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SF PERUSALS

Woman in a Dressing-Gown

by Ted Willis



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Woman in a Dressing-Gown

This play was first presented in England at the New Theatre, Bromley, on 11th November 1963, and subsequently opened at the Vaudeville Theatre, London, with the following cast:

AMY PRESTON	*Brenda Bruce*
BRIAN PRESTON	*David Hemmings*
JIM PRESTON	*Roy Purcell*
GEORGIE BARLOW	*Christine Finn*
HILDA	*Joy Stewart*
WILLIE	*Colin Rix*
CHRISTINE	*Alathea Charlton*

The play was directed by SIMON OATES, *with settings by* GLEN EDWARDS

Time: The present

ACT ONE

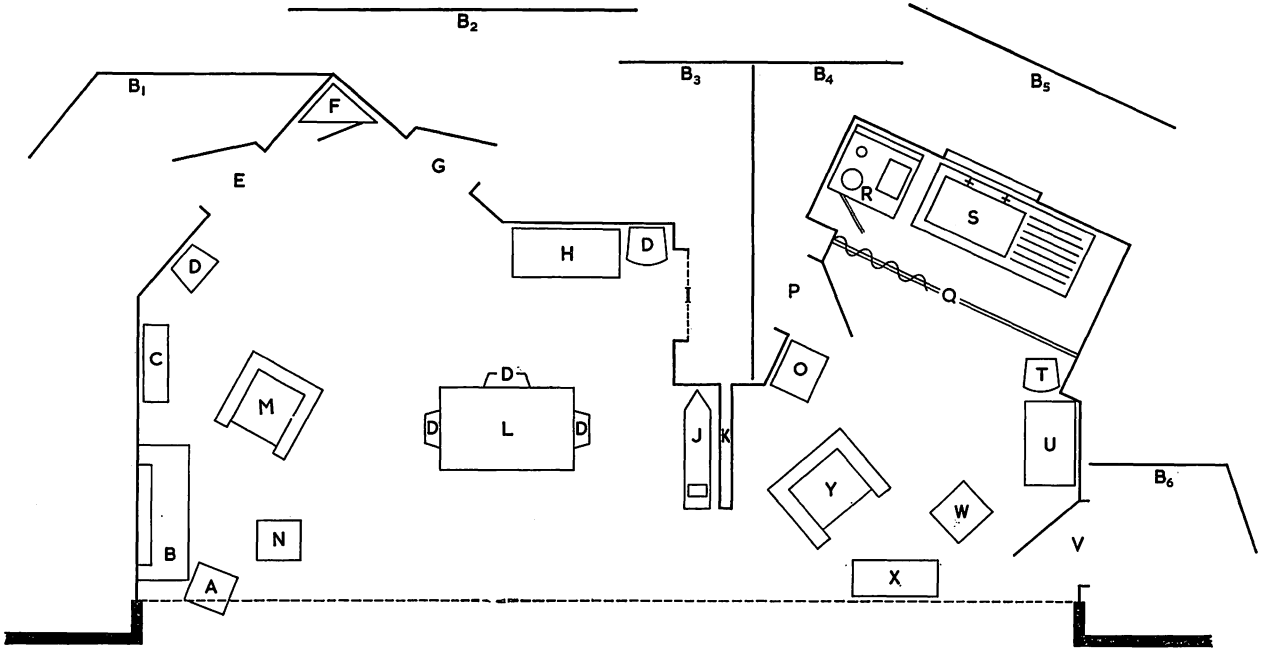
SCENE 1	The Prestons' flat in London, Sunday morning
SCENE 2	Georgie's flat, an hour later
SCENE 3	The Prestons' flat, that evening

ACT TWO

SCENE 1	The Prestons' flat, the following morning
SCENE 2	The Prestons' flat, late afternoon and evening

No reference is intended in this play to any person, alive or dead.

Running time of this play, excluding the interval, is approximately two hours.



A	Television set on low table	J	Ironing board	P	Door to bedroom with coathook on reverse side	X	Coffee table
B	Tile fireplace with hearth	K	Broken wall piece, with electric socket for iron	Q	Curtain on pole	Y	Armchair
C	Occasional table	L	Dining table	R	Cooker		
D	Dining chairs	M	Armchair	S	Sink-unit	B_1	Bedroom backing
E	Door to bedroom	N	Low stool	T	Occasional chair	B_2	Hall backing
F	Corner cupboard			U	Formica topped folding table	B_3	Kitchen backing
G	Door to hall					B_4	Bedroom backing
H	Sideboard			V	Door to hallway	B_5	Exterior backing
I	Arch to kitchen with plastic strip curtain	O	Mock Victorian what-not	W	Small stool	B_6	Hallway backing

PRODUCTION NOTE

Woman in a Dressing-Gown is a play about ordinary human beings. There are no villains in it and no great heroic figures. Even the central situation is ordinary, the sort of thing which you can read about in your morning paper. Yet it is none the less tragic for all that; how tragic we can only realize when we are ourselves involved in similar circumstances.

The people in the play are not intellectuals. They cannot rationalize their problems or explain them away. They even find it difficult to talk about them and, at the height of their difficulties, they search desperately for words of explanation, often falling back on clichés. They are decent, kind, average people who are trapped in an emotional crisis which has crept up on them almost unawares and to which there are no hand-made, off-the-peg answers.

It follows that the keynote in any production of the play must be reality. Everything that happens on the stage must appear to be true and real and possible: the audience must be able to identify with the characters. A single jarring note of unreality can disturb the whole balance of the production.

It is important, for example, that Amy should not be made to appear as a slut, for this would destroy the climax of the play. Jim would have no difficulty in making his choice if she were unclean and lazy. She is sloppy, untidy and unorganized, but she is not dirty and her home is not a slum.

In Act One especially both the producer and the actress who plays Amy should avoid any anticipation of the crisis which comes later. Scene 1 and most of Scene 3 should be treated lightly and as much pace and comedy got out of them as possible. They should not be played with any heavy-handed sense of impending doom.

Georgie's flat and, of course, Georgie herself, should appear as a firm contrast to the Preston home and to Amy. But the danger here is to make Georgie seem too cold and almost inhuman. The opening of her first scene with Jim should be light and fast, and again every possible ounce of humour should be got from it. This is almost the only opportunity we have during the play to see Georgie and Jim alone, and it is important also that we should feel them to be very much in love. When Georgie attacks Jim towards the end of the scene, she should be bitter perhaps, but never bitchy. The audience must never feel that she is a designing woman, driving Jim into a situation against his will. She wants him to act for his own sake, because she loves him and believes in him.

Jim is a difficult character to play and, if the actor isn't careful, the character may emerge as a rather unattractive and spineless individual. This would be wrong. He is weak in the sense that he lacks Georgie's self-confidence and certainty of purpose: but his hesitations arise out of a genuine affection for Amy, a desire not to hurt her, and doubts as to Georgie's estimate of his abilities. He is a kind and genuine person who finds it difficult to think only of himself. The actor should seize every opportunity to emphasize the lighter side of Jim's nature. In Act One, Scene 2, especially, we should see him as a man with a good sense of humour, who is attractive to Georgie and who loves her deeply.

In Act Two, Scene 2, where Amy and Hilda get drunk, the players should not overdo the drunkenness. Staggering about the stage and over-slurring of words will ruin the scene and make it distasteful. We should rather see two women on a spree, enjoying themselves. The audience should laugh *with* them, not *at* them. And we should realize from time to time that Amy's thoughts are still on Jim. When she interrupts with a phrase or two from "Oh, Oh, Antonio" this should come in as an echo of the main theme.

Audiences tend to put their own interpretation on the ending of the play and this is how it should be. Some see it as a resolved and happy ending, with the family reunited. Others feel that nothing has been changed and that many problems remain. My only comment is that the producer should not put the answer there for them. At the final curtain we should see a family which has been shaken to its foundations and which still has to work out its salvation, if that be possible.

I have seen this play performed in many countries and several languages and I have never stopped being surprised at its universal appeal. Argentinian, German, Swedish, Dutch and British women have told me that they "know Amy", that a woman like this lives "next door" or "along the road". The few comments I have made here are based on my experience of these varied productions and are an attempt to indicate a few of the possible pitfalls.

What I am sure of, above all, is that it is, in a sense, a simple play, and this is how it should be produced and played—simply, without tricks or melodrama.

I wish you every success with it.

TED WILLIS

N.B. Interleaved producers' copies of this play are available, price 10s. 6d. (postage 7d. extra), *direct from the Publishers only*.

* WOMAN IN A DRESSING-GOWN

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

The living-room of the PRESTON *flat on a Sunday morning in spring. The flat is on the second floor of a block of council apartments, vintage 1955 or thereabouts.*

The furniture is cheap but sturdy enough, the room is clean, but the eye-catching feature is its untidiness. Household chores like ironing and mending appear to have been started and abandoned: clothes, papers, magazines, food, have been picked up and put down at random. Thus a teapot and a cup and saucer are on the shelf over the fireplace beside a clock. Two or three postcards have been stuck around the side of the mirror above the shelf R. *An old pair of woman's slippers are on the rug* C. *A kitchen table and chairs are set* L.*; an armchair in front of fireplace* R. *Radio on sideboard* U.S., *against wall above table.*

There are three doors. One, U.S., *leads to a small entrance hall and to other parts of the flat. Another* L. *leads to a kitchen, and a third* R. *to* AMY *and* JIM'S *bedroom.*

The stage is empty. We hear the distant chime of church bells.

After a moment AMY *enters from the bedroom. Over a nightdress she is fastening an ancient, stained and shabby dressing-gown. She yawns, rubbing her face with her hands, fighting the pull of sleep. She closes the bedroom door very softly.*

AMY *is a woman of about 38. Her figure is not what it used to be, and her hair hasn't been blessed by the touch of the professional for years. But with* AMY *this is not the outward symptom of an internal disorder or depression, or of defeat. She is, in fact, a supremely undefeated woman, an irrepressible optimist.*

She moves R. *to the mirror and examines her face carefully. She puts out her tongue, grimaces at what she sees. She tidies her hair a little, looks around for her slippers and finds them on the rug. She slips them on to her bare feet. Humming a snatch of "Clair de Lune", she crosses to the kitchen. She stops, remembering that she hasn't got her normal background of music.*

She crosses U.S. *to the radio set on the sideboard, switches it on.*

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There is no response. She thumps the side of the set expertly and is rewarded by a sudden ear-splitting burst of hymn-singing. She turns down the volume hurriedly. She goes to the bedroom door and listens to see if she has disturbed her husband. Satisfied, she crosses towards the kitchen, pausing on the way to take a sweet from a paper bag on the shelf, and pops it into her mouth. A lusty choir is now singing "Onward, Christian Soldiers", and she catches the spirit of it, marching round the room and out to the kitchen in martial style.

JIM PRESTON *enters from the bedroom.* JIM *is a burly, easygoing, patient man of about 42. He is half-dressed.* JIM *frowns a little at the radio, crosses and turns down the volume lower still. Then he returns into the bedroom.*

A moment later AMY *reappears. She frowns at the radio, crosses and turns it up a little. Then she looks around, as though trying to remember where she left something. She clicks her fingers, purses her lips in an effort to concentrate.*

AMY. Teapot—teapot—teapot— (*She finds it on the shelf. She gets a tray and puts the pot on it, together with some crockery. She lifts a pile of clothes, looks around for somewhere to put them and eventually shoves them on another pile on a chair. A magazine on the floor catches her eye, and she tries to read it as she holds the tray, screwing her head round to do so. She puts the tray down, and picks up the magazine. Pushing away some things on the table to create a space, she starts to read an article. She hunts for and finds a stub of pencil in the pocket of her dressing-gown and begins to work out some figures—reading a little—closing her eyes and murmuring some words—and then marking down a figure. She has found one of those quiz articles which award points for answers to queries.*)

(BRIAN PRESTON, *a husky, good-looking seventeen-year-old, comes in from the* U.S. *door. He is wearing a gaudy beachrobe over pyjamas, and has collected the morning paper, which he is glancing at as he enters. He has a slight stutter which is only apparent when he gets excited.*)

BRIAN. Hey, Mum—how about breakfast?

AMY. In a minute, son—won't be a moment. I'll bring it in to you.

(*He turns and is about to wander back to his room.*)

Brian—listen—

BRIAN. Mmm?

AMY. It's this quiz. You have to answer these questions, see—

BRIAN. Eh? Wait. (*He turns off the radio, moves down* C. *to table.*)

AMY. Why did you do that?

BRIAN. I couldn't hear what you were saying. What did you say?

AMY. It's these questions. This quiz. Now—I want your honest opinion. I want you to be absolutely frank, Brian. Now listen—this is the question—

BRIAN. Tell me what it's about first.

AMY. See for yourself. Here—

(*She hands him the magazine. He reads the headline.*)

BRIAN. "Are You a Civilized Woman?" (*He grins.*) The short answer, Mum, the short answer in your case is no. Definitely no.

AMY (*snatching the magazine with a smile*). Brian, stop it! If I score seventy out of a hundred, I pass. So far I think I'm doing very well. But I'm not sure about number five.

BRIAN. Mum, this is trash. Strictly for the dustbin. You want to prove you're a civilized woman? Right—get some breakfast for your son before he collapses from hunger. (*Sits by table* L.)

AMY. But it says here that the quiz was composed by a panel of eminent psychologists.

BRIAN. So?

AMY. People like that wouldn't sit down and write rubbish, would they? It stands to reason.

BRIAN. Why not? What have the psychologists done to win your respect? You want to know the trouble with the world? I'll tell you. Too many psychiatrists and psychologists. It's an indisputable fact.

AMY (*proudly*). Sometimes—the way you talk, Brian—sometimes you amaze me—you know?

BRIAN (*smiling*). Okay, okay. I know. I talk too much. It's my chief failing.

AMY. No, I didn't mean that. You're intelligent, Brian, you don't want to be ashamed of that. I've always envied people with intelligence. You know my trouble? I haven't got any real opinions of my own. That's the truth.

BRIAN (*with a grin, ruffling her hair*). Who needs opinions? You're fascinating as you are.

AMY (*smiling*). I'll do this later.

BRIAN. That's the stuff—get the breakfast. Dad will be shouting for his tea any minute.

AMY. Your father will be sound asleep. It's Sunday, remember.

BRIAN. He wasn't sound asleep the last time I saw him. He was on his way to the bathroom.

AMY. I don't believe you! I told him to have a lie-in today! (*She crosses to the bedroom door, opens it.*) Jimbo! (*Disappointed.*) Oh, Jimbo!

(JIM *comes to the door. He has washed and shaved, and is tucking his shirt into his trousers. He moves down to fireplace* R.)

Jimbo—I asked you to stay in bed.

JIM. I told you, Amy—I've got to work today. I told you last night.

AMY. I thought you were joking. It's Sunday, Jimbo.

JIM. A new shipment of timber came in from the Baltic. Simpson wants the whole lot checked by morning.

AMY. Simpson! Doesn't he know you have a home—and a wife? Doesn't he think you have a life outside the office?

JIM. Why should he? He lives for the business and he expects his staff to do the same.

AMY. The only difference is that it happens to be his business! Tea ready in a minute. (*Crossing to kitchen.*) Sunday—honestly—Sunday! (*She goes into kitchen.*)

BRIAN. You really got to work today, Dad?

JIM (*with a shrug*). I don't like the idea any more than your mother does.

BRIAN. Dad, why don't you stand up to old man Simpson? I mean, all this Sunday work, this overtime—that's pushing it. You should tell him there's a limit. A man is entitled to some life of his own. Hell, there's a limit.

JIM. I'll get that written up on a big sign and hang it in his office.

(*They exchange a smile. The relationship between them is a good one.* AMY *enters to collect the tray with the teapot from table.*)

AMY. You'll overdo it—that's what will happen. You'll overdo it, you'll have a breakdown, and I'll be the one who'll have to nurse you!

(*She goes off with the tray.* BRIAN *crosses to armchair* R., *peers past his father into mirror.*)

BRIAN. You know I'm shaving every day now, Dad? (*He rubs his chin.*) Have to. If I don't shave I look pretty stubbly by five o'clock.

JIM. Who told you that?

BRIAN. Mmm?

JIM (*teasing him*). Christine tell you that? Did she tell you your skin is rough?

BRIAN (*embarrassed, flattered*). Well, you know how it is. Girls sort of notice these things—you know—

JIM. I know. She's a nice girl, Brian. I like her.

BRIAN. At least she's got something between her ears, Dad. I mean—she's got ideas, a point of view; you can discuss things with her.

JIM (*dryly*). She's good-looking, too.

BRIAN (*absently*). Yeh. Yeh—she is quite pretty, I suppose. (*Eagerly.*) Last night, fr'instance, we had a terrific discussion on religion. I've been giving the subject a great deal of serious thought. I shall soon have to make a decision.

JIM. About Christine?

BRIAN. No—no—about religion.

JIM. Oh. In what way?

BRIAN. Well, you see, I happened to tell Christine that I was a Metho-

dist. And she asked me why. I couldn't tell her! Imagine! I've been calling myself a Methodist for years and I don't know why! It's not good enough. I mean—here is a fundamental area of belief—and what do I do? Do I think it out? No. I just put on the family opinions—as if I was putting on one of your shirts!

JIM. You've been putting on my shirts for the past year. (*With a smile.*) Not to mention my ties. Which reminds me— (*Calls.*) Amy!

(*He crosses to* R. *of table.* AMY *appears with the tea, and some fruit juice.*)

AMY (*indicating tea*). It's here, Jimbo.

BRIAN. Dad, I'm serious— (*Crosses towards* JIM.)

JIM (*to* BRIAN). Another time, son. We'll discuss it when I'm not in a hurry. (*To* AMY.) There's a button off this shirt.

AMY. Did you take it from your wardrobe or from the airing cupboard? All the shirts wanting buttons are in the airing cupboard—you shouldn't take those. (*She moves* U.C. *of table.*)

JIM (*patiently*). I took it from the wardrobe.

AMY. Did you? How did it get there? Never mind—I'll put a button on while you're eating your breakfast.

JIM. I don't want anything to eat this morning—just tea.

AMY. You feeling all right, Jimbo?

JIM. I'm fine, Amy! I just don't want any breakfast. All right?

AMY. I suppose so. Only it's unusual. I mean, you always have a cooked breakfast on Sundays. Are you sure you're all right?

BRIAN. Mum—for Pete's sake! (*Crosses to* L. *of table.*)

AMY (*smiling*). All right. Drink your fruit juice, both of you.

BRIAN. It's rich in Vitamin C.

AMY. It certainly is. And Vitamin C helps to build up your resistance.

BRIAN. Mum, don't you know that a person on a normal diet gets all the vitamins he needs? It's an indisputable fact.

AMY. Well, isn't fruit juice part of a normal diet?

BRIAN. Yeh—I suppose so.

AMY (*fondly*). You and your indisputable facts!

JIM (*drinking fruit juice*). There! Everybody happy?

BRIAN. I would be if I wasn't so hungry. If I don't eat soon I shall fall through my trousers and hang myself on my belt. (*Sits in chair at* L. *of table.*)

AMY. I'll get your breakfast now. (*Crosses towards kitchen with teapot.*)

JIM. What about this button?

AMY (*turns back*). The button? Oh, the button. I don't know. In this place a person needs ten pairs of hands. My work-box—where did I put my work-box? I had it here last night. (*She crosses to fireplace, puts teapot on mantelpiece and hunts around for work-box.*) Brian! Don't

stand there like one of the seven pillars of wisdom! Help me find it! Your father's in a hurry.

BRIAN. I wouldn't know where to start.

JIM. Is this it? (*He finds the sewing-box under a pile of clothes on a chair.*)

AMY. Ah. I knew it was somewhere in here. Thank you, dear.

(*She takes it and crosses* U.C. *to table. She gets out needle and thread.* JIM *sits down at the table with a cup of tea.*)

Now, let's see—where's the button?

JIM. Which button?

AMY. The one that came off. Honestly. Where you two would be without me to look after you, I don't know!

(*She goes to the fireplace and takes down a tin. She rattles it. It is full of buttons. During this* BRIAN *gets himself a cup of tea.* AMY *opens the tin, crosses* U.C. *to table, and pours the buttons in a cascade on to the table.*)

There should be a shirt button here. (*She scrabbles among the buttons to find one for the shirt.*)

BRIAN. Could I have a bit of the table, do you think?

AMY. Mmm? O, sorry, dear. (*She clears a space by lifting a pile of papers and putting them on chair* L. *of table.*)

BRIAN. Thanks. Now where do I sit?

AMY. Honestly! I don't know what you think I am, honestly!

BRIAN (*with a grin*). All right, all right.

(*He drops the papers to the floor and sits down, as* AMY *selects a button and starts to sew it on* JIM'S *shirt.*)

AMY. While you're out today I've made up my mind to have a real go at this place. I'm going to tidy it up once and for all.

(*They exchange a little smile.*)

What's funny in that?

JIM. Nothing. (*She pricks his neck with needle.*) Oh!

BRIAN. I didn't say a word.

AMY. I suppose you don't think I'm capable of being tidy? Anyone would think to hear you two that I sat down all day and did nothing. Let me tell you—I'm on my feet twelve and fourteen hours a day sometimes!

BRIAN. Nobody said you didn't work, Mum.

AMY. Thank you. (*She twists the thread around the button, makes one more stitch and then bites the thread off.*) There.

(JIM *rises.*)

I'll get your coat, dear. (*She moves out to the entrance hall to get his coat and clothes brush.*)

BRIAN. Do you get paid for all this extra work, Dad?

JIM. Hah! I'm hoping you'll make a fortune and keep me in my old age.

(AMY *returns with the coat. She helps him on with it, brushes it down. During this:*)

AMY. They expect too much of you, Jimbo. One of these days I'll go and see Mr. Simpson and tell him a thing or two! Just because he hasn't got a family— You got a clean handkerchief?

JIM (*checking*). Yes.

AMY. I was looking forward to this Sunday. I thought if it was nice we could go out this afternoon—take a ride on the Green Line—a little fresh air would do us both good.

JIM. Look—I'll be home about six. We'll go out then for a couple of hours, eh? I might even buy you a drink.

AMY. Oh, I'd like that. If you're not too tired. I know—I'll ask Hilda and Willie to join us—make a foursome. What do you say?

JIM. Do we have to? I'd like to be on our own. (*There is a slight awkwardness in his manner which she does not sense immediately.*)

AMY. We always ask Hilda and Willie, Jimbo.

JIM (*sharply*). I know, I know. So—just for once, just for a change, I'd like to be on our own. Why must we always have other people around?

AMY. How can you call Hilda and Willie other people? They're our friends. Still—just as you like. We'll go on our own. I'll have some supper ready for you at six, then.

JIM. I shan't want anything to eat. I—I'll get something at that place near the office. (*He moves to the door. He is sorry now that he spoke sharply.*) You can ask Hilda if you want, Amy.

AMY. No. You're absolutely right. We're never on our own these days.

JIM. 'Bye, dear. 'Bye, Brian.

BRIAN. So long, Dad.

(JIM *moves out.*)

AMY (*quickly*). Jimbo!

JIM (*pausing*). Yes?

(*She moves* U.C. *to him and holds up her face to be kissed. He kisses her on the cheek.*)

'Bye, dear. Take care of yourself.

(JIM *goes out.* AMY *goes to the outer door with him and can be heard calling as he clatters down the stairs.*)

AMY. 'Bye, Jimbo! (*She comes back carrying a milk bottle. She crosses* D.R.—*pauses by the mirror, glances at herself. She frowns. She notices a pack of cigarettes on the shelf.*) Jimbo's cigarettes! Your father's forgotten his cigarettes. (*Calls.*)

Jimbo! (*She puts the milk on shelf, picks up the basket and makes a run* U.C. *for the door. But as she does so the packet opens and the cigarettes spill to the floor. In exasperation:*) Oh!

BRIAN. You're too late, anyway. Leave 'em—I'll pick them up. (*He moves across and starts to pick them up.*)

AMY. You know what he is for his cigarettes.

BRIAN. He can buy some more, can't he?

(AMY *crosses to mirror again.*)

AMY (*pulling at a hair*). Imagine that! A grey hair. All of a sudden—like a visitor. (*Cheerfully.*) Who cares? At my age I should learn to expect such things. (*She switches on the radio. She thumps it as usual and twiddles the dial until she gets some music. She picks up a Strauss waltz. She smiles in pleasure, and, lifting up her arms, starts to waltz around table* L. *to* R., *finishing* D.S.C.)

BRIAN. Hey!

AMY (*without stopping*). Isn't it beautiful, Brian? I love music. I mean real music—with melody.

BRIAN. I said—hey!

AMY. I know—I heard you. (*She sings this to the music.*)

BRIAN. What about my breakfast?

AMY (*still singing*). Get it yourself. You're old enough.

(*She waltzes round. He advances on her purposefully. He switches off the radio in passing, putting cigarettes on radio.*)

BRIAN. That does it!

(*Seeing him coming, she stops dancing, and dodges him. He chases her round table, trying to corner her.*)

AMY. No, Brian—no—Brian! No!

(*She is enjoying the game, laughing, pretending to be frightened. He catches her* D.S.R., *and clasping his arms round her, gives her a "bear-hug".*)

No, Brian—oh—not one of your hugs— No!

BRIAN. Do I get my breakfast?

AMY. Yes—yes—right away. Oh—I can't breathe!

BRIAN (*releasing her*). Okay—

AMY. Oh, Brian—you don't know your own strength! I bet you've bruised me. (*She picks up knife and cuts off some butter, which we clearly see on the knife. She goes to the kitchen. We hear a crash offstage from kitchen.*)

(*Offstage.*) It's all right. Brian—did you think your father looked tired? (*She comes back to table, still with butter on knife.*)

BRIAN. Yeh. He is a bit frayed around the edges. (*He sits in armchair* R., *one leg across the arm.*)

AMY. He doesn't sleep, you know. I mean—he doesn't sleep properly. I woke up in the middle of the night—he was lying on his back, his eyes open, staring at the ceiling. He needs a holiday.

BRIAN. So let's all pack up and go to the South of France for three months.

AMY (*moving* U.S. *of table*). Wouldn't it be marvellous! I mean—if we had the money—if we could! I've always wanted to travel—Italy, Rome, Florence, Venice—can you see me, sitting back in a gondola, with the gondolier serenading away on a guitar?

BRIAN. They say the canals in Venice are dirty.

AMY. Brian, don't spoil it.

BRIAN. They empty their rubbish into the water—it stands to reason—the canals must be filthy.

AMY. I don't care. One day I shall win thousands of pounds in a quiz or the Pools and we'll all go there. (*She waves the knife up and down to emphasize the point.*)

BRIAN. You'll never win, Mum. People like us don't win.

(AMY *moves* D.S.R. *between armchair and fireplace.*)

AMY. An old widower with only his pension won two hundred thousand pounds last week!

BRIAN. One man in a million.

AMY. It could happen to me! Why not? Is there any reason? One day I shall surprise you. You'll be sitting here with your father, talking as if it were an ordinary, normal day, and I shall walk in with a whole armful of money! And I shall climb right up on that table and scatter it over the pair of you—pound notes and fivers, fluttering down like feathers from a bird, like snow from heaven!

BRIAN. Mum, it's an illusion—a dream.

(AMY *moves to* U.S. *of table.*)

AMY. There's no harm in dreams. Dreams can stimulate a person, Brian. If I won a lot of money—you know what I'd do? First I'd pay for our holiday on the Continent. Then, with what was left, I'd buy tickets—airplane tickets—and send them to people. Anonymously, of course. Like Mrs. Dekker—she's always wanted to go to Australia—she opens her post one morning and there's a ticket to Australia with a little note pinned to it: "From an Anonymous Well-Wisher"— and the Martins—they've never been able to go to Canada to see their boy—never had the money. Hey presto! One morning—what does the postman bring? Two tickets to Canada! (*She laughs in sheer pleasure at the thought.*) Can you see their faces? Can you see the look on their faces!

BRIAN. Your money wouldn't go very far.

AMY. Far enough. You see—if I won a lot of money and kept it, I'd

be afraid it would change our life. I wouldn't want that—I mean—we've got enough—we get along—we're happy. I don't just want to win a big prize so we can live rich—you know what I mean?

BRIAN. Just before you give it away, all that fabulous fortune, remember your son would like a new suit, would you?

AMY. You'll have all the clothes you want! And I'd get your father at least six new suits! (*Seriously.*) You know—I honestly think luck favours some people and not others. Like me, for instance; I've been lucky all my life. Not in money matters—in other things. I've had music playing for me since the day I was born. One day for certain I shall win a really big prize. I honestly believe this, Brian, I honestly do. I feel lucky—know what I mean? (*She laughs, then checks suddenly.*) Oh! (*She puts down the knife on table.*)

BRIAN. Now what's the matter?

AMY. Nothing. Only you shouldn't talk about your luck, they say—that's the surest way to drive it away. (*Thoughtfully.*) Anyway, perhaps I've had my share of good fortune— It's not as if I deserve any more, really. I was thinking this morning when they were singing those hymns on the wireless—I mean, I don't go to church or anything. I never enter a church to pay my respects to God. Oh, Bri—wouldn't it be terrible if I found I'd used up all my luck?

BRIAN. Of all the available mothers, I had to pick a nut like you!

AMY (*dismissing her pessimistic thoughts*). No! It will happen, I know it. I'm confident. One day I'll surprise you—money!—like snow from the ceiling! (*She picks up knife and waltzes out to kitchen.*)

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

The music changes with the scene, switching to the beat of "Lady is a Tramp", with vocal by Frank Sinatra perhaps.

The living-room of GEORGIE'S *flat. It is rather like* GEORGIE—*fresh, neat, cool, feminine, and an obvious contrast to the room in Scene 1. There is nothing expensive about the furnishings. Most of the stuff has been bought cheap and made over with a lick of paint or an attractive cover and the total effect is uncluttered and tasteful.*

There are two doors—one U.S.R. *leads to the bedroom, the other to a small entrance hall,* D.S.L. *The kitchen is incorporated in the living-room—being simply a tiny annexe* U.S., *with sink, racks of dishes, etc., which can be hidden by a trailer-curtain.*

There is a coffee-table D.S.C., *an armchair* R. *of this and a low stool set just above it. A small bureau stands* R. *just below bedroom door.*

JIM *and* GEORGIE *are discovered in an embrace as lights fade in.*

GEORGIE. Love you.

JIM. Love you.

GEORGIE. How long can you stay?

JIM. I've only just got here!

GEORGIE. I like to know. Then I can sort of parcel out the hours—

JIM. I must be home by six.

GEORGIE (*nodding*). Six— I've got some coffee ready.

(*She goes up to the stove for the coffee-pot. She pulls curtain across sink area, comes down to table and starts to pour coffee.* JIM *goes into the bedroom, removing his jacket. Hanging on the bedroom door, clearly visible, is a flimsy robe, belonging to* GEORGIE. JIM *re-enters buttoning on a cardigan. During this:*)

JIM. It's a wonderful day. Really feels like spring at last. Would you like to take a walk across the Heath?

GEORGIE. Would you?

JIM. Not particularly. I'd rather stay here—

GEORGIE. So would I. Unanimous— Besides, I've something rather special to tell you, Mr. Preston. Rather special.

JIM. What's that?

GEORGIE. In a minute, when you're properly relaxed.

(*She lights his cigarette as he settles in the armchair,* D.S.R.)

JIM. What did you do yesterday?

GEORGIE. Thought of you.

JIM. Apart from that.

GEORGIE. Went shopping in the morning. In the afternoon I did some washing and mending. Evening? I went to the local flicks.

JIM. Any good?

GEORGIE. So-so. Not good, not bad. Passed the time.

(*She hands him his coffee. There is a tiny moment of awkwardness, which she covers quickly.*)

(*Sits on stool.*) Have you ever tried a pipe, Preston?

JIM. The way you call me Preston!

GEORGIE. It distinguishes me from all your other girls. Did you ever smoke a pipe?

JIM. Once—years back. Couldn't get on with it.

GEORGIE. Pity. I always wanted to fall in love with a pipe-smoker. You know how it is when you're young—I used to have a very clear picture of my ideal hero—the tough, rugged, pipe-smoking type—you know—

JIM. And you got lumbered with me.

GEORGIE. I got lumbered with you. (*A light kiss.*) You're pretty rugged, come to think of it.

JIM. Thank you.

GEORGIE. Don't let it go to your head. Matter of fact, when I first saw you I wasn't at all impressed. Simpson had been bawling you out, and you looked like you hated the whole world. I thought—murder—have I got to share an office with that!

JIM. Well, if you must know, I felt much the same about you. You were so—so sort of remote, aloof—you know, the type who looks down her nose at the world, as though it isn't good enough for her.

GEORGIE. Did I really give that impression? Really?

JIM. Really—

GEORGIE (*rises*). It's always a bit of an ordeal starting a new job. I suppose I was shy.

JIM. I don't believe that!

GEORGIE. Why not? (*Sharply.*) Don't you think I'm capable of shyness? (*She moves away a little towards* U.S.L.)

JIM. No— I didn't mean— It's just that you always seem as though you have complete control over a situation—you know? Calm, unruffled—

GEORGIE. I suppose I do sort of tighten up when I'm worried or embarrassed— Doesn't mean I don't feel worried. Funny the impression you can give people— I've always thought of myself as being rather weak, as a matter of fact.

JIM. That's definitely not true.

(GEORGIE *moves down to him, smiling.*)

GEORGIE. How did we get on to this? Let's change the subject. I've got some veal for lunch. Do you like roast veal?

JIM. Marvellous.

GEORGIE. I'll put the oven on. (*Moves up, pauses.*) Do you want Yorkshire pudding with the veal?

JIM. Naturally.

GEORGIE. You're a barbarian, you know that? Yorkshire pudding with roast beef—yes—all right. But with veal—ugh.

JIM. It's Sunday. You can't dish up dinner on Sunday without a Yorkshire pudding.

GEORGIE. All right, all right. But one of these Sundays I shall surprise you. I shall make an enormous risotto, or a paella—kebab maybe. Something foreign and exotic. That'll shake you. Yorkshire pudding!

(*She goes behind curtain of kitchen area. He follows her up to* U.S.L.)

JIM. I like that dress.

GEORGIE (*re-appearing from opposite side of curtain* R.). Mmmm?

JIM. I said I like the dress. (*He crosses* R. *to her. He kisses her.*)

GEORGIE (*smiling*). Do you know what I was thinking this morning?

JIM. No?

GEORGIE. Noses.

JIM. What?

GEORGIE. Noses. As I was cleaning my teeth I started thinking about noses. You must admit—it's a curious object—a lump stuck in the middle of your face with two holes in it.

JIM. You're a nut case, you know that? (*Rubs his nose against hers.*) That's what the Eskimos do.

GEORGIE. Why?

JIM. I suppose it's too cold to uncover their lips.

(*She rubs her nose against his experimentally.*)

GEORGIE. Mmm— No, I prefer our method. (*She takes his arm and guides him down to armchair. She sits on the arm.*) You were saying about yesterday. I mean—when you come to work it out—what did I do? A whole day—twenty-four hours out of my life, and what have I got to show for it?

JIM. Some clean laundry.

GEORGIE. No. I mean—there was nothing of real value about the entire day. It just sort of slipped over the horizon. Frightens me, you know that? I mean—not just yesterday. So many days—they come, they go, and they don't leave any sort of mark. Do you ever think of things like that, Preston?

JIM. Too often.

GEORGIE. Every day should have some special meaning, shouldn't it? Something by which you can remember it. I mean—you can't call it back, can you? Frightens me.

JIM. If I added up all the time that has slipped through my fingers—

GEORGIE. I know— (*Thoughtfully.*) Darling—do you know anything about Australia? (*She gets up and goes to bureau* R. *and picks up an air-mail letter.*)

JIM. Australia—we're hopping about a bit, this morning, aren't we?

GEORGIE. Seriously—this is the something special I warned you about.

JIM. I don't know much. Except that it's big. It has kangaroos, koala bears—

GEORGIE. And timber.

JIM. What?

GEORGIE. Timber. Trees—Western Australia has a very important timber industry—

JIM (*puzzled, smiling*). What is this? What's all the mystery?

(*She comes down and sits on stool.*)

GEORGIE. I've got a confession to make. You know I have an uncle in Western Australia—I wrote and told him about us. You didn't mind?

JIM. You told him that—

GEORGIE. I told him that I'd fallen in love with a wonderful man, and that we were going to be married—

JIM. And what did he say?

GEORGIE. He said it was about time. But—and here's the point—I also told him about your job, what you did at Simpsons', your experience in the timber trade—

JIM. Yes?

GEORGIE. Well—read what he has to say about that! Here—this bit—

(*She hands him the letter, waits happily while he reads it.*)

JIM. A job—

GEORGIE. A good job.

JIM. But he doesn't know me.

GEORGIE. He knows me—and I told him a lot about you. He wouldn't make the offer if he didn't mean it. Preston—don't you see? This could be the answer. A new country, a new beginning. You've always wanted to travel. We could put everything behind us. (*Happily.*) Apart from anything else, they have wonderful weather out there. And look at this bit—at the end. (*Turns letter for him.*) He's even offered to advance our passage money, and we can pay him back later!

JIM. It's a very good offer.

GEORGIE. Very good! It's fabulous! (*She kneels beside him.*)

JIM. Mind you, I don't know about their timbers.

GEORGIE. You'd soon learn. I mean—you know how to organize the import and export of timber—that's what he has in mind. He says they're crying out for good men.

JIM. We couldn't go for quite a while.

GEORGIE. Why not?

JIM. Well—a divorce takes—

GEORGIE. We can go out there and get married later, when it comes through. What's to stop us? What's to stop us going next week, come to that?

JIM. Next week!

GEORGIE. Next month, then. The point is, we can go soon. We've got this to look forward to—

JIM. Suppose it didn't work out?

GEORGIE. Then you'd find something else. Australia is a big country—opening up all the time. This was waiting for me when I got home on Friday night. Lying on the mat. I don't know how I contained

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