would tell me about it.

Kate I can't, madam.

Laura Kate, you are not a typical prisoner. (*She opens the file Frances took from the cabinet*) You are intelligent, well educated—university—I see you took a degree in history.

Kate (*harshly*) It hasn't counted for much, has it?

Laura It will in the future. And you do have a future. You must hold on to that. So many people here have absolutely nothing, in spite of what we do.

Kate Yes.

Laura I am going to speak to you plainly. And I should appreciate your speaking freely to me in return. Will you do that?

Kate I cannot tell you what you want to know.

Laura What I need to know. This is a very serious matter and cannot be overlooked.

Kate You mean there will have to be some sort of enquiry?

Laura Yes. And if you answer now, it will save a great deal of trouble and even more time.

Kate Madam—may I say something? Could you forget the whole matter, and accept it as part of my punishment?

Laura No, Kate. I could not and you know that. It is completely illogical . . .

Kate What has logic got to do with it? It is part of my punishment. Even a layman knows prisoners loathe another prisoner who has—

Laura Kate!

Kate —who has killed her own child.

Laura (*after a pause; quietly*) I did not want to mention that.

Kate It is the main issue. You knew that all along. You have asked me "who"—not "why".

Laura I am asking you that now.

Kate You want me to name someone, and that person will be punished—and humiliated—and it will be my fault. Always my fault. (*She jumps up and leans on the desk. Desperately*) Please—don't add one misery to another. For God's sake—isn't there enough in this place already?

Laura Sit down, Kate.

Kate I do beg of you . . .

There is a knock at the door

Laura Just a moment. (*Quietly*) Sit down, Kate.

Kate slowly sits. Laura moves behind her and puts a hand on her shoulder

Are you quiet now?

Kate nods

Laura opens the door

Collins is outside with a coffee-pot. Laura takes it with a quick word of thanks, and shuts the door

Kate I'm sorry—I . . .

Laura (*pouring coffee*) Drink this. (*She gives Kate a cup, pours one for herself, and stands looking out of the window and drinking. After a moment*) Why history?

Kate What?

Laura Your degree. Why did you read history?

Kate I have always been deeply interested in people. (*Wryly*) And history is safe.

Laura Safe?

Kate All the emotions are past.

Laura As our own will be eventually. It is a comforting thought.

Kate No emotions, good or bad, are comforting. We should have been born without them.

Laura The Lord in His infinite wisdom created us as we are. We can only trust Him that He knew what He was doing.

Kate You believe in God, then?

Laura I find it difficult to believe we all evolved from some amorphous blob of jelly. That may be old-fashioned—or simply arrogant. I only know that without my particular form of faith I could not have done this work.

Kate You have a tremendous quality of compassion. Are you never torn between what you want to do and what you know you must?

Laura Inevitably.

Kate How do you decide?

Laura One falls back on the rules.

Kate (*bitterly*) The great and glorious letter of the law.

Laura Yes.

Kate I should not be talking to you like this.

Laura For the moment we are not being official.

Kate I would like to say—officially—I do regret that I lost control and caused you this extra complication.

Laura Tell me something I don't understand. If you could accept this beating as part of your punishment, why should it make you want to kill yourself? (*She finishes her coffee and puts it on the desk*)

Kate (*slowly*) It was—the vicious hatred involved. It is terrible to realize one has done something which arouses such hatred in others.

Laura It is only fair to remember these—others—do not know the full situation.

Kate It is enough for them to know what I did.

Laura The circumstances were not normal. (*Gently*) Neither was the child.

Kate Does that give me absolution?
Laura It gave you a sympathetic hearing and a light sentence.
Kate The sentence is not in the law. It is in the mind.
Laura For someone like you—yes. But you must not carry it with you for ever. You'll be free soon. And we've agreed you have a great deal to live for.
Kate No-one has the right to take a life—(*breaking*)—however hopeless —and—distorted . . . (*She covers her face with her hands*)
Laura I'm not here to judge you, Kate. You were driven out of your mind by an intolerable and pitiful burden. One day, please God, a more sane and enlightened society may make such an action as yours unnecessary. (*She goes to the telephone*) The Governor speaking. Please ask Miss Collins to come to my office . . . Thank you. (*She replaces the receiver and turns to Kate*) Try and rest now, Kate. Then I shall probably change your work. If you want to see me at any time, just tell Matron.
Kate You are not asking me any more . . .
Laura No. I think your reasoning is wrong, but I cannot force you.
Kate You'll find out, of course.
Laura Yes, I think we shall.
Kate Be merciful. They are really not to blame.
Laura You must leave that to me.

There is a knock on the main door

Come in.

Collins enters carrying a coat over her arm

Ah, Miss Collins, will you take Walmer over to the hospital.
Collins Yes, ma'am.
Laura Help her on with her coat. (*She returns to signing letters*)

Miss Collins helps Kate with the coat, then opens the door

Kate (*formally*) Good morning, madam. And thank you.
Laura Good-bye, Kate. (*She turns to the intercom*)

Kate exits, followed by Miss Collins, who closes the door

(*On the intercom*) Miss Oates? Will you come up in about five minutes. Bring your notebook. Thank you. (*She continues working*)

There is another knock

(*With a sigh*) Come in.

Marcy puts her head round the door

Marcy 'Morning, Governor dear. Is it all right to collect the coffee-cups?
Laura Yes. Take them. (*She goes on working*)

Marcy moves to the desk and takes a yellow duster from her pocket with a flourish

Marcy All this hullaballoo and I've not done the dusting for you today. Shall we 'ave a quick flip then. (*She picks up the cigarette box, holding it in the duster and rubbing vigorously*)

Laura (*not looking up*) Not now. Take the tray and go.

Marcy Yes, ma'am. Perhaps the Chief'll let me finish you off this afternoon. Can't have you growing cobwebs, can we?

Laura Out, Marcy.

Marcy Yes, Governor dear. (*She tucks the duster back in her belt and replaces the box, then picks up the tray and goes to the door*)

Laura Marcy.

Marcy Yes, ma'am?

Still not looking up, Laura taps the cigarette box

Laura Put them back, Marcy.

Marcy Oh, really, ma'am.

Laura At once.

Marcy returns to the desk puts down the tray, takes the duster from her belt and picks four cigarettes from the folds. She puts them in the box

Marcy Some people've got eyes and ears in places they've no right to 'ave 'em.

Laura (*looking up*) That will do. And don't insult me by trying that old trick again.

Marcy I got to keep me 'and in, ma'am.

Laura Don't be impertinent.

Marcy Beg pardon, ma'am. (*She takes the tray and moves to the door*)

Laura (*looking in the box*) Marcy, I am ashamed of you.

Marcy I don't understand, ma'am.

Laura There were nine in the box. There are only eight here. Put that last one back.

Marcy But, ma'am, Miss Treadgold . . .

Laura Miss Treadgold does not smoke.

Marcy No more she does. But she gave me one this morning.

Laura Is that the truth?

Marcy (*running to the desk and putting down the tray*) Governor dear, would I lie to you?

Laura Without scruple.

Marcy I swear it, ma'am. I'd run right out, see, and when I brought the coffee, I asked her—for Gawd's sake, miss, I says, give us a fag, and she give me one. Not being flinty-hearted . . .

Laura Marcy.

Marcy stops and gulps

Are you sure this is correct?

Marcy On my oath, madam. (*She raises her right hand and gabbles*) I-swear-by-Almighty-God-that-the-evidence-I-shall-give . . .

Laura That's enough! Now, listen to me.

Laura's tone is not harsh, but Marcy automatically comes to attention

Through your own fault, you have wasted the greater part of your life in prison. I personally have no wish to make it harder for you. Do you understand that?

Marcy (*subdued*) Yes, ma'am.

Laura Because of your age, you are treated very leniently. But there cannot be one set of rules for you and another for everyone else. If you persist in this petty pilfering, I shall have no alternative but to punish you. Severely. Is that quite clear?

Marcy Yes, ma'am.

Laura So remember. Now, go.

Marcy takes the tray to the door

Marian enters

Marian Hallo, Marcy.

Marcy tucks her head down and scuttles out. Marian shuts the door

Cigarettes again?

Laura Yes.

Marian Poor old thing.

Laura It is not funny. She thinks she can clown her way out of everything. I will not have her encouraged.

Marian I beg your pardon.

Laura (*ruefully*) Oh dear, I didn't mean to snap at you. This is a difficult day and there's more to come. Please sit down. We have a lot to get through.

Marian sits and opens her notebook on her knee

Laura (*taking off her spectacles and passing a hand across her eyes*) I expect you know what has happened.

Marian I should think everyone does by now.

Laura Yes, indeed—this infernal grapevine. (*She replaces her spectacles*) Well, now, I'm arranging an informal discussion. Tomorrow at two-thirty. In this office. Send memos—I'll sign them—to Miss Treadgold, the Chief Officer, Dr Graham and the Chaplain. Got that?

Marian Yes, ma'am.

Laura And send a separate note to the chaplain. Ask him to have lunch with me first. One o'clock. In my sitting-room, I think.

Marian Shall I tell cook?

Laura Please ask her for something light—oh, and remember he's a strict vegetarian. (*She breaks off*)

A peculiar squeaking noise is heard outside

What on earth is that?

Marian Valentine taking the clean laundry round.
Laura But why that hideous noise?
Marian It's her little cart—it wants new tyres. We've indented for them weeks ago. (*She looks out of the window*) Yes, she's just crossing the courtyard.
Laura Then for heaven's sake get another request in. Ask one of the clerks to attend to it. It's quite nerve-racking.
Marian (*returning to her seat and making a note*) I'll do it right away.
Laura Thank you. Now, where were we . . .
Marian Lettuce for the padre.
Laura Oh yes. About the actual meeting—I'll leave you to arrange chairs and so on. I shall want Walmer's record. And when you write to Miss Probyn ask her for a list of everyone on the garden working party. I'll want you, too. To take notes.
Marian Yes, ma'am.
Laura You can take these—(*she puts the signed letters in the basket*)—and these. (*She adds the letters already in envelopes*) You'd better see what Miss Treadgold has for you. If it's rather much, one of the other typists can do it. I'll go through this private mail and then you can come back this afternoon and we'll try and finish.

Marian gets up and collects the basket

I'm afraid you're rather overloaded.
Marian We'll cope.
Laura Tell the switchboard to take all calls for me tomorrow afternoon. Nothing to be put through unless it's absolutely urgent.

Marian makes a note

I think that's all—no, one other thing. Better get a supply of cigarettes for Dr Graham. You know her brand.
Marian (*smiling*) I should do, by now.
Laura Yes, indeed. She certainly gives us every opportunity. (*She takes her keys from the desk drawer, crosses and unlocks the filing cabinet*)
Marian By the way, did you see your flowers?
Laura Flowers?
Marian They came this morning. I told Marcy to bring them up.
Laura Now who would be sending me flowers? (*She kneels to the bottom drawer*) Is there a card?
Marian (*bringing the flowers to the desk*) It's a letter.
Laura (*absently, intent on a file*) Open it, will you?
Marian (*opening the letter*) Why, madam, it's from Mrs Truscott!
Laura Mrs Trus . . . Read it out. I haven't got my glasses.
Marian (*reading*) "Dear Madam, I been to the Lady and she has read the letter you wrote first. She has given me the job to clean the house and answer the phone no cooking there is a cook here and she is a good sort and won't hold nothing against me. I have a nice room to myself and good time off. It is wonderful like heaven and I hope after all you've done for me to keep right and stay"—she's crossed something out here

—oh, yes—"to keep right and stay same yours respectfly Mrs Ann Truscott."

Laura Well, I . . .

Marian There's a P.S. "Dear Madam, I send these flowers as I know you like them they are for your room and God bless you for all you've done."

Laura (*going to the desk and taking the letter*) Who would have thought her capable?

Marian It's rather moving, isn't it?

Laura They must have cost her more than a week's salary.

Marian You really did try for her, ma'am.

Laura One tries so often. (*She touches the flowers, then puts the letter on the desk and replaces the keys in the drawer*) We must answer this.

Marian Will you dictate it now?

Laura No. It must be a personal letter and I need to think about it. I'll call you on the intercom later. We must put these in water.

Marian Would you like me to do it?

Laura Do you know, I think we'll let Gow do it. Cooking and arranging flowers are a passion with her. It will give her enormous pleasure and she does it beautifully.

Marian Madam . . .

Laura Yes?

Marian I'm afraid she's on report.

Laura Oh, no.

Marian gives her a file from the desk

Again. Yes, I see. Why does she—it's all so pointless and trivial. (*She looks at her watch*) Where can I fit this in—I think I had better do it now. (*On the phone*) Please ask the Chief Officer to bring Gow to my office . . . Thank you. (*To Marian*) We really could have done without this. Still, as Dr Graham would say, it's all in a day's work.

The telephone rings

And here we go again. Answer it, will you? (*She busies herself at the desk*)

Marian (*on the phone*) Governor's office . . . Would you hold on, please. (*To Laura*) The Rev. John.

Laura (*on the phone*) Hullo, Padre . . . Yes. Yes . . . It would have to be very brief. Could you come up now? . . . Good (*She replaces the phone*) Now—we must get organized. Let me think—look, see the Chief, would you? Ask her to keep back Gow for about ten minutes. Then get along to Miss Treadgold. Thank you very much.

Marian collects the basket and exits, shutting the door

Laura reads the letter again. The squeaking cart is heard. She exclaims impatiently, gets up and goes to the window, opening it and leaning out, looking down. There is a knock on the main door

(*Shutting the window*) Come in.

The Rev. John enters. He is about fifty, with grey hair, alert, humorous and a determined optimist. He wears his long cassock

Rev. John Good morning, Governor.
Laura Hullo, Padre.
Rev. John I won't keep you a moment. I was over at Wellesley all morning and I've only just heard . . .
Laura About Kate? Who from?
Rev. John The Chief Officer.
Laura Then you have the correct information.
Rev. John I just wanted to know if there's anything I can do. Would you like me to see Kate? Do you think she might confide in me?
Laura I very much doubt it, but please do see her. Have a word with Dr Graham first.
Rev. John Naturally. Is there any other way—any way at all—I can be of help?
Laura Could you be free tomorrow, from midday on? You will have a note from Miss Oates, so I won't go into details.
Rev. John Certainly, only too glad. This is a wretched business, Laura. I'm sorry.
Laura We've met it before.
Rev. John Unfortunately. But one is always grieved when it happens again, expecially in an open place like this. Don't drive yourself too hard, my dear. You look weary.
Laura An occupational disease we all share.
Rev. John I'm afraid so. But you will handle this. And you'll have my full support—in every way. Just let me know if I am needed. Any time.
Laura Thank you.
Rev. John I won't keep you any longer. God bless you.
Laura Before you go, you might like to read this. Something a little brighter, just for a change. (*She gives him the letter*) You won't mind if I go on . . .
Rev. John No, no, don't mind me.

Laura sits at her desk and writes

(*Reading the letter*) Well, this really is most gratifying. I'm delighted for you. And you deserve it.
Laura No more than anyone else concerned.
Rev. John I know better. We must follow this up—keep the contact.
Laura Yes, I'm going to write a personal letter.
Rev. John Would you like me to write as well?
Laura A very good idea. I feel the more encouragement she gets——
Rev. John —especially at the beginning. I'll just take a note of the address if I may. (*He takes out a small notebook and scribbles*) And now I really will leave you in peace. Don't forget. Any time.

Laura Padre, Kate still doesn't want to speak. I think we should respect her reasons.
Rev. John I understand. (*He opens the main door*)

Probyn is standing outside with Gow, and carries a report book. The Rev. John stands back for them

Rev. John Good morning, Chief. Good morning, Gow.
Probyn Good morning, sir. (*To Gow*) The Chaplain spoke to you.

Gow mutters something inaudible

The Rev. John glances at her, then at Laura, and exits

Gow is about thirty, tall, dark, almost foreign looking, and in a tense and smouldering temper. She wears the prison uniform and a yellow armband

Forward to the Governor's desk. Smartly. Back straight. Hands behind you. (*To Laura*) Gow, madam. On report.
Laura Read her the charges.
Probyn Disobedience, swearing. Fighting in the kitchen. (*She puts the book before Laura*)
Laura (*studying it*) Have you anything to say?
Gow (*sullenly*) Why should I? You got it all down there.
Laura Yes, it's all here. For the third time in six weeks. Insubordination, bad language—always the same. Just what is this feud between you and Mrs Beatty?
Gow She can't cook.
Laura She has been employed here in that capacity for seven years.
Gow She's not trained. I am.
Laura Indeed you are. That is why you are allowed to work in the kitchen. Work. Not criticize, and make trouble. And particularly not to throw saucepans. It is disgraceful behaviour.
Gow Permission to speak, ma'am.
Laura Yes?
Gow (*becoming more worked up*) It's downright bloody wicked . . .
Probyn Watch it now!
Gow Well, it is. Call herself a cook! Good food comes into this place. No-one can complain about that. And what does she do? Bloody ruins it—burns it, shrivels it, or else it's raw. Why, the only way she knows to cook cabbage is bloody drown it . . .
Laura That's enough. You will please speak to me without swearing. And don't forget I personally taste the food every day. No-one else complains.
Gow They either don't know different, or they haven't the bl . . . haven't the guts.
Laura Then it's a pity you haven't the guts to control yourself. You have been warned again and again . . .
Gow Wicked waste of the taxpayer's money. It makes me boil, sod it . . .

Laura That will do! If you use another swear word during this interview you will go straight to the punishment room. Right?

Gow (*woodenly*) Ma'am.

Laura I've been very patient with you. Because of your aptitude, you've been allowed to do work you like. You cannot expect to take over the entire kitchen, however much you think you are qualified. I've given you chance after chance to behave yourself, and I will not tolerate any more. Take off your armband.

Gow claps her hand tight over her armband

Chief . . .

Probyn moves. Gow whips off the band

Put it on the desk.

Gow throws it there

Thank you. (*She puts it in the desk drawer*) From now on you will work in the laundry.

Gow Laundry!

Laura Yes. You will now go away and try to behave yourself. When you think you are in a proper state of mind, you may ask to come and see me. You will then apologize and tell me you are ready to take back the band. And I may consider—I say consider, mind—letting you return to the kitchen. Thank you, Chief.

Probyn About turn. Smartly, and out.

Laura Just a moment. Before you start your punishment you may do something for me. Something you do extremely well. Take those flowers and put them in water.

Gow I . . .

Laura You may bring them back here and put them in the alcove. I shall not ask an officer to come with you. Then you will report to Miss Probyn.

Gow does not move

Probyn (*sharply*) You heard what the Governor said.

Gow still does not move. Probyn holds out the flowers

Gow (*suddenly*) No! (*She dashes the flowers to the floor*)

Probyn seizes her, pulling her hands behind her back

I bloody won't!

Gow screams and struggles with Probyn, kicking and trampling the flowers. They both shout together. Laura goes and opens the main door

Probyn Now then, that's enough! Stop this at once, at once, do you hear—control yourself . . .

Gow You can stuff your blasted flowers! Thinks she can soft-soap me—I won't—I won't . . .

Laura Take her to the punishment room.

Probyn gets Gow, still struggling and screaming, through the main door. Laura closes it behind them. Gow is still heard shouting

Gow (*off*) Let me alone! You bitch—let me alone . . .

Laura returns to her desk, glances at her wrist watch, then flicks the intercom

Laura Frances? . . . How are you placed? . . . If we had a talk now, we should both have a free afternoon . . . Straight away? . . . Yes, please do. (*She goes to the bookshelves, finds a newspaper and spreads it on the desk. She picks up the mangled bouquet, finds three undamaged blooms, fills the glass used by Kate from the carafe, and puts the flowers in it. She rolls the debris in the paper and goes to the inner door*)

Laura exits through the inner door

Frances enters through the main door; Laura returns, dusting off her hands

Frances What was all that shouting?
Laura Gow. (*She sits at her desk*)
Frances (*sitting opposite*) It's getting rather frequent.
Laura Too much so. I think we may have to consider having her transferred.
Frances Oh, but . . .
Laura (*smiling*) I know how you feel. Confession of failure.
Frances Or shift of responsibility.
Laura We have a responsibility to the others.
Frances But she's never attacked anyone directly.
Laura So far as we know.
Frances You don't think it was she who . . .
Laura No. She was on kitchen duty all morning. She had no access to Kate.
Frances That's a relief. Laura, she isn't psychopathic. It's basically sheer uncontrollable temper . . .
Laura Which is getting rapidly worse. She'll have to be watched. And with our minimum security we haven't the facilities.
Frances If she was more restricted, she might really go to pieces . . .
Laura You heard her just now. What do you call that?
Frances Temper. Can't we sort out what caused this latest outburst, and give her another chance?
Laura I know what caused it. And if you look at her record you'll see it's inherent. Remand home, approved school, Borstal—never out of trouble. She was only sent here because she'd kept steady for five years.
Frances Then wouldn't it be a pity to throw her back among sharks?
Laura We shall have to think. I've taken her off kitchen work. If she does stay here, she'll work in the laundry.
Frances She won't like that.
Laura No-one is here to like anything. Prison is a deterrent—not a holiday camp. If we do our job correctly, none of them should want to return.
Frances Isn't it enough to lose their personal freedom?

Laura signs the report book and puts it on top of the cabinet, speaking as she crosses

Laura They have a great deal of freedom here. They have comfortable conditions and certain privileges. And that reminds me. It's a small thing, but I feel I should mention it.

Frances Yes?

Laura I don't think Marcy should be given extra cigarettes.

Frances (*laughing*) What made her tell you?

Laura I did. She pulled that duster trick again—right under my nose.

Frances Oh, no—not with you?

Laura Yes. And it has to stop.

Frances (*still amused*) She'll never alter. She's the classic recidivist—out for the summer and back in the winter. Prison's her home. She'll probably die in one.

Laura And that is a confession of failure. For us.

Frances I think you're taking it a little bit too seriously. She's quite harmless—

Laura —and cheerful and disarming and often very funny. I know. And she should not be allowed to get away with it. She is here for punishment.

Frances (*laughing*) Oh, for heaven's sake—one cigarette!

Laura She has her allowance. It's a game, Frances. When she can, she steals. If she can't steal, she wheedles. When she scores a point, she cheerfully chalks it up against us, and plans her next move. It has got to stop.

Frances Very well. I won't do it again if that's what you wish. But she's a likeable old thing, in spite of her sins. One can't help feeling sympathy.

Laura I always find it so difficult to avoid sympathy becoming sentimentality.

Frances How does one divide these?

Laura By disciplining ourselves as well as the prisoners. (*Sighing*) Yes, it is difficult. Don't think I don't realize that.

Frances I wish I had your strength.

Laura That comes with experience. You have your own kind. We belong to different generations and one can only do the job as one sees it personally. When I look back at my own mistakes . . .

Frances (*breaking in*) You have taught me a great deal, and it has been a privilege to work with you.

Laura Thank you. (*Goes back to desk and sits. Briskly*) Now—this latest business . . .

Frances Kate has told you nothing?

Laura No, and I don't think she can be persuaded.

Frances Nor anyone else for that matter.

Laura Not very easily, I agree.

Frances It will have to be referred.

Laura Yes. But the Home Office will want the full facts. We must try and elicit them with as little delay as possible.

Frances (*nodding*) An enquiry.
Laura Unofficial. Two-thirty tomorrow. Here. Myself, you, the Chief, Dr Graham and the Chaplain.
Frances A judicious combination of the temporal and the spiritual.
Laura (*smiling*) Poor Rev. John will be somewhat outnumbered. We must keep Dr Graham in check. We know what they're like in argument.
Frances They enjoy it—every time she calls him a Sassenach, he feels ten years younger. (*She becomes more serious*) Laura, it is possible we might never find out.
Laura We shall. Make no mistake about that. I'll get to the bottom of it if it's the last thing I do in the service.
Frances Right. (*She goes to the main door*)
Laura Don't go, Frances. (*Moving to the windows*) While you are here, there's something else.

Frances returns into the room. Laura looks out of the windows, speaking with her back turned

This is strictly off the record.
Frances (*suddenly tense*) Yes?
Laura After the consultative board yesterday I saw Hovenden. (*Slowly*) I shall be retiring from the service in the spring.
Frances Shall you—be sorry?
Laura (*turning*) Yes and no. It has been a life's work, especially since my husband died. But I'm getting tired. And it's right I should make way for someone younger.
Frances Still off the record—has anyone been . . .
Laura (*quietly*) I am sure you will be among those considered. (*She sits at her desk, pulling some papers towards her*)
Frances I see.
Laura That shouldn't surprise you.
Frances Naturally, I had hoped . . .
Laura I thought you'd like to know.
Frances Thank you. (*She goes to the door and turns*)

Laura is writing

Laura—I should like to feel you would be in favour of my appointment.
Laura (*quietly*) The decision will be made by the Home Office.
Frances You are likely to be asked for recommendations.
Laura Perhaps. (*She looks up*) Frances, does this mean so much to you?
Frances Yes, it does.
Laura You realize you would be young to undertake it?
Frances You did say strength comes with experience.
Laura Yes, I did.
Frances If you think . . .
Laura Even in confidence you must not ask me any more.
Frances (*quietly*) It was generous of you to tell me so much. (*She turns to go*)
Laura Frances—

Frances turns

—be patient. You have one most precious asset. Time.

Frances Time—for me—is now.

Frances exits

Laura sits back in her chair. She visibly braces herself, then picks up Mrs Truscott's letter, glances at it, puts it down on the desk. She clicks the intercom

Laura (*on the intercom*) Miss Oates . . . A letter, please. On my private notepaper. To Mrs Truscott—you will have the address. Dear Mrs Truscott . . . (*She thinks for a second*) Dear Mrs Truscott. I am much moved—correction—deeply moved—by your gift of flowers. They are —very beautiful—and I have them before me on my desk . . . (*Smiling a little ruefully, she picks up the glass with the three salvaged blooms*)

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE 1

The same. Friday afternoon

The room has been arranged for the enquiry

As the CURTAIN *rises, Laura enters from the inner door, followed by the Rev. John. He now wears a lounge suit, clerical collar and black silk vest with a watch-chain across it. Laura carries a table napkin, which she drops on the drinks table as she moves to the bookcase. They are both laughing*

Laura We'll see who's right. It should be here somewhere. Help yourself to a brandy. I know it's not against your Christian principles.

Rev. John No, indeed. Praise God for the grape—and the knowledge to use it!

Laura Casuistry! (*She finds a book and turns the pages*)

Rev. John In moderation, of course. Shall I pour you one?

Laura Please. Yes, here we are. What was your version?

Rev. John (*pouring two drinks*) "For in that older time, when truth . . ."

Laura Wrong. Elder time—not older.

Rev. John Disgraceful. (*He comes down with two glasses, looking over her shoulder*) And translated by one of my cloth, I see, which makes it even worse. How does it go on . . .

Laura (*reading*) "For in that elder time when truth and thought were still revered and cherished here on earth . . ." (*She suddenly closes the book*) When truth and thought were still revered and cherished—elder time, indeed.

Rev. John Come, do I detect a note of bitterness? Unless my memory misserves me again, there's something further on about—hope and a great joy.

Laura (*putting the book on the desk*) It would be nice to think so.

Rev. John (*cheerfully*) Why, then—let's drink to it.

He gives her a glass and they drink

And now, what is it you want to ask me?

Laura (*laughing*) Has it been so obvious?

Rev. John You didn't invite me to that excellent lunch solely to discuss Caius Valerius Catullus. Though it has indeed been a refreshment for the mind as well as the stomach. (*Indicating the book on the desk*) Might I—in the language of my small nephew—have a lend of this?

Laura Please do.

Rev. John Thank you. So now—officially—what is the difficulty—if any?

Laura You know, I expect, that I'm retiring. By the way, I didn't tell you. I've been offered a lecture tour in America.

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