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Suddenly At Home

A Play

Francis Durbridge

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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ISBN 978-0-573-01452-9

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SUDDENLY AT HOME

First produced at the Theatre Royal, Windsor, by Bill Freedman, on the 8th June 1971, and subsequently at the Fortune Theatre, London, on 30th September 1971, with the following cast of characters:

Maggie Howard	Penelope Keith
Helen Tenby	Jennifer Daniel
Ruth Bechler	Rula Lenska
Sam Blaine	Terence Longdon
Sheila Wallis	Veronica Strong
Glenn Howard	Gerald Harper
Appleton	Frederick Farley
Remick	John Horton

The play directed by **Basil Coleman**

Setting by **Richard Berry**

The action passes in the living-room of the Howards' flat

ACT I Scene 1	A Tuesday evening in early January
ACT I Scene 2	The following afternoon
ACT I Scene 3	Several hours later
ACT I Scene 4	Later the same night
ACT II Scene 1	Thursday morning
ACT II Scene 2	Thursday evening

Time—the present

For Norah

SUDDENLY AT HOME

ACT I

SCENE 1

The living-room of a flat belonging to Maggie and Glenn Howard. A Tuesday evening in early January

The flat is in a quiet London mews and has recently had a great deal of money spent on it by Maggie, and a great deal of time spent on it by an interior decorator. The general effect is interesting, if a little breathtaking. The furniture includes a record player, side tables, an ornate drinks cabinet, and two sofas. There are some surprisingly good pictures on the walls. The hall leads directly into the living-room, the front door being at right angles to the rest of the hall and out of sight. To one side of the room is a bay window. A door leads to the bedrooms, bathroom, etc., and another to the kitchen

When the CURTAIN rises, Maggie is lying on one of the sofas and Helen Tenby, her sister, is bending over her with a bottle of eye lotion and a glass dropper. Maggie has a glass of gin and a tissue in her hands. Helen, a smart, intelligent-looking woman in the late twenties, runs a successful art gallery. Maggie is ten years older and, although somewhat coarse in speech and manner, is not unattractive. The two women are dressed for an evening out, except that Maggie still wears her housecoat instead of a dress. Maggie is struggling to get up

Helen (*pushing her back on the sofa*) I do wish you'd keep still, Maggie.

Maggie Oooh! This stuff's useless, Helen. It's just a waste of time using it!

(She snatches the bottle, puts it on the table, and picks up a hand mirror)

I'm sick to death of looking like Cyclops or Polyphemus, or what the hell his name was! *(She suddenly jumps off the sofa and picks up a pair of dark glasses)*

Helen Don't be silly, darling. It's only a sty, hardly noticeable.

Maggie You must be joking. You must be as blind as a bat not to notice this. I've had it four weeks now. *(She puts on the glasses)*

Helen What does the doctor say about it?

Maggie I haven't seen him. I just can't be bothered. You know Laurence Illingworth! He'd probably put me on some bloody awful diet. The last time I saw him he said, "If it's good, Maggie, don't eat it." *(Amused)* Mary Lomax went to see him just before Christmas. He told her to lose a stone and a half!

Helen (*amused*) She's in the play tonight, isn't she?

Maggie Mary Lomax? My God, I hope not! I shouldn't think so, or Sheila wouldn't be going. She loathes her. They were in Rep together in Nottingham.

Helen Yes, I know. I've heard all the stories. (*She sits on the other sofa and checks through some catalogues*)

Maggie I'll bet you have!

Ruth Bechler, Maggie's au-pair girl, comes from the bedrooms carrying a week-end case. Ruth is from Munich—an attractive girl in the middle twenties

Ruth Excuse me. Is it all right if I go now, Mrs Howard?

Maggie Yes of course, Ruth.

Ruth I've made up the laundry . . .

Maggie Oh, thank you.

Ruth And I've had a word with the manager about the shirt.

Maggie My dear, you shouldn't have bothered.

Ruth He's promised to make another search. I only hope they find it this time.

Maggie (*with a friendly wave; dismissing the matter*) Don't worry, Ruth! Mr Howard's forgotten all about it.

Ruth I'll be back on Sunday—I'm not sure what time. The train leaves Liverpool about seven o'clock.

Maggie Not to worry! We'll see you when we see you. Enjoy yourself!

Ruth Thank you. Good-bye, Mrs Tenby.

Maggie }
Helen } 'Bye, Ruth. (*Speaking together*)

Ruth smiles, and, with a nod to Helen, exits to the kitchen

Maggie The laundry lost a shirt of Glenn's—he was furious and blamed Ruth. She was terribly upset. I damn nearly lost her, Helen. And she's marvellous, she really is! Terrific worker—wonderful cook—trained nurse. The lot!

Helen Glenn says she's friendly with one of the Pop groups.

Maggie Well, as long as she's not too friendly. What time do you make it?

Helen (*looking at her watch*) It's just gone seven.

Maggie I'd better put my dress on. Sheila should be here any minute.

Helen When are you expecting Glenn?

Maggie Well, the plane's due in at five-thirty, but ten to one he'll be late. I'll leave a note asking him to meet us at the restaurant.

Helen Won't he be too tired to eat out?

Maggie I expect so. He's too tired for most things these days. I do wish he'd pack the job in, Helen! He must be mad—flying all over the place trying to sell machine tools to people who'd be a damn sight better off without them!

Helen He just doesn't want to be dependent on you.

Maggie Dependent—my fanny! He's just being bloody-minded.

Helen Yes, well I know what you're after, Maggie. You've still got this bee in your bonnet about Bermuda.

Maggie (*laughing at being caught out*) Well—why not, for heaven's sake! The funny thing is, if I hadn't broken with Sammy I'd probably be living there by now.

Helen (*shaking her head*) That's not true, and you know it isn't. If you hadn't walked out on Sam when you did Father would have left me the lot. It was marriage—good old-fashioned respectability—that put you back on the map so far as the old man was concerned.

Maggie Yes, I suppose you're right. (*With a sudden thought*) Incidentally, talking about Sammy—what about this new book of his? (*She picks up a copy of Sam's book from under a couple of paperbacks on the sofa table*)

Helen I haven't read it. I don't like thrillers and I certainly can't read Sam's. They're like Sammy, far too devious.

Maggie (*shocked*) Sammy, devious!

Helen I don't mean devious—devious . . .

Maggie Well, what do you mean?

Helen Come off it, Maggie! You know perfectly well what I mean! He's a darling, but he's got a mind like a corkscrew.

Maggie Yes, well, this new book of his isn't a thriller. And it certainly isn't a who-dun-it! You know who-dun-it all right! (*Looking at the book*) This is the dirtiest book I've ever read.

Helen (*taking a quick glance at the book then reading on*) Nonsense, Maggie!

Maggie It's true Helen.

Helen I find this very difficult to believe. Most of his other books have been about that bottom-pinching little detective in the South of France.

Maggie This is about the South of France.

The front doorbell rings

You read it. (*She picks up the tissue-box, mirror, glass of gin and eyedrops and goes to the bedroom door*) That'll be Sheila. Let her in. And don't let her get her hands on that book, Helen. I want to re-read Chapter Nine.

Helen goes out into the hall as Maggie exits into the bedroom

We hear the front door open and the sound of voices, Helen obviously surprised

Helen (*off*) Sam, how lovely to see you. Come in!

Sam (*off*) Hello, Helen.

Helen Let me take your coat. We were just talking about you.

Helen enters with Sam Blaine. Sam is in his forties, a faintly conceited yet rather likeable man. He wears sports clothes that are just a shade too well cut

Sam I'm afraid everyone's talking about me these days. I'm even on the box next week. Helen, it is good to see you!

Helen And you.

Sam Where's Maggie?

Helen She's getting dressed, she'll be here in a minute. We're going to the theatre with Sheila.

Sam Sheila? Not Sheila Wallis?

Helen Yes.

Sam You must be mad! She'll talk all the way through the first act and give ghastly impersonations in the interval.

Helen Yes, I know, but it's a first night and Maggie asked her if she could get tickets for us, and before we knew what had happened . . .

Sam You were landed with her!

Helen (*laughing*) Sheila's all right, when you get to know her.

Sam I have got to know her, and she's not all right. (*After a momentary hesitation*) You know she's a junkie? (*He makes a gesture as if injecting his arm with a hypodermic*)

Helen Nonsense.

Sam A friend of mine told me.

Helen I don't believe it.

Sam It's true. She's a main-liner.

Helen I don't believe a word of it.

Sam It's true, Helen. Honestly! Why do you think she's taken to wearing long sleeves all of a sudden?

Helen Because she's got skinny arms, that's why!

Sam Don't you believe it!

Helen Sam, your imagination will drive you round the bend one of these days.

Sam Anyway, she came to see me about a week ago, said she'd heard the cottage was up for sale and she might be interested. Do you know what she offered me? Sixteen thousand. It's worth twenty-five of anybody's money.

Helen But Sheila must be out of her mind! She'd never live in the country! Why, good heavens, when we moved to Hampstead she told everyone I'd emigrated.

Sam She was just curious, that's all. She'd read an article about "Red Trees" and wanted to take a look at it. My God, but people are curious, aren't they? If you want to know just how curious, put your property on the market. (*Regarding a picture on the wall*) That's new, isn't it?

Helen Yes. Do you like it?

Sam Very much.

Helen Alec gave it to Maggie as a Christmas present.

Sam (*surprised*) Alec? Your Alec?

Helen Yes.

Sam But I thought he was still at Stoke Mandeville?

Helen No, they discharged him at the end of November. He's been working at the gallery for the past four weeks.

Sam I had no idea! This is good news, Helen. I'm delighted. (*He hesitates*) Is he . . . ?

Helen (*nodding*) He's still in the wheel-chair—he always will be, I'm afraid.

But he's a great deal more mobile than he was, and certainly less sorry for himself. He's even a little aggressive at times.

Sam The old Alec, in fact.

Helen Yes. (*After a moment*) The old Alec . . .

Sam Have you been staying with Maggie?

Helen Just for a few days.

Sam (*shaking his head*) You know, I never fail to be amazed how well you two get on! You're not like sisters.

Helen That's probably why we get on.

Sam Glenn's away, I take it?

Helen You know perfectly well he's away, or you wouldn't be here. He's due back tonight. Sam, why do you want to see Maggie?

Sam No particular reason. I was passing and just thought I'd drop in.

Maggie (*calling from the bedroom*) Helen, give Sheila a drink. I'll be with you in a minute.

Helen (*turning towards the bedroom door*) It's not Sheila, Maggie. It's Sam.

Maggie (*off; astonished*) Sam!

Sam smiles at Helen, amused by Maggie's surprise

Helen Would you like a drink, Sam?

Sam (*picking up the copy of his novel*) No, thank you, darling. Oh, Maggie's improving her mind, I see.

Helen (*with a suggestion of a smile*) Yes, I hear it's doing well.

Sam It's fantastic. It's been top of the best-sellers for the past six weeks. (*He winks at Helen and scribbles something in the book*)

Maggie enters from the bedroom

Maggie It's pornography! Sheer unadulterated pornography! (*Going to Sam*) And how you, of all people, had the gall to write a book like that I'll never know.

Sam Nonsense, Maggie. I'll bet you adored every word of it! (*He kisses Maggie*)

Maggie (*looking at what he has written*) Dirty bugger!

Helen (*moving towards the bedroom*) Good-bye, Sam.

Sam Good-bye?

Helen (*laughing*) I've got some packing to do.

Helen exits into the bedroom

Maggie takes a critical yet affectionate look at Sam

Maggie Where did you get your pretty jacket?

Sam From my tailor—where do you think?

Maggie You could have fooled me.

Sam I thought it was rather trendy!

Maggie Yes, but aren't you a little young for it?

For a brief moment Sam takes her seriously, then he laughs

Sam Yes, well maybe. I'm delighted to hear about Alec. I'd no idea he'd started work again.

Maggie He's started all right! Helen's already lost the best secretary she's ever had, and now there's trouble with the accountants.

Sam Yes, well, it must be very difficult for him. The poor devil's been out of things for a couple of years.

Maggie Of course it's difficult for him! It's difficult for Helen too! I refuse to be hypocritical about Alec. He's a bloody little know-all. He always was, and he always will be.

Sam Maggie, you're a hard, hard woman.

Maggie You know perfectly well you don't like the conceited little bastard any more than I do.

Sam Oh, I don't know . . .

Maggie How Helen stands him I'll never know. He never leaves her alone, not for five minutes on end. If she goes to a dress show he'll telephone her in the middle of it to see what she's up to. *(She looks at him)* Do you really think I'm a hard woman?

Sam *(laughing and taking hold of her arm)* Yes. *(He takes a cheque out of his wallet)* I nearly forgot—I've got a present for you. *(Replacing the wallet in his pocket)* Well—hardly a present. It's the money I owe you. The four thousand. *(He hands her the cheque)*

Maggie *(astonished)* You mean—you're repaying it?

Sam That's right.

Maggie *(staring at the cheque)* Can you afford it, Sammy?

Sam If I couldn't I wouldn't be here.

Maggie Oh!

Sam It was kind of you to lend me it. I shall always be grateful.

The doorbell rings. Maggie smiles at Sam, kisses him again, then casually thrusts the cheque into her dressing-gown pocket and goes out into the hall

Maggie *(off)* Hello, Sheila!

Sheila *(off)* Maggie darling, I'm terribly sorry, but I can't go with you tonight.

Maggie *(off)* No?

Sheila *(off)* My father's had an accident and I've got to drive down to Eastbourne.

Maggie *(off)* Oh my dear, I am sorry.

Sheila *(off)* But it's perfectly all right. The tickets are at the box office.

Maggie returns with Sheila Wallis. She is about thirty-six or seven, sexually attractive without being particularly good-looking. Her manner is tense and with certain people curiously unfriendly

It's terribly disappointing, Maggie, but I'm afraid there's just nothing I

can do about it!

Maggie It can't be helped, Sheila. Not to worry. You say the tickets are at the box office?

Sheila Yes, in my name. There's no problem, darling—all you've got to do is pick them up. Hello, Sam!

Sam (*putting the book in the bookcase*) Hello, Sheila. How are you?

Sheila I'm in a bit of a tizz at the moment. My father's had an accident and I've got to drive down to Eastbourne. (*To Maggie*) It's infuriating. I was really looking forward to this thing tonight. I believe Mary Lomax is dreadful.

Sam (*laughing*) Maggie, I must be off.

Sheila (*to Sam*) You haven't found my earring, I take it?

Sam No, and I've looked everywhere. I'm sorry, I think you must have lost it somewhere else.

Sheila I'm sure I was wearing them both when I arrived because . . . (*To Maggie*) I dropped in Sam's place one day last week and lost a diamond earring. It's very annoying—they're a lovely pair and they're not insured.

Sam Yes. Well, we had a good look round. We practically disembowelled the chair you were sitting in.

Maggie It'll turn up. You'll probably find you weren't even wearing them at the time. I lost a watch six months ago—swore blind I'd left it in Fortnum's loo—ten days later I found it in a handbag.

Sheila Well, it's possible, I suppose.

Sam Maggie, darling. (*He kisses Maggie*)

Maggie Good-bye, Sam. Take care of yourself. And thank you for—dropping in.

Sam 'Bye, Sheila. If you can raise another ten thousand I might be tempted.

Sheila Oh!

Sam exits

Maggie What's all that about?

Sheila He's selling "Red Trees" and he's asking twenty-five thousand for it. I think he's dotty, it's not worth a penny more than sixteen.

Maggie I think you're dotty if you're thinking of buying it.

Sheila I've got to do something, darling. London's so expensive these days. **Maggie** Yes, but you'd never live at Melston. Supposing you suddenly got a part and had to come up to town every day?

Sheila It isn't likely. I haven't been offered a decent part for ages. Although funnily enough I've got an audition on Thursday.

Maggie Have you? Well, good luck, Sheila.

Helen enters, carrying a case

Helen Hello, Sheila.

Sheila Hello, Helen.

Helen I'll pick my case up after the show, Maggie. (*She puts the case in a corner*)

Maggie Yes, of course, darling. Sheila's not coming to the theatre. Her father's had an accident . . .

Helen Oh, I'm sorry. Is he all right?

Sheila It's nothing serious, he's twisted his ankle or something. (*She looks at her watch*) Anyway, I've got to drive down to Eastbourne.

Maggie (*to Helen*) The tickets are at the box office.

Helen How much do we owe you?

Sheila I haven't a clue. I'll let you know later.

There is the sound of a key in the front door. Maggie turns towards the hall

Glenn Howard, Maggie's husband, enters. He is in the late thirties and has an easy charm. He wears a new vicuna overcoat and carries a Samsonite suitcase, a valise, and an LP record under his arm. He puts the suitcase down just inside the hall

Maggie Glenn! Darling, I wasn't expecting you for ages!

Glenn I said I'd be home by seven.

Maggie Yes, I know you did, but I never dreamt for one moment . . .

Glenn I meant it! (*He kisses her*) I must say, Maggie, your lack of faith in BEA is consistent, if nothing else! Hello, Helen! How are you?

Helen I'm fine. You know Sheila, of course.

Glenn Yes, of course. Hello, Sheila. (*To Maggie*) Here's the LP you wanted. (*He gives Maggie the LP and puts his valise down on a table*)

Maggie Oh, thank you, darling. (*She takes the record, and suddenly notices the coat he is wearing*) Don't tell me you've bought another overcoat!

Glenn It's only a little one.

Maggie (*to Helen and Sheila*) He's nuts! He's hooked on overcoats! He's bought three since Christmas! (*She looks at the coat*) My God, it's another vicuna. No wonder they've had to stop killing the poor little sods!

Glenn Some men like women, I like overcoats. (*He takes the coat off*)

Sheila It's probably cheaper in the long run.

Maggie I doubt it. (*Examining the coat*) Sulka, Paris.

Glenn They're having a sale.

Maggie I can imagine. (*She leaves the coat on the back of a sofa*) Anyway, thanks for the LP.

Glenn (*curiously*) Was that Sam Blaine I saw just now?

Maggie (*looking at the record*) It could have been. He was passing and just dropped in to say "hello".

Glenn looks at Maggie for a moment, then with a sudden smile puts his arm round her

Glenn You look better, Maggie.

Maggie I'm fine.

Helen Did you have a good trip?

Glenn Not bad—not bad at all. All things considered.

Sheila How is Paris these days?

Glenn I wouldn't know. I spent forty-eight hours in the Hilton.

Sheila I adore Paris, but I haven't been for ages. Maggie, I must be going.

Phone me in the morning and tell me about the show. And if Mary Lomax is good I don't want to hear about it. 'Bye, Helen.

Helen Good-bye, Sheila. Thanks for the tickets.

Sheila exits into the hall, followed by Maggie

Glenn You look nice.

Helen Thank you.

Glenn (*with a glance towards the hall*) How are things?

Helen Fine. She seems all right to me.

Glenn (*nodding*) I must admit she looks better than she did. (*Looking at Helen*) How long was Sam here?

Helen Oh—about five minutes, that's all.

Glenn Did he upset her?

Helen Good heavens, no! Glenn, she's over that—she was finished with Sam ages ago! They're just friends . . .

Glenn Then I wish to God he'd leave her alone.

Helen He was only here a few minutes and he was talking to me most of the time. Maggie's run down, that's all. I don't think there's anything for you to worry about. I don't, really.

Glenn I hope you're right. Thanks for staying with her, anyway. And tell Alec I appreciate it.

Helen Don't worry about Alec. He's only too happy to get rid of me these days.

Maggie slams the front door off

Glenn Oh dear, is he being difficult?

Helen No, no, not difficult, but . . . (*She sighs*) Apparently I've been doing everything wrong for the past two years.

Glenn Like making a profit?

Helen (*laughing*) Yes.

Maggie enters

I don't want to rush you, Maggie, but we haven't a lot of time.

Maggie I'm ready now, darling. I've just got to slip into something tight. You look tired, Glenn.

Glenn I'll be all right when I've had a bath.

Maggie (*apprehensively*) I've booked a table at the Tiberio, but if you'd rather . . .

Glenn Don't worry, I'll be there.

Maggie (*kissing him*) Eleven o'clock, Tiberio.

Maggie exits to the bedroom

Glenn I must admit she does seem better. She's far more relaxed. The only trouble is she's been like this before and suddenly—(*shrugging*)—for some unaccountable reason she gets depressed again and just can't sleep.

Helen If it will put your mind at rest why don't you ask Laurence Illingworth to take a look at her?

Glenn You know Maggie when it comes to doctors. Ever since she saw that quack in Bermuda and he told her she had a weak heart she's been scared to go near one. But I must admit I damn nearly sent for him on Thursday.

Helen What happened on Thursday?

Glenn (*with a glance at the bedroom*) I'll tell you some other time. (*After a moment*) Tell me something, Helen. Do you think it's a good idea for me to give up my job and go and live abroad as Maggie wants?

Helen (*thoughtfully*) I don't know. She's always been a restless sort of person, even in the old days when she had very little money. Now, as you well know, she's got this bee in her bonnet about Bermuda. But—somehow I don't think Bermuda is the answer.

Glenn No, neither do I. I've been to most places and—God knows why—I'd still rather live here than anywhere else. But it's Maggie I'm concerned about at the moment.

Helen Yes. Well, if I were you I'd start thinking about yourself for a change.

Glenn That's not exactly easy when your wife has three-quarters of a million and refers to your hard-earned salary as peanuts.

Helen Bloody little peanuts, surely? It's just a phase, Glenn—she'll pull out of it, I'm sure.

Glenn I hope you're right. Would you like a drink?

Helen No, thank you. I hear you're dashing off again.

Glenn (*pouring himself a drink*) Yes, I've got a meeting in Zurich on Friday, and then I'm catching the night train to Milan. I'll be back on Tuesday, with a bit of luck.

Maggie enters, dressed for the theatre

Maggie I told you, he's just a jumped-up commercial traveller these days. (*She shows off her dress with a whirl*)

Glenn Did you get that in a sale?

Maggie (*laughing*) You . . . !

Glenn And I'm out tomorrow night. It's our overseas dinner at the Savoy.

Maggie Oh good heavens, yes, I'd forgotten about that! (*To Helen*) He's making a speech, poor darling.

Glenn pulls a face

Don't worry, Sweetie. Just tell 'em a couple of filthy stories and you'll be home and dry.

Glenn I hate to surprise you, but I don't know any filthy stories.

Maggie No new ones, you mean!

Glenn Go on, you're going to be late.

Helen Good-bye, Glenn, see you later.

Glenn Eleven o'clock, Tiberio. (*He kisses Helen, then goes to Maggie and*

kisses her) Enjoy yourself. Have you got your tickets?

Maggie They're at the box office. At least, I hope so! (*With a sudden thought*) My God, wouldn't it be infuriating if Sheila's made a balls-up of it? (*She puts on her dark glasses*)

Helen Come along, Maggie!

Maggie and Helen exit, and the front door slams

Glenn stands still for a moment, then puts his glass on the drinks cabinet, goes into the hall, and puts the front door on the latch. He returns, and picks up his suitcase and overcoat

Glenn exits to the bedroom with his case and coat, then returns

He puts his valise on the sofa, sits, and moves the telephone towards him. He stares at it for a moment, then suddenly makes a decision and dials a number

Glenn (*into the phone*) Hello? Who is that? . . . Oh, could I speak to Dr Illingworth, please? It's Glenn Howard speaking . . . Yes, I'm afraid it is important, but I won't keep him very long . . . Thank you. (*He waits*) Laurence—this is Glenn. I'm sorry to drag you away from your surgery . . . No, I'm fine, old boy, but I'd very much like you to take a look at Maggie . . . I don't know, it's just that—I'm worried about her, Laurence . . . Well, I was hoping some time tomorrow. (*There is a pause: he is giving careful thought to something Laurence has said*) Seventy-three? . . . Yes, that would do splendidly. We'll expect you, then. Thank you, Laurence. (*He replaces the receiver, opens his valise and looks inside*)

The doorbell rings

It's on the latch.

The front door is heard to open

Sheila enters slowly

Glenn does not move. Sheila puts down her cloak and handbag and sits beside him. He turns and looks at her, then suddenly takes her in his arms. They remain together for a moment

Sheila (*breaking away*) Where were you when you phoned?

Glenn At the airport. Sheila, what was Sam Blaine doing here?

Sheila I don't know. He was here when I arrived. I got the impression he'd just dropped in for a chat. (*She pauses nervously*)

Glenn takes a small package from his valise and hands it to her

(*Gratefully, intensely relieved*) Oh thank you, Glenn! I don't know why, but I had a horrible feeling you wouldn't be able to help me this time. Was there any problem?

Glenn Only the usual one. Money.

Sheila (*faintly embarrassed*) Well, I'll try to let you have . . .

Glenn (*dismissing the subject*) It's all right. It's been taken care of.

Sheila Thank you, darling. (*She kisses him, then puts the package in her handbag. After a pause*) It's tomorrow, then? You haven't changed your mind?

Glenn No. I told you I wouldn't, unless Illingworth couldn't make it. I've spoken to him. He's coming here tomorrow night. (*Looking at her*) Now don't worry, Sheila—everything's going to be all right. But we've got to be careful and we've got to go over every detail. Not once, but half a dozen times if necessary. Now, let's start with the earrings.

Sheila Oh yes. (*She opens her handbag and takes out a diamond earring*)

Glenn (*taking it from her*) You've got the other one?

Sheila Yes.

Glenn Let me see it.

Sheila It's in here.

Glenn Let me see it.

Sheila looks in her handbag and finally produces the other earring

Good, Now take care of it; whatever happens for God's sake don't lose it.

Sheila replaces the earring in her handbag. Glenn puts the one he is holding on the table. He takes a pair of white gloves, dark glasses, a car key and a map from the valise

Now what about the hairdresser's?

Sheila I've made the appointment.

Glenn When did you make it?

Sheila This morning. I picked a firm in Bruton Street—Carlos and Pierre.

Glenn (*noting the name*) Carlos and Pierre . . .

Sheila They're quite well known.

Glenn Has she been there before?

Sheila I don't honestly know. I don't think so. She usually goes to a place in Sloane Street.

Glenn Tell me what you said.

Sheila (*puzzled*) What do you mean?

Glenn Tell me what you said, on the telephone.

Sheila I said I was Mrs Glenn Howard and I wanted to make an appointment for tomorrow afternoon. They suggested two o'clock but I said it was too early. We finally made it three-fifteen.

Glenn Good. Now, first thing tomorrow morning telephone them and cancel the appointment. Say you're very sorry but you've got to go out of town for the day and you'll ring them again at the end of the week.

Sheila hesitates, then gives a little nod

Now you're quite clear about that?

Sheila Yes.

Glenn I should ring about nine-fifteen, or nine-thirty, as soon as they open,

and try to speak to the same girl if you can. (*He takes a brown envelope out of the valise, puts the earring in it, and returns it to the valise. Then he picks up the car key*) Here's the key to Maggie's car. I've tried it, it works all right.

Sheila She's got the other key?

Glenn Yes, I'll make sure it's in her handbag with the earring.

Sheila Three-four-six DXY—a blue mini with a white top.

Glenn That's right. From lunch-time tomorrow it'll be parked in Weldon Street. Pick it up at twenty past five—no later.

Sheila But supposing you can't find a meter?

Glenn There's no question of a meter; we've a residents' permit. I'll find a spot all right.

Sheila Yes, but just supposing . . .

Glenn If the car isn't there or there's a change of plan, I'll phone you. Not to worry, Sheila. It'll be all right. Twenty past five, not a minute later.

Sheila I'll be there. (*Tensely, almost as if she is now suddenly aware of what they are talking about*) How long do you think it'll take?

Glenn (*faintly surprised by the question*) To Melston?

Sheila Yes.

Glenn How long did it take you on Tuesday?

Sheila About an hour and a half, but I got lost. I couldn't find Sam's cottage.

Glenn (*quietly*) Yes, well—you won't get lost tomorrow. (*Taking hold of her arm*) Now listen, Sheila—there's nothing to worry about. If you do precisely what I tell you, everything will be perfectly all right. Do you want a drink?

Sheila No, no. I don't want a drink.

Glenn looks at her for a second or two, then releasing himself he sits on the settee and opens the map

Glenn I want you to take a look at this map and listen very carefully to what I'm saying.

She nods and sits next to him. He spreads the map out on the floor in front of them

(*Pointing to the map*) That's the main road, the road you took on Tuesday.

Sheila nods

The road to Melston.

Sheila I'm not worried about that. It's after Melston . . .

Glenn After Melston you keep straight on for about two miles, until you come to a cinema. You take the first turning past the cinema. Coniston Lane. You go down Coniston Lane for about a mile and a half. Straight down the lane. After a mile and a half the street lights stop—God knows why—and two hundred yards further on, on the left-hand side, there's a small turning with a sign which says Keggleston Way.

Sheila Keggleston Way.

Glenn That's right. You drive down Keggleston Way for about fifty yards, then suddenly there's a corner. It's a very sharp corner, with a high hedge on one side and a ditch on the other. That's where you leave the car. (*He looks at her*)

Sheila I've got it.

Glenn Good.

Sheila But where's Sam's cottage?

Glenn That's here.

Sheila And the pond?

Glenn The pond's about a quarter of a mile away from Sam's place. But don't you worry about the pond.

Sheila But isn't that where you're taking her?

Glenn Darling, you're concerned with two things and two things only. The car and the phone call. Now, when you get to the corner make sure there's no one in sight, and then drive the car slowly off the road and into the ditch. And for God's sake be careful and don't hurt yourself.

Sheila I'll be careful.

Glenn Take the key out of the car and walk back to Coniston Lane. You'll find the telephone box fifty yards up on the right-hand side.

Sheila Fifty yards past the turning?

Glenn Yes, that's right. Now, if all goes well and you pick up the car as arranged you should be at the call box by seven-fifteen—seven-thirty at the latest. Illingworth's due here at seven-thirty and I'll hold him here as long as possible. But you've got to phone me before he leaves. That's absolutely vital. You understand?

Sheila Yes.

Glenn Now when you get into the phone box . . .

Sheila But wait a minute? Will you be back here by seven-thirty? If you've got to drive all the way out to . . .

Glenn Don't worry about me! Don't even think about me. I know exactly what I'm doing, so please don't give me a second's thought.

Sheila hesitates, then gives a little nod

When you get into the phone box dial the operator, tell him you're Mrs Glenn Howard and you want a transferred charge call to your own number. As soon as I hear you impersonating Maggie, I'll say, "Good God, Maggie—where on earth are you?" Then we'll take it from there.

Sheila But supposing the operator's listening? If it's a transfer charge call . . .

Glenn So much the better. Don't worry, darling, I know exactly what I want you to say, word for word, and we'll rehearse the whole thing at least a dozen times before you leave. (*Studying her*) Now, is everything perfectly clear?

Sheila Yes, I think so. But what happens after I've telephoned?

Glenn After the phone call you make your way to Melston Station.

Sheila (*pointing to the map*) That's here—on the main road.

Glenn That's right. Don't get on a bus, and whatever happens don't take a cab, even if you see one. There's a train back to town at eight-forty-six

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