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I Have Been Here Before

A Play in Three Acts

J. B. Priestley

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

Produced at the Royalty Theatre, London, on Wednesday, September 22nd, 1937, with the following cast of characters:

(In the order of their appearance)

SALLY PRATT	*Eileen Beldon.*
SAM SHIPLEY	*William Heilbronn.*
DR. GÖRTLER	*Lewis Casson.*
OLIVER FARRANT	*William Fox.*
JANET ORMUND	*Patricia Hilliard.*
WALTER ORMUND	*Wilfrid Lawson.*

The Play produced by LEWIS CASSON.

The SCENE throughout is the sitting-room of the Black Bull Inn, Grindle Moor, North Yorkshire, at Whitsuntide.

ACT I.—Friday.

ACT II.—Saturday.

ACT III.—Sunday.

For some of Dr. Görtler's theories of Time and Recurrence, I gratefully acknowledge my debt to P. D. Ouspensky's astonishing book, *A New Model of the Universe.* It must be understood, however, that I accept full responsibility for the free use I have made of these borrowed ideas, and that it does not follow because I make use of them that I necessarily accept them.

J. B. P.



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I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

ACT I

SCENE.—*The sitting-room of the Black Bull Inn, Grindle Moor, North Yorkshire, a moorland inn of the farmhouse type that serves as the local "pub" and also takes a few guests.*

The room is simply furnished in the style of a North Country farmhouse sitting-room. On the L. *is a long low window, deeply set, through which the sunlight is streaming. At the back, on the* L., *is a door that serves as an entrance to the inn to the people staying there, but not to people who merely go for a drink or a meal. On the* R. *at the back is the door that leads to the dining-room, the bar and the rest of the inn, including two of the guest bedrooms. Through this door a passage can be seen. Down stage* R. *is a slighter door, leading to two bedrooms; it opens directly on to a steep flight of stairs. Through the main door, when open, can be seen a distant glimpse of high moorland. The fireplace of the room is presumed to be in the fourth wall.*

(*See Photograph of Scene.*)

It is an evening in June, about eight o'clock.

The room is empty at the rise of the CURTAIN, *and only the tick of the clock can be heard, but immediately afterwards* SALLY PRATT *enters up* R.C., *bringing in two bowls of flowers. She is a pleasant-looking country-woman in her middle thirties and is nicely dressed, but wears an apron as if she were still busy with household work. She speaks in a rather loud tone and with a North Country accent, but not too broad. After a moment or two,* SAM SHIPLEY *enters up* R.C. *He is a stout, humorous, contented Yorkshireman in his sixties. He is in his shirt-sleeves and is smoking a pipe. His accent is broader than his daughter's, but not very broad.*

SALLY *puts one of the bowls on the table* C. *and the other on top of the desk* L., *upstage end.*

SALLY (*as she finishes her task*). That looks a bit better.

SAM. Ay.

SALLY (*sharply, but not unpleasantly*). Father—get your coat on.

SAM (*moving to above* L. *of the table*). What for?

SALLY (*going up to* SAM). You know what for, I've told you

often enough. Landlord o' the Black Bull in his shirt-sleeves like a barman!

SAM. Long as folk pay me what they owe me—they can tak' me for a barman if they like. I'm not a particular chap.

SALLY (*commencing to dust*). Now go on. We'll have somebody here in a minute. I don't want Miss Holmes and her friends marching in, catching you in your shirt-sleeves.

SAM. If they never see worse nor that, they'll be lucky. (*Moving slowly to the door* R.C.) When's Mr. Farrant getting back?

SALLY. Any time. He only wanted some cold meat and salad and cheese left for his supper. I wish they were all as easy to please. (*She goes to the desk to rearrange the flowers.*)

(SAM *wanders out during this speech, leaving the door open behind him. Then he pops his head back.*)

SAM. Butcher's here.

SALLY. An' he's rare an' late.

(*As she is going up* R.C., *there is the sound of a car. She hears it and shouts.*)

Father, I believe there's somebody here. (*She goes quickly to the window* L.)

SAM (*off*). I'm coming.

(SALLY *hurries out* R.C. *In the empty room we hear the clock ticking. A moment's pause. Then there is a quiet knocking on the outer door up* L. *and it opens slowly.* DR. GÖRTLER *enters. The clock chimes the quarter past. He is a man about sixty, in well-worn darkish clothes of a foreign cut. He has a slight foreign accent, and speaks with precision. Although his appearance and manner suggest the quiet detached scholar, he has a good deal of assurance and authority. He puts his hat on the table* C. *and looks about him with eager interest and curiosity, and when he has taken the room in, consults a small notebook, as if comparing its appearance with some notes there. Finally, he nods.* SAM *now returns, wearing his coat. The two men look at each other for a moment, then play their scene slowly.*)

(R.C.) Good evening, sir. (*He comes down* R.)

DR. GÖRTLER (L.C.). Good evening. You are the landlord?

SAM. That's right. Sam Shipley.

DR. GÖRTLER. You let rooms to visitors?

SAM. A few.

DR. GÖRTLER. Three or four, perhaps?

SAM (*slightly surprised*). Yes.

(SALLY *bustles in, then stops short in surprise when she sees* DR. GÖRTLER.)

SALLY (*up* R. *of the table*). Oh !——good evening.

DR. GÖRTLER (*smiling*). Good evening.

SALLY. Were you wanting a room ?

DR. GÖRTLER (*slowly*). I am not sure.

SALLY (*who does not like this*). Oh !——well, it doesn't matter, because I'm afraid we can't oblige you.

DR. GÖRTLER. You have no room ?

SALLY. We've only four bedrooms and they're all taken for this Whitsuntide. There's a gentleman in one already, and the other three are coming to-night.

DR. GÖRTLER. So. These three who are coming to-night—you know them ?

SALLY (*surprised*). Yes.

DR. GÖRTLER (*gently, tentatively*). Two of them—perhaps—are married people—the man older than his wife—he might be rich—and then—perhaps—a younger man——?

SALLY (*who has listened to this with some surprise*). No. We're expecting three ladies.

DR. GÖRTLER (*rather taken aback*). Three ladies ?

SALLY. Teachers from Manchester.

DR. GÖRTLER. Oh ! Perhaps there is another inn here, eh ?

SAM. Nay, this is t'only one. There's t'Lion at Dale End, but that's eight mile from here.

SALLY. But there's one or two here that lets rooms. You might try Lane Top Farm—Mrs. Fletcher—it's just a bit further on.

SAM. Not five minutes in a car—if you've come in a car.

DR. GÖRTLER (*still showing signs of disappointment*). Yes, I have a little car. I will try this farm, but I do not think it will be any use. (*He picks up his hat and goes to the door, then turns and smiles rather forlornly.*) This must be the wrong year.

SAM. Don't you know what year your friends are coming ?

DR. GÖRTLER (*with a slight smile, turning back to* L.C.). They are not my friends. (*He goes to the door again.*) How do I find this farm ?

SAM (*following him towards the door up* L.). When you get out o' t'yard here, turn sharp to your right, and she has a sign up—you can't miss it.

(*By the time he has said this,* DR. GÖRTLER *is outside and* SAM *is at the door.* SAM *closes the door and comes in. Meanwhile* SALLY *has gone to the window.*)

There'll be no rain this week-end. We'd have had a smell of it by now.

SALLY. Just fancy ! Creeping in like that and asking questions !

SAM (L.C.). What, yon chap ? Well, he's a foreigner o' some sort, you see.

SALLY (*by the desk*). What's that got to do with it?

SAM. Well, happen it's foreign style o' doing things. (*He begins to chuckle.*) Nay, what tickled me was him saying he must ha' come at wrong year. Now that's as good as aught I've heard o' some time. If he's going round asking for people —not friends of his, mind you—and he doesn't know where they are nor what year they'll be there—I reckon he's got his work cut out. I must tell that to some of 'em in t'bar.

SALLY. You and your bar!

(*The telephone rings.* SALLY *crosses below* SAM *to answer it.*) (*At the telephone.*) Yes, this is the Black Bull. Yes, well I *am* waiting. . . . Oh, Miss Holmes, yes—this is Mrs. Pratt—we were wondering what had become of you. . . . Oh dear dear! . . . Well, I never did! . . . No, if your friend's so poorly I don't suppose you could. . . . No, well it can't be helped. . . . Yes, we're sorry to. . . . Oh, we'll manage to get somebody . . . that's right . . . good-bye. (*She puts down the telephone and turns to* SAM.) Miss Holmes—ringing up from Manchester—to say they can't come.

SAM. Nay!

SALLY. One of the other two's been suddenly taken poorly, and they don't like to leave her.

SAM. Oh!

SALLY (*indignantly*). And I should think it is "oh!" That's all three rooms going begging, at very last minute, an' we could have let 'em four times over. (*Moving down* R.) Here we are—Friday night—Whit Saturday to-morrow—an' now only one room taken. We ought to do what everybody else does, an' charge 'em a deposit when they book rooms in advance, and then if they do give backword we're not clean out o' pocket.

SAM (*moving over to* SALLY). Well, it's happened afore.

SALLY. Does that make it any better?

SAM. Yes, 'cos we know we'll fill 'em up easy. Black Bull's nivver had rooms empty o' Whitsuntide. There'll be some motorists coming. Ay, and happen some business chaps who'll spend more nor them three women teachers. All they want is cups o' tea, an' they'd nivver put their noses into t'bar.

(OLIVER FARRANT *enters up* L. *He has been walking and wears a tweed jacket and flannel trousers, and is rather dusty. He is about twenty-eight to thirty, good-looking, with something of the boy left in him and something of the intellectual man. He has a decisive, slightly donnish manner, which shows itself least with these two, with whom he is on pleasant easy terms. He has more personal charm than would appear from his actual lines, and though he suffers from the rather priggish conceit of the successful intellectual, there is more of this in the matter than in the manner of his talk.*)

FARRANT. Any sherry left, Sam ?

SAM. Yes, Mr. Farrant.

(*He goes out* R.C. *to get it.* FARRANT *shuts the door up* L.)

SALLY (*who obviously likes him*). Your supper'll be ready when you are.

FARRANT. Good ! (*Sitting down in the chair* L. *of the table and relaxing.*) The last few miles were becoming a bit grim. (*Remembering, with whisper and slightly droll manner.*) Oh !—— have the three females from Manchester arrived yet ?

SALLY (*down* R.). No, they're not coming. One of 'em's poorly.

FARRANT. Well, I can't say I was looking forward to them—but I'm sorry. It's bad news for you, isn't it ?

SALLY. It's a nuisance, but we'll fill up to-morrow all right. I only hope whoever we do have, you can get on with 'em, Mr. Farrant.

FARRANT. Now you're not going to suggest I'm hard to get on with ?

SALLY (*earnestly*). No, I don't mean that, Mr. Farrant, but you know what it is. If we take people at last minute, we can't be too particular, and when you've all got to sit in here together, it might be a bit awkward.

FARRANT. Oh, don't worry about me. I don't suppose I shall be in much this week-end, anyhow, and if the worst comes to the worst, I can always go up to my room and read.

(SAM *enters with a glass of sherry on a tray. He comes to above the table and puts the tray down.*)

SALLY. I'll see if you've everything you want in there. Do you like Wensleydale cheese, Mr. Farrant, 'cos I've got some ?

FARRANT. I don't know. I'd like to try it.

(SALLY *goes out up* R.C., *shutting the door after her.*)

SAM. Bit o' nice Wensleydale tak's some beating. (*Moving down* L.) Have a good walk, Mr. Farrant ?

FARRANT (*sipping his sherry*). Yes, thanks, Sam. I must have done about sixteen miles. Down the dale, then across by the church, up the moor and back over Grindle Top.

SAM. Ay, that'll be all o' sixteen mile. Did you find a bit o' bog again at the Top ?

FARRANT. No, I'm getting artful, Sam. I dodged it this time —worked well over to the right. The ordnance map's all wrong about Grindle Top. (*He sips his sherry, and talks easily.*) You know, Sam, there must have been three or four times as many people living in this dale two or three hundred years ago.

SAM. I've heard 'em say that.

FARRANT. Look at all those old ruins of byres and barns and sheep pounds—and the miles of old walls on the moor.

SAM. Ay, they built them afore folk went into the towns. I remember me grandfather talking about that when I wor a little lad.

FARRANT. Somebody ought to try and find the old records of these dales. Why, in the Middle Ages, what with all that old moorland farming life, and the abbeys and a castle or two, the whole place must have been humming with people.

SAM. I'll bet it worn't humming wi' folk to-day.

FARRANT. Didn't see a soul this afternoon over the Top except a couple of shepherds.

(*He finishes his sherry, rises, and begins moving towards his bedroom.* SAM *takes the glass and puts it on the tray. The telephone rings.* SAM *puts the tray on the sideboard and rather dubiously prepares to answer it.* FARRANT *hurries out through the door down* R., *through which he can be seen going upstairs to his room, the stairs being immediately behind the door.*

As SAM *takes hold of the telephone,* SALLY *hurries in up* R.C.)

SAM. Yes, this is Black Bull. That's right. . . .

SALLY (*impatiently,* L. *of him*). Here, I'll answer it, Father.

SAM (*into the telephone*). Hold on a minute.

(SALLY *takes it from him, pushing* SAM *down* R.)

SALLY. Yes, who is it? . . . Yes—Mr. Ormund. . . . Well, it just happens we have two rooms because somebody's just given us backword. . . . Yes, they're both ready, you can come up as soon as you like. Straight away? . . . Will you be wanting supper to-night? Oh, I see. . . . Well then, you turn to your left just outside Marlingset, and then straight up and you can't miss it. . . . That's right. (*She puts down the telephone and is rather excited.*) Now would you believe it? (*She comes to above the table* C.)

SAM (*humorously*). I don't know till you tell me.

SALLY (*excitedly*). That's a Mr. and Mrs. Ormund. They rang up from Marlingset to see if they could stay over the week-end—they want a bedroom each—and they're coming straight away—they've just had their dinner at the White Hart—and d'you know what I think?

SAM. No, I don't.

SALLY (*moving close to* SAM). I believe this Mr. Ormund is one o' them big Ormunds—y'know—Ormunds Limited.

SAM (*down* R.). Nay, he wouldn't come here if he wor.

SALLY. How do *you* know? And he sounded as if he'd plenty o' money. Wanted two rooms and didn't ask price or anything. I'll bet you he's one of Ormunds Limited. Him and his wife—they'll be company for Mr. Farrant.

SAM (*moving up* R.). I told you we'd have them rooms let i' no time. (*He opens the door, then stops.*) I wonder if that foreign chap's fixed up at Lane End ?

SALLY. He didn't even know whether he wanted to stay or not.

SAM (*casually*). No, but happen it'ud suit him here now. We have a married couple for him, if that's what he wants.

(FARRANT *enters down* R., *having changed his shoes and tidied himself, and crosses to beyond the chair* L. *of the table. He is carrying a book.*)

You're having company *to-night*, Mr. Farrant.

(*He grins and goes out* R.C., *closing the door after him.*)

SALLY. There's a Mr. and Mrs. Ormund coming to-night, to stay the week-end.

FARRANT (*interested*). Ormund ?

SALLY. Yes, an' I fancy it's one o' them big Ormunds—Ormunds Limited—manufacturers—I expect you've heard o' them ?

FARRANT. I ought to. They put up most of the money for my school.

SALLY. Well, I'm sure this is one o' 'em.

(*Footsteps are heard outside,* SALLY *goes* L. *to the window.*)

FARRANT. Here already ?

SALLY. No, they couldn't have come from Marlingset so soon.

(*She moves towards the door up* L., FARRANT *watching idly. Before she can open it,* DR. GÖRTLER *knocks and enters slowly, carrying an old-fashioned bag. He looks at* SALLY, *then sees* FARRANT *and appears to recognize him.* SALLY *looks at him, then at* FARRANT, *rather bewildered. The door is left open.*)

DR. GÖRTLER (*to* FARRANT, *with some eagerness*). You are staying here ?

FARRANT (*below the desk*). Yes.

(DR. GÖRTLER *takes his hat off. There is something decisive in his manner.* SALLY *crosses to* R.C.)

DR. GÖRTLER (L.C.). I am Doctor Görtler.

FARRANT (*rather puzzled*). My name's Farrant, Oliver Farrant.

DR. GÖRTLER. A schoolmaster, I think ?

FARRANT. Yes, I'm head of Lamberton.

DR. GÖRTLER. I am now an exile from my own university —and my country, Germany—and I have been doing some little work for the University of London. (*He turns to* SALLY.) And still you have no room for me ?

(SALLY *gives* FARRANT *a quick questioning look. He nods re-assuringly.*)

SALLY. Well, as a matter of fact we have now, because those three ladies aren't coming and we've a room to spare——

DR. GÖRTLER. I should very much like to stay here.

SALLY (*businesslike*). We charge twelve-and-six a day—all in. That's for this holiday time, and really we ought to charge more because we could easily get it—but——

DR. GÖRTLER (*simply*). But you do not like to be greedy, eh ?

SALLY (*rather taken aback*). No.

DR. GÖRTLER. I will stay. (*He puts his bag down.*) The car will be all right there for a time, eh ? (*He moves to the chair* L. *of the table.*)

SALLY (*moving* R. *a little*). Yes. My father can put it away.

DR. GÖRTLER. And my room ?

SALLY (*pointing to the door down* R.). It's up there.

FARRANT (*smiling*). Next door to me. (*Moving to* DR. GÖRTLER.) I'm just going to have some supper, Doctor Görtler. You'd better join me.

DR. GÖRTLER (*taking* SALLY *in too*). Thank you, yes. I should like something to eat. Anything. (*He sits in the chair* L. *of the table.*)

SALLY. I'll see to it. My father can show you your room.

(*She hurries out up* R.C., *closing the door.*)

FARRANT (*moving round above the table to* R. *of it*). It's a simple, unpretentious little place—but they're nice people—and I think you'll be comfortable.

DR. GÖRTLER. Thank you.

FARRANT. What's your subject ? Science ?

DR. GÖRTLER. It *was* physics and mathematics.

FARRANT. Not now ?

DR. GÖRTLER (*with a slight shrug*). I still teach these subjects. But for myself—I go further——

FARRANT. Research, eh ?

DR. GÖRTLER. You might say—exploring.

FARRANT (*with a smile*). I know. Spherical geometry. Two parallel lines meeting. Two angles of a triangle no longer greater than the third angle. Poor old Euclid turned upside down and inside out. I have a maths. master who talks like that—for his own amusement—not ours—— (*He pauses, then looks hard at* DR. GÖRTLER.) You know, I must have seen your photograph somewhere.

DR. GÖRTLER. No, I do not think so. I am not an Einstein.

FARRANT (*hesitantly*). I thought I—seemed—to recognize you.

DR. GÖRTLER (*calmly*). We often seem to recognize people—and places.

FARRANT. I don't.

DR. GÖRTLER. You have been ill?

FARRANT. I was ordered a short rest. (*He pauses, moves down* R. *a little, then resumes, rather hastily.*) They say that it's when you're nervously exhausted that the two halves of your brain don't synchronize. Then they play that recognition trick on you. Isn't that the explanation?

DR. GÖRTLER. Yes. But do not believe it. We are not as simple as bicycles.

(SAM *enters up* R.C.)

SAM. Supper's ready, Mr. Farrant.

(FARRANT *moves up and* SAM *holds the door open for him.*)

FARRANT (*to* DR. GÖRTLER *as he goes*). You'll join me in the dining-room, eh?

(*He goes.*)

SAM (*heartily, coming down to above the table*). Now then, sir, you're here, after all. And you'd like to see your room?

DR. GÖRTLER. Please.

(SAM *goes up* L.C. *for* DR. GÖRTLER'S *bag, talking as he moves. He takes the bag and crosses below the table towards the door down* R.)

SAM. Ay, not five minutes after you'd gone, them three ladies rang up to say they couldn't come, so we'd room after all for you. Just the one left.

DR. GÖRTLER. But the other two rooms?

SAM (*at the door down stage* R.). Oh—we got rid o' them all right. There's a Mr. and Mrs. Ormund coming to-night into them.

(DR. GÖRTLER *rises and crosses to* SAM.)

DR. GÖRTLER (*triumphantly, with a touch of wonder, really to himself*). *So! So! Ich bin glücklich.*

SAM (*opening the door*). What language is that, sir? German?

DR. GÖRTLER (*off*). Yes. It means "I am fortunate."

(*They go out and their voices die away. The stage is empty. The light has been fading slowly, but there is a last glow in it. There is a pause of a moment or two, then* DR. GÖRTLER *and* SAM *return, talking as if they had never stopped.* DR. GÖRTLER *crosses over below the table to above the chair* L. *of it and stands with his back to* SAM. SAM *comes* C. *below the table.*)

You say that because you have been happy here?

SAM. Yes, I can't grumble at all. I've never made much out o' this place, but I've had all I want. I'd ask for naught better —if I had my time over again.

DR. GÖRTLER (*turning—interested*). Do you often say that?

SAM. Say what?

DR. GÖRTLER (*slowly*). If you had your time over again.

SAM (*surprised*). Well—no—not specially. I mean to say—it's just a way—like—o' putting it. Everybody says it.

(SALLY *enters up* R.C., *holding the door open behind her.*)

SALLY (*not very cordially*). Your supper's ready, Doctor—er——

DR. GÖRTLER. Thank you.

(*He goes over towards the door, then stops.* SAM *follows him round to above the chair* L. *of the table.*)

(*Turning, rather mischievously, to* SAM.) My friend—perhaps you *will* have your time over again.

SALLY (*at the door*). In here, that's right. And if you don't find everything you want, just ring the bell. (*She watches him go, then comes in, closing the door behind her.*) If four of 'em's going to sit in here, it wants changing round a bit.

(*Throughout the following dialogue* SALLY *is now busy, with some small assistance from* SAM, *slightly re-arranging the furniture of the room. She brings the chair from up* L.C. *to above the table and the chair from down* R. *to* R. *of the table. In between her remarks, she is looking the place over, then going to move a chair back or forward, to put an ornament in another place, and so on.*)

What was that Doctor Görtler talking about?

SAM. Nay, I just happened to say "If I'd my time over again"—you know how you do?—and he seemed right taken up with it. (*Repeating it speculatively.*) "If I'd my time over again." Nay, it's a common enough saying.

SALLY (*in a slow, grumbling tone, as she changes the tablecloth for one in the sideboard*). Yes, it's common enough. An' it's silly enough an' all. A lot of use it is you or anybody else saying what they'd do if they had their time over again. A fat chance they have, haven't they? Time moves on and it takes you with it, whatever you say—as I know only too well. (*She is by the chair* R. *of the table.*)

SAM. Ay. Though it's only same for you as for onnybody else, lass.

SALLY. Well, I'm not so sure about that.

SAM. We all go on getting older, Sally.

SALLY. I didn't mean just that. (*Leaning on the table.*) Y'know, Father, it's only four years since Bob and I were staying here with you over Whitsun. And Charlie was still a little lad. The three of us here . . . laughing and talking and going on day long . . . and nothing to tell us it was nearly all over. . . . (*She moves up to turn on the lights at the switch by the door* R.C.)

SAM (*disturbed and affectionate*). Ay—I know—lass—but don't think about it.

SALLY (*crossing over* L. *above the table to draw the curtains—upstage one first*). It's not so long since, but time's run on. . . . It's taken Bob from me . . . even Charlie's growing up and doesn't need me like he used to. . . . I almost might be an old woman wondering where they're going to bury me. . . . (*She draws the downstage curtain.*)

SAM (*moving to her and trying to pat her shoulder*). Now then, Sally lass, it's not so bad as it might be.

SALLY. I might have thirty years to live yet—and I'd swop the lot for just that week we had here, four years ago. . . . But what's the use ? (*She crosses to the sideboard and picks up the tray with the sherry glass.*)

SAM. Ay—but give it a chance. You'll forget.

SALLY. I know I'll forget. I'm forgetting now. I can't hear Bob's voice as plain as I could a year or two since. It's taking even that from me now. . . . That's what time does to you . . . and if it's God's idea, He'll get no thanks from me. . . . (*She looks critically at the room.*) Well, I don't think I can do any better with it as it is. I've sometimes had an idea we might do better to bring the big table in and make this the dining-room—I mean, just for people who's staying here. But it's too far from the kitchen.

(*She is silent a moment, and then is heard the horn of a very large car.*)

It'll be Mr. and Mrs. Ormund.

(*She looks towards the window, and at the same time the clock chimes the half-hour.*)

Here, I must nip upstairs and see if their rooms look all right. Go and see to their luggage.

(*She hurries out up* R.C. SAM *goes to the outer door, leaving it open as he goes through. Voices are heard outside. A pause. Then* JANET ORMUND *enters slowly. She is an attractive, sensitive woman about twenty-eight, and is dressed for the country in a simple but expensive style. She enters the room with a slow indifference, leaving a book she is carrying on the* L. *end of the sideboard, then suddenly stiffens, frowns, looks incredulous, then examines it eagerly, without much movement. It is clear that there is some recognition, mixed with incredulity. A sudden uprush of emotion makes her feel almost faint, and she sinks into the chair above the table, exhausted, breathing heavily.*

Her husband, WALTER ORMUND, *enters. He is a biggish man in his early forties, whose manner alternates between alert, sharp command, on the one hand, and a gloomy brooding, on the other. He is dressed in quiet tweeds, the kind a man might wear at an*

office before leaving for the country. He carries a much-used dispatch-case. He has no eyes for the room, only for his wife.)

ORMUND (*going to* L. *of her*). What's the matter, Janet ?

JANET. I felt rather faint.

(*She takes charge of herself. He would like to help but doesn't know how, so remains large and helpless, still holding the case. She looks about her, then at him.*)

ORMUND. Probably tired.

JANET. No. . . . I'm not . . . really. (*She looks about her again, then at him.*) I had—a sort of feeling—this room—— (*She gives it up.*)

ORMUND. We needn't stay here, y'know.

JANET. No.

ORMUND. We can push on. There's plenty of time.

JANET. Yes, of course we can.

ORMUND. I can simply say " Sorry, not our kind of place," give them something for their trouble, and off we go.

JANET. Quite simple. And—I think—rather comforting.

ORMUND (*with touch of burlesque*). You mean—one of us hasn't been taken ill—the car hasn't suddenly and mysteriously broken down—there isn't a fog or a flood or a landslide—none of those sinister compulsory things—— ?

JANET (*with a smile*). No, not one. (*Then with sudden seriousness.*) We're quite free. We can choose. We're not being compelled. (*She rises.*)

ORMUND. Not in the least. We can go now. Just say the word.

JANET. Why don't you say it ?

ORMUND (*marching to the door*). All right. I'll say it. Let's go. (*He moves to the door up* L.)

JANET (*hesitating, then with a slight laugh*). No. We'll stay. (*She moves to* R. *of the chair above the table.*)

(ORMUND *puts his hat and dispatch-case on the sideboard, then closes the door and comes to* L. *of* JANET.)

ORMUND (*with a touch of bitterness*). Anything for a change, eh ?

JANET. Walter—is that one of the remarks you promised not to make ?

ORMUND (*rueful*). Oh—I hope not.

JANET. It sounded like the beginning of one. Remember—you promised. Play fair.

ORMUND (*who would like to play fair*). I'm trying, Janet. I'm trying hard. Only—I do seem to be in the one situation in the world where it's impossible for a man to be fair. You've no idea what a devil of a job it is.

JANET. I know, Walter.

ORMUND (*not sharply, going* L.). You don't.

JANET (*rather sadly*). No—that's the trouble, I suppose—I don't. (*Looking at him with a touch of wistfulness and pity.*) But —just to be easy and friendly—for once, no arguments, no reproaches—that'll be something, won't it? (*She has moved down* R. *of the table.*)

ORMUND. Yes, it'll be—something.

JANET (*half-laughing, half-vexed*). Oh—Walter! The very way you said that——!

ORMUND (*moving back to the table*). No, no, I didn't mean it that way. I'm really doing my best.

(*They meet* C. *below the table.*)

You're right. God knows you're right. It'll be something.

JANET. I'll do my very best.

ORMUND. And I'll do better still. You'll see. Nice. Easy. Friendly. All according to plan.

(*He looks about him, moving down* L. *and whistling softly. She looks at him, and he breaks off and gives her a careful reassuring smile. She returns it, but nevertheless looks troubled.* SALLY *enters up* R.C., *with an obvious sense of the importance of the occasion.*)

SALLY (*rather breathless, as she comes down* R.). Good evening. Mr. and Mrs. Ormund, isn't it?

JANET (*who has moved up* R. *of the table again*). Yes. (*She sits in the chair above the table.*)

SALLY. You did say you wanted both rooms, didn't you?

ORMUND (*humorously*). Yes. I have to have a room to myself because sometimes I waken up in the middle of the night and begin scribbling figures on bits of paper—and then—I have to smoke. Yes, smoke. Are you insured against fire?

SALLY. Yes, we are that.

ORMUND. It's all right then. (*He crosses over to the telephone.*) I shall smoke a lot—and burn holes in your best sheets.

SALLY (*entering into this*). I'll make you pay for 'em if you do, Mr. Ormund. (*To both of them, as she goes to the door up* R.C.) I expect you'd like to see your rooms, wouldn't you?

ORMUND. You have a look at 'em, Janet. I must telephone to Sykes.

(JANET *rises and goes out* R.C. *with* SALLY. ORMUND *telephones.*)

Trunks. . . . Is that Trunks. . . . This is—(*he looks at the number on the 'phone*)—Grindle five. I want Brensham six-seven. . . . Yes, Brensham six-seven. . . . All right. . . .

(*He waits, telephone to ear.* SAM *enters up* R.C.)

SAM. Your bags are upstairs, sir, and the car's in the garage.

ORMUND. Thanks. Bring me a large whisky-and-soda, will you? MacFarlane's Old Liqueur, if you've got it.

(SAM *goes out and shuts the door.*)

(*Telephoning.*) Hello, Brensham? Oh—that you, Sykes? Walter Ormund here. We're fixed up in a little pub on the moors—the Black Bull, Grindle Moor. 'Phone number's Grindle five. . . . Yes, get me here any time—shan't be going far. . . . Yes, well, you work out the marketing costs, and I'll do the rest. . . . I've got all the information here, including Orgenbaum's report. . . . Who? Pensfield? . . . No, he won't make any trouble. I'll offer him a seat on the board. That'll keep him quiet. . . . Not he! I know too much about him. . . .

(SAM *comes in up* R.C. *with a large whisky-and-soda. He stops in the doorway as he sees* ORMUND *is still telephoning, then tiptoes towards the table. As he is passing,* ORMUND *reaches out and takes the whisky, to* SAM'S *surprise, and has a long drink while still listening.* SAM *gives him a droll look and goes out and shuts the door after him.*)

Yes . . . nothing in that, Sykes. . . . Add two and half per cent to the overhead then. . . . I'll ring you up before Monday morning. . . . Well, work all night then—put a wet towel round your head and a bottle of whisky on your desk. . . . Nonsense! Holidays are for boys and girls, not men. . . . I know all about your children, but they can get on without you. . . . All right. I'm depending on you. 'Bye.

(*He puts down the telephone, takes his drink to the table, and pulling an old envelope out of his pocket, makes a few quick notes on it. Then he looks at what he has written, so absorbed that he does not notice the entrance of* JANET, *who comes in quietly up* R.C., *shutting the door. She watches him take an absent-minded pull at his drink.*)

JANET (*coming down to the back of the chair* R. *of the table*). You know, Walter, you'd several whiskies at that place where we had dinner.

ORMUND. I know. And I'd several before that. And now I'm having another. And what I say is this. If the only way I can find dividends for several hundred shareholders and wages for several thousands of employees is by drinking several whiskies, then I must drink several whiskies. (*He sits in the chair above the table.*)

JANET (*moving up to* R. *of him*). But you're not going to do any work this week-end?

ORMUND (*now sitting with his notes*). I must.

(JANET *moves away a little.*)

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