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Because of the Lockwoods

A Play

Constance Cox

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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BECAUSE OF THE LOCKWOODS

First performed by the Arthur Brough Players, at the Leas Pavilion, Folkstone, on April 21st, 1952 with the following cast of characters:

Mrs Hunter	Marjorie Wilde
Molly Hunter	Joan Charlesworth
Mrs Lockwood	Pauline Loring
Martin Hunter	Derek Holmes
Thea Hunter	Pamela Page
Mr Lockwood	Martin Bradley
Oliver Reade	Aidan Turner
Clare Lockwood	Jennifer Phipps

The play produced by Peter Walter

The action of the play takes place in the front room of Mrs Hunter's home in Aldworth, a town in Lancashire

ACT I

- SCENE 1 A late afternoon in January
SCENE 2 An early evening in March
SCENE 3 An afternoon in August

ACT II

- SCENE 1 A late evening in October
SCENE 2 An early evening in November

Time—1902

ACT I

SCENE 1

The front room of Mrs Hunter's house in Aldworth, a town in Lancashire. A late afternoon in January

The room is rather chaotic, as the Hunters have just moved in. In the back wall there is a door, which usually stands open and leads to the hall. Placed against the back wall is a sideboard, which has a brush and crumb tray on it. There is a chair either side of the sideboard

UR, is a second door which leads to the kitchen. DS of the door is a fireplace, which has an armchair, with cushions on it and a small table beside it, placed in front of the fire. There is a clock and a box of matches on the mantelpiece

In the centre of the L wall is a window looking out on to the street, with a windowseat below it. US of the window is a bookcase, while DS is a whatnot

There is a table C, with three chairs around it

When the CURTAIN rises Mrs Hunter, a gentle, silly, rather frightened-looking woman, a little past her prime, is taking ornaments from a packing-case, dusting them and then placing them on the mantelpiece

Suddenly there is a loud knock at the front door. Mrs Hunter drops the ornament she was dusting back into the straw. She stands rigidly, listening, with her hand pressed to her heart

Molly Hunter, a pleasant, homely girl in her twenties, enters from the kitchen carrying a tray of tea things. She, in common with the other Hunter children is not in full mourning, but wears a wide black band on her arm. The knock is repeated, as she places the tray on the sideboard

Molly There's someone at the door, Mother.

Mrs Hunter (*pressing a finger to her lips*) Ssh!

Molly What's the matter?

Mrs Hunter If we stand quite still, dear, perhaps they'll go away.

The knock is repeated

Molly But, Mother, we must answer the door.

Mrs Hunter I know I'm stupid, dear, but ever since . . . everything happened, I'm terrified of a knock at the door.

Molly (*with great gentleness*) I'll peep out of the window. It can't always be something unpleasant. (*She crosses to the window*)

Mrs Hunter Is it, dear?

Molly (*smiling*) Well, that's a matter of opinion. It's Mrs Lockwood.

Mrs Hunter Mrs Lockwood! And the place looking like this!

Molly Don't worry. She knew we were moving in today. I'll go and let her in.

Molly exits to the hall

Mrs Hunter makes a futile attempt to tidy the room. She gives up and thrusts her apron under a cushion

Mrs Lockwood (*off*) How are you, Molly dear.

Molly (*off*) Good-afternoon. Won't you come in, Mrs Lockwood?

Mrs Lockwood enters from the hall, followed by Molly. She is a well-dressed, middle-aged, interfering woman

Mrs Lockwood My dear Mrs Hunter!

Mrs Hunter Mrs Lockwood! How kind of you to call!

They kiss peckily

Mrs Lockwood My husband hasn't come yet then?

Mrs Hunter Not yet. He said five-thirty.

Molly (*clearing a chair at the table*) Won't you sit down, Mrs Lockwood?

Mrs Lockwood Thank you, Molly. (*She sits*) I can only stay for a moment. I'm on my way to fetch Clare from Lady Harvey's. (*Looking round*) Upon my word, you've made the place look quite homelike already.

Mrs Hunter sobs and sinks into one of the chairs at the table

Molly (*moving to comfort her*) What's the matter, Mother?

Mrs Hunter I feel so ashamed that Mrs Lockwood should see us here . . . after Hill House.

Mrs Lockwood My dear Mrs Hunter, that's one of the reasons why I came. I was determined to show you that your altered circumstances aren't going to make the slightest difference to our friendship. You should have seen Siddle's face when I told him to drive me here. He'd never taken the carriage into such a locality before.

Mrs Hunter It's all so bewildering. When my husband was alive we had plenty of money—yet the moment he's dead I'm told we haven't a penny.

Molly It's quite simple, Mother. Mr Lockwood explained it when we were in his office. All the years Father was ill he lived on his capital He died just as he'd come to the end of it, that's all.

Mrs Hunter (*with weak obstinacy*) Oh, yes, I know you children all think you understand it better than I do, but I'm quite sure if your father were alive now we'd never be here.

Molly (*giving up*) I'll make some tea when Martin and Thea come in. That will make you feel better. Will you excuse me, Mrs Lockwood? There's so much to do in the kitchen.

Mrs Lockwood Of course dear. Don't let me interrupt you.

Molly exits to the kitchen

Mrs Lockwood Molly seems to be taking it very well.

Mrs Hunter All the children have been wonderful. I'm afraid they don't realise yet what poverty means.

Mrs Lockwood But surely they understand they must earn their own livings now?

Mrs Hunter Oh yes, indeed they do! Why, Thea has already arranged with Miss Eardley to take her as a teacher as soon as her present term is up.

Mrs Lockwood (*who doesn't like Thea*) A teacher! Hmm. I should have thought she was rather too good-looking for that. Still I suppose she'll only teach in a girl's school. And Martin? What does he propose to do?

Mrs Hunter Well, I was hoping when Mr Lockwood comes this evening, he'll say there's enough money left for Martin to go on with his studies.

Mrs Lockwood My dear Mrs Hunter, don't be absurd. It costs hundreds of pounds to be a doctor. You couldn't possibly afford it.

Mrs Hunter I suppose not. Poor Martin! He's set his heart on it.

Mrs Lockwood He's young enough to get over it. And I can tell you in confidence that my husband is speaking to his business friends about him. Between them, they'll find a nice office job for Martin, so he'll be perfectly happy.

Molly enters

Molly (*moving round her mother's chair*) We haven't any bread, Mother. I'm going out to try and find a shop.

Mrs Hunter Very well, dear.

Mrs Lockwood Go to Nesbit's in the High Street, Molly.

Molly's face tightens

Oh, how stupid of me. They're very expensive, aren't they? Let this be my treat. (*She fumbles in her bag*)

Molly I'd rather not, thank you, Mrs Lockwood—I won't be long, Mother.

Molly exits quickly

Mrs Lockwood There, what a silly little thing I am! I almost forgot to tell you something I came specially to say. I've found a situation for Molly.

Mrs Hunter For Molly! But there isn't anything she can do!

Mrs Lockwood I know, dear. That's why this situation is so suitable. It's nursery governess to four dear high-spirited little children!

Mrs Hunter Four?

Mrs Lockwood That's right. Lunch and tea provided, and *thirteen* pounds a year!

Mrs Hunter It's most kind of you, but——

Mrs Lockwood Well?

Mrs Hunter —Molly's so nervous with strangers. I'm afraid she wouldn't be happy.

Mrs Lockwood Happiness has nothing to do with earning one's living. (*Offended*) Of course, if you don't want it——

Mrs Hunter It's not that. I'm most grateful to you, only——

Mrs Lockwood Good. Then that's settled.

The sound of the door opening and shutting off

Good gracious, is that the time? I must fly. (*She rises*)

Martin Hunter enters from the hall, carrying a book. He is a pleasant, quiet young man of nineteen or twenty

Martin Good-afternoon, Mrs Lockwood.

Mrs Lockwood Why, Martin! Have you been out, you naughty boy, instead of helping your mother with the moving in?

Martin I had to go up to Hill House.

Mrs Lockwood Oh, you poor boy! Such sad memories it must have for you! I must go. Clare is expecting me.

Mrs Hunter rises

Martin (*his face lighting up at the mention of Clare*) Oh, how is Clare?

Mrs Lockwood Oh, frightfully excited. Planning her clothes for France. (*To Mrs Hunter*) Did I tell you she goes in three month's time to finish at the *Pension Jeanne D'Arc*?

Mrs Hunter Thea was going to finish abroad before . . . all this happened.

Mrs Lockwood Oh, really? It's dreadfully expensive, of course, but we've always felt that only the best is good enough for our girls.

Martin Would you mind telling Clare I'll come up to Oakfield one evening for my Christina Rossetti.

Mrs Lockwood Your what?

Martin A little book of poems I lent her.

Mrs Lockwood (*obviously disapproving*) Oh. Oh, well, don't bother, Martin. She really hasn't time to see anyone now. I'll send one of the servants down with it.

Martin But——

Mrs Lockwood Goodbye, my dear boy. Take care of your mother, won't you?

Mrs Hunter moves to the hall door with Mrs Lockwood

Now you mustn't be too depressed about the house, Mrs Hunter. I'm sure there are far worse neighbourhoods if one looked for them.

Mrs Hunter and Mrs Lockwood exit

Martin moves C, takes a long envelope from his pocket, and looks at it

As Mrs Hunter returns

He stuffs it back into his pocket

Mrs Hunter Were there any letters, dear?

Martin Only one for me. I gave the postman our new address.

Mrs Hunter (*returning to the ornaments*) Thank you, dear.

Martin (*after a pause*) Mother—did Mrs Lockwood say anything about—about our seeing them in the future?

Mrs Hunter No, dear, I can't remember. Why?

Martin Oh, nothing. Look at this wonderful book I bought for half a crown in the market!

Mrs Hunter Oh, Martin, you shouldn't be buying books at a time like this!

Martin But it's just what I need for my studies. And the illustrations are marvellous! (*He sits in a chair R of the table studying them*)

Mrs Hunter (*after a moment; moving to him*) Martin . . . you do understand Mr Lockwood may say that there isn't enough money?

Martin Yes.

Mrs Hunter Then—wouldn't it be better not to hope too much—until we know?

Martin (*taking her hand*) Look, Mother, leave this to me, will you? I'm not depending on anything you can do for me. I know you'll be needing every penny that's left. I'm going to manage this in my own way. (*He pats her hand*) Don't you worry.

Molly enters holding some full paper bags

Molly I found a shop up the road, Mother, called Riley's. But the cakes don't look very nice. (*She holds open the bags*)

Martin (*looking*) Cripes!

Mrs Hunter Oh, dear, they do look unpleasant, don't they? (*She starts to take the bags out to the kitchen*) What a lot we shall have to put up with here!

Mrs Hunter exits

Molly (*starting to follow her*) Shall I start tea, Mother?

Mrs Hunter (*off*) No, dear, Thea's not in yet, and I think we ought to wait till Mr Lockwood's been.

Molly Then I'll go and finish upstairs.

Molly exits as;

Mrs Hunter returns

Mrs Hunter But I think we ought to . . . Where's Molly?

Martin Upstairs.

Mrs Hunter Oh. I wonder if she remembers where we put that little bag with your father's papers in it? Mr Lockwood will want to see them.

Mrs Hunter exits, calling

Molly—Molly—

The moment she has gone, Martin who has been waiting for an empty room, takes out his letter and tears it open. He takes out some papers

There is the sound of the front door banging

Thea Hunter enters. She is eighteen, attractive and full of purpose. She sees Martin and catches his excitement

Thea Martin, are those the papers? Have they come?

Martin Oh, hullo, Thea. Yes, this afternoon.

Thea Let me look!

She takes the papers from him

Martin Hey, wait a minute! I haven't seen them myself yet!

Thea Here, share them with me. Oh, what yards! (*Reading*) Scholarship examinations for the University of Cambridge. Age—qualifications . . . Oh, bother, we know all that!

Martin Turn over. Here it is!

Thea The examinations will include chemistry, physics—

Martin (*reading with her*) Biology, Latin—

Thea That's so you can write mysterious prescriptions for chemists!

Martin Wait a bit! Don't joggle them about! Yes . . . that's roughly the lot.

Thea Oh, Martin, you're good at all these subjects!

Martin Not too sound on physics.

Thea But you'll get a pass for that, anyway. Oh, Martin, you'll be able to do it!

Martin Yes—I honestly think I will.

Thea Everything's going to come right after all. (*She moves L and flings off her hat*) Now I'll tell you *my* news.

Martin Yours?

Thea I'm going to France in two months time!

Martin What—has Miss Eardley—?

Thea Yes, she's arranging for me to go to a school there. I shall teach English while I'm learning French. She says I'll be qualified for a first-class job when I come home.

Martin Good for you!

Thea Not a word to Mother until it's settled.

Martin Of course not.

Thea (*moving towards him*) In years to come we'll meet again—Sir Martin Hunter of Harley Street, and Miss Thea Hunter, headmistress of Dothe-girls College, Eastbourne.

Martin Idiot!

They laugh together. Then Thea is suddenly serious. She kneels by him

Thea Martin . . . were you dreadfully afraid when you first heard we were going to be poor?

Martin (*low*) Horribly!

Thea So was I. But now I don't mind any more because I'm discovering there are things I can do—things I might never have known about otherwise. And so are you.

Martin Yes.

Thea I suppose we're really discovering our characters. Isn't there something in Shakespeare about that?

Martin "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings."

Thea Yes, that's it! And we aren't going to be "underlings", are we, Martin?

Martin You bet we aren't!

There is a knock at the front door

Thea (*rising*) That'll be Mr Lockwood. When are you going to tell Mother about this?

Martin (*rising*) Tonight, I expect. Probably while he's here. (*He gathers his papers up*)

They stand together by the fireplace

Mrs Hunter enters with Mr Lockwood, a big, brusque man in his fifties, holding a brief-case

Molly follows them carrying a little leather bag

Mrs Hunter Here is Mr Lockwood, children. You know Thea and Martin, don't you, Mr Lockwood?

Mr Lockwood (*moving c to above the table; dryly*) I could hardly avoid knowing them, seeing we've been neighbours for eighteen years. (*He places his brief-case on the table*) Good-evening.

Thea, Martin and Molly respond

Mrs Hunter It is so kind of you to come, Mr Lockwood——

Mr Lockwood We'll cut out the compliments, if you don't mind, Mrs Hunter, I'm a busy man. I understand you've some other papers you wish me to see?

Mrs Hunter Well, the principal papers were at the bank——

Mr Lockwood (*touching his case*) Yes, I have those here.

Mrs Hunter The others are just receipts and bills, I think, but perhaps you ought to see them. Did you fetch them, Molly?

Molly (*handing her the bag*) Here they are, Mother.

Mr Lockwood brings a chair from against the back wall and places it at the head of the table. He sits

Mrs Hunter Thank you, dear. (*Turning*) Won't you sit—oh!

Mr Lockwood (*taking the bag from her*) Is it necessary for me to have an audience?

Thea I thought we were going to be told what Father had left.

Mr Lockwood You'll know soon enough. I'll send for you when I'm ready.

Mrs Hunter Thea, there's a lot to do in the kitchen. And, Martin, perhaps you'd help Molly upstairs.

Martin Yes, of course. (*He crosses to the hall door*) Come on, Molly.

Mr Lockwood Hey, wait a minute. You—what's your name—Martin! Remind me to have a word with you before I go. Got a job in view for you.

Martin exchanges a smile with Thea

Martin Very well, sir.

Martin and Molly exit into the hall

Thea exits into the kitchen

Mr Lockwood (*taking the papers from the bag*) These are all the papers you have?

Mrs Hunter (*sitting in a chair L of the table*) Yes, Richard always kept them in that little bag. He said it was so easy to pop them in.

Mr Lockwood Just the kind of slapdash thing I can imagine him saying.

Never did have any method, or he wouldn't have left you in this mess.

Mrs Hunter But—there will be something, Mr Lockwood?

Mr Lockwood (*sorting through the papers*) Precious little.

Mrs Hunter I . . . see.

Mr Lockwood To save time, I can tell you briefly what the papers at the bank consisted of. A few share certificates worth possibly fifty pounds, and the deeds of Hill House.

Mrs Hunter Is that all?

Mr Lockwood That's all.

Mrs Hunter Then all I have in the world is——

Mr Lockwood The money Hill House will fetch, and whatever the furniture realised at auction.

Mrs Hunter But that was only eighty pounds! People didn't seem to like Richard's taste very much.

Mr Lockwood (*without sympathy*) Well, there it is. (*He pushes one bundle of papers aside*) Nothing of value here. Mainly rubbish. (*He takes another bundle*) Let's see what's here. (*He straightens a paper*) What on earth—God in Heaven! (*He rises*)

Mrs Hunter What is it?

Mr Lockwood The damnable swindler!

Mrs Hunter Mr Lockwood, please! (*She rises*)

Mr Lockwood (*with fury*) Did you know your husband had purchased the paddock adjoining Hill House?

Mrs Hunter (*alarmed*) The paddock—oh! (*She sits*)

Mr Lockwood Did you?

Mrs Hunter (*nervously*) Only when it was all completed.

Mr Lockwood Why wasn't I told?

Mrs Hunter Richard thought it might cause unpleasantness. He knew you were interested in buying it as well.

Mr Lockwood Interested! I've coveted that land all my life. It's the finest building land in the county.

Mrs Hunter Richard didn't buy it for building. He wanted to keep the view unspoilt.

Mr Lockwood How long ago?

Mrs Hunter (*not understanding*) What?

Mr Lockwood When did he buy it?

Mrs Hunter opens her mouth

(*He waves her aside*) Never mind. The date will be on this agreement. October! (*The date strikes him*) Wait a minute! (*He takes out a notebook and consults it*) So that was what he wanted the money for. What a blind fool I was!

Mrs Hunter What money? I don't understand.

Mr Lockwood It may interest you to know, Mrs Hunter, that your husband purchased the paddock with money borrowed from me.

Mrs Hunter Borrowed!

Mr Lockwood Unknowingly, I provided the money for someone else to buy

a piece of land I'd have given my right hand for. No wonder he was so confounded close about it!

Mrs Hunter How much was it?

Mr Lockwood Three hundred pounds.

Mrs Hunter Then Hill House is worth that much more—(*a thought strikes her*) that is, of course—if—if——

Mr Lockwood (*absently and impatiently*) If what?

Mrs Hunter If—my husband paid you back.

Mr Lockwood looks at her sharply, an idea forming in his mind

He *did* pay you back, didn't he?

Mr Lockwood (*slowly*) He never told you much, I gather?

Mrs Hunter No, he always hated me to be worried. But he did pay you back, I'm sure. I know he was careless about papers and so on, but he was always most conscientious about money.

Mr Lockwood suddenly claps a hand to his heart

Mr Lockwood what's the matter? (*She rises*)

Mr Lockwood My heart—plays me up—shouldn't get excited——

Mrs Hunter (*helping him*) Sit down. I'll get you some water.

Mr Lockwood (*gasping*) Brandy, if you have it. (*He sits*)

Mrs Hunter I'm afraid not. There was some sherry left in a decanter. Will that do?

Mr Lockwood Yes, yes, anything.

Mrs Hunter Keep quite still, Mr Lockwood. I do hope I can find it.

Mrs Hunter exits into the kitchen

The moment she has gone, Mr Lockwood straightens himself, rises and goes through the papers with a rapid and expert hand

Mr Lockwood (*picking one up*) Promissory note. Good. (*He puts it in his notebook*)

Thea enters from the kitchen

Mr Lockwood (*spinning round*) What the devil do you want!

Thea Mother said you were ill. I——

Mr Lockwood I'm no better for you staring at me. Go away! (*He rests his hand heavily upon the table*)

Thea looks at him, then exits

Mr Lockwood feverishly examines the rest of the papers, finally turning the bag upside down

Mr Lockwood No receipt. Careless fool! (*He smiles in satisfaction and sits*)

Mrs Hunter enters with a glass of sherry

Mrs Hunter Drink this, Mr Lockwood.

He takes the glass from her

How do you feel now?

Mr Lockwood Much better, thank you. Silly of me to get worked up like that. Doesn't do me any good.

Mrs Hunter (*sitting R of the table*) Mr Lockwood, I hate to worry you, but I must know if my husband repaid you that money.

Mr Lockwood If your husband had repaid me, Mrs Hunter, my receipt would be among those papers. Furthermore, I should have returned this. (*He takes from his notebook the paper he took from the little bag*)

Mrs Hunter What is it?

Mr Lockwood It's what we call a promissory note. Read it.

Mrs Hunter I promise to pay William Lockwood on order or demand the sum of three hundred pounds for value received. Richard Hunter. . . . This is a dreadful shock to me, Mr Lockwood. I can't pay you yet.

Mr Lockwood Now who said anything about money, Mrs Hunter? I shall be perfectly content to take over the paddock instead.

Mrs Hunter But won't that reduce the value of Hill House?

Mr Lockwood To a certain extent, of course, but you can't have it both ways.

Mrs Hunter (*resigned*) Very well, Mr Lockwood, if you think it best.

Mr Lockwood I'll take the deeds with me and have it properly transferred. Then when everything's settled, I shall send you a receipt and return this promissory note. Is that clear?

Mrs Hunter Quite clear.

Mr Lockwood Good. Now, if you'd like to call in the children, I think I can pretty well tell you how you stand.

Mrs Hunter rises and goes to the kitchen door

Mrs Hunter Thea dear——

Thea enters

Thea Yes, Mother?

Mrs Hunter Ask Martin and Molly to come downstairs, will you please? Mr Lockwood has finished.

Thea All right, Mother.

Thea exits, with a look towards Mr Lockwood

Mr Lockwood Oh, by the way, did the children know anything about this? (*He taps his notebook*).

Mrs Hunter The paddock? (*She moves to his R*) Oh, no. You see it was only just before—and the shock——

Mr Lockwood I see. Then I shouldn't mention it to them or anyone else if I were you. (*He puts the papers into his brief-case*)

Mrs Hunter Oh, I shouldn't dream of it. I wouldn't like anyone to know that Richard had borrowed money.

Martin, Molly and Thea enter together

Mrs Hunter Come and sit down, children. Mr Lockwood is going to tell us . . . how things stand. (*She sits in the armchair by the fire*)

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