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BRUSH WITH A BODY

A Play in Three Acts

by Maurice McLoughlin

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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BRUSH WITH A BODY

Produced by City Stage Productions Ltd and Anna Deere Wiman at the St Martin's Theatre, London, on the 19th July 1962, with the following cast of characters:

(in the order of their appearance)

SARAH WALLING	<i>Bernadette Milnes</i>
CYNTHIA WALLING, her sister	<i>Joyce Marlow</i>
MR FLAHERTY, an Irish chimney-sweep	<i>Patrick McAlinney</i>
MRS D'ARCY, the Wallings' housekeeper	<i>Gladys Henson</i>
HENRY WALLING, the brother	<i>Jack Watling</i>
PAUL MARTELL, a young actor	<i>Raymond Smith</i>
SYBIL WALLING, the mother	<i>Mary Merrall</i>
DETECTIVE INSPECTOR HARDY	<i>J. Grant Anderson</i>
SERGEANT BRAY	<i>Gordon Cave</i>
ROSITA HERNANDEZ	<i>Gilgi Hauser</i>
THE HON. PAMELA COLEFAX, Henry's fiancée	<i>Pat Gilber</i>

Directed by RICHARD DALE

Setting by JOHN BARRIE

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the Play passes in the morning-room of Sybil Walling's house in Hampstead

ACT I

A summer morning

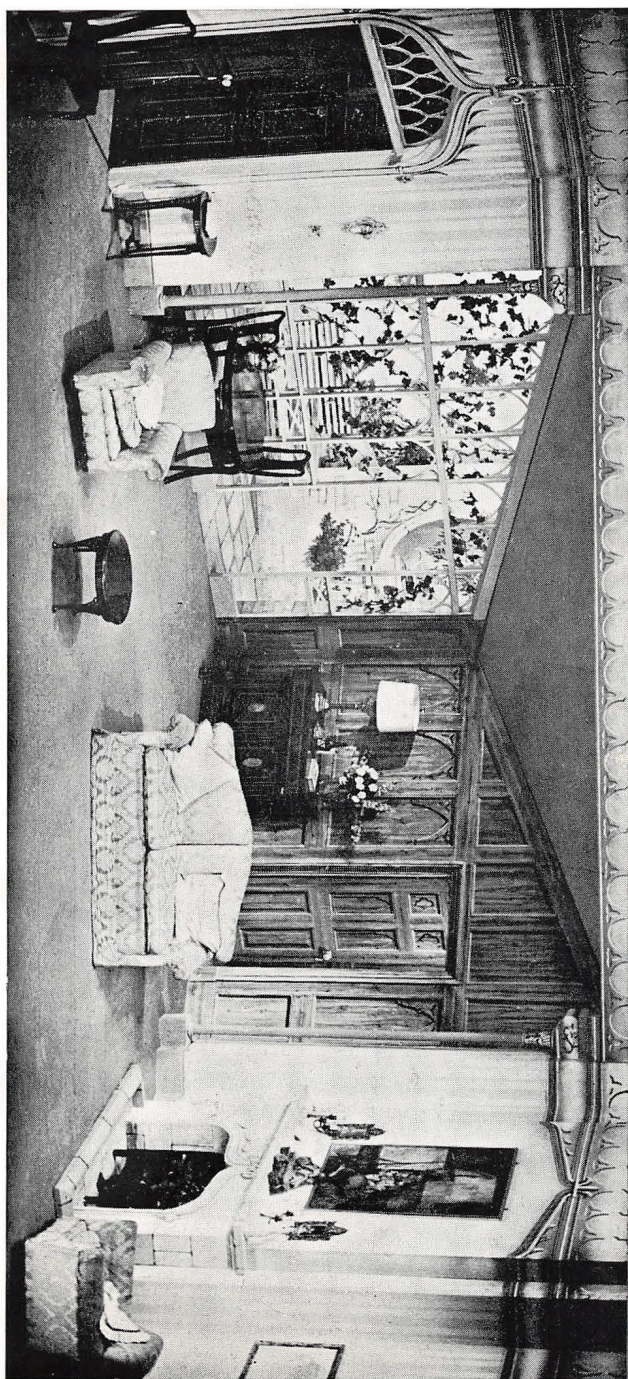
ACT II

The next morning

ACT III

Immediately following

Time—the present



To face page 1—Brush With a Body

ACT I

SCENE—*The morning-room of Sybil Walling's house in Hampstead. A summer morning.*

It is a large, rambling, three-storied house. Double doors R lead to the entrance hall and stairs. A door up L leads to the kitchen and back entrance to the house. Up C there is a large window with a glass-panelled door leading to a high-walled garden, which has access to the back and side entrances to the house. The fireplace is L. Up RC there is a round dining-table with two upright chairs R and L of it. A small table with a telephone on it stands above the doors R and an upright chair is down R. Easy chairs stand RC and down L, with a sofa to match LC. There is a sideboard up C, a low coffee-table down C, and a table behind the sofa.

When the CURTAIN rises, SARAH WALLING is seated L of the dining-table finishing her breakfast. She is aged about nineteen. She is reading a copy of "The Stage" and has a transistor radio on the table beside her, playing a "pop" number. Her table-napkin is on the floor beside her. CYNTHIA WALLING, her elder sister, enters from the hall. CYNTHIA is in her late twenties. She carries a drawer containing a quantity of old papers, etc.

CYNTHIA. Haven't you finished yet, Sarah?

SARAH *(without looking up)* Nearly.

CYNTHIA *(crossing to the table behind the sofa)* Hurry, then, and turn that thing off. *(She puts the drawer on the table)*

SARAH. Cynthia dear, just try to remember while you're on holiday that I'm not a member of your sixth form.

CYNTHIA *(looking at the papers in the drawer)* I hope my sixth form have more sense than to sit about at this time in the morning listening to that noise. Turn it off.

SARAH. That record was requested by two Horsham housewives and a schoolteacher in Sutton Coldfield—I can't think why. *(She switches off the transistor)*

CYNTHIA. Has Mrs D'Arcy arrived?

SARAH. Haven't seen her.

CYNTHIA. She knows we have the sweep coming—I asked her to be early. I'll look through this later. I can't believe mother really wants all this old stuff of father's. *(She moves to L of Sarah)*

SARAH. Ask her when she comes home.

CYNTHIA. She'll say "yes", and then we'll never get rid of it.

SARAH. I think it's unfair changing her room while she's away. She might not like it.

(CYNTHIA picks up Sarah's napkin, rolls it, puts it in its ring and lays it on the table)

CYNTHIA. It will be much better for her. Henry says so.

SARAH (*pouring coffee*) Henry doesn't care, he hardly ever sees her. When he doesn't stay at his consulting rooms, he's off watching that ghastly Pamela Colefax prancing all over England on a horse. (*She finishes her toast*)

CYNTHIA. Sarah!

SARAH. He might as well be engaged to a centaur.

CYNTHIA. Don't be ridiculous. Finish your coffee then clear the table. If Mrs D'Arcy comes send her up to me. (*She crosses to the hall door*) You can come, too.

SARAH. I'm supposed to be meeting Paul Martell this morning.

CYNTHIA. He'll have to wait until we've finished.

SARAH. Oh!

(*CYNTHIA exits to the hall. SARAH rises, picks up her cup of coffee and takes it with her paper to the sofa. She puts the coffee on the floor beside the sofa, sits on the sofa, puts her feet up and reads her paper.*)

MR FLAHERTY *appears outside the open garden door and taps on it. He is in his fifties, is scruffily dressed in overalls and has a slightly sooty face. He has a copy of the "New Statesman" sticking out of his pocket*)

FLAHERTY. Dermot Ignatius Eamon McMorragh Flaherty, for to sweep your chimneys. Will I come in?

SARAH. Hello.

FLAHERTY. Me cart's be the side gate there. Will I bring me brushes in?

SARAH. You'd better see my sister, she's the organizer around here.

FLAHERTY (*coming into the room*) Is the chimney upstairs or down?

SARAH. Up. I'll go and tell her when I've finished my coffee. Do you want a cup?

FLAHERTY (*moving to the table*) Coffee is it? Do you have any tea?

SARAH. Not with breakfast.

FLAHERTY. Ah, well. Don't bother, I'll pour it meself. (*He pours a cup of coffee*)

(*SARAH returns to her paper*)

Ye haven't finished your toast.

SARAH. No. Would you like it?

FLAHERTY. It's a bit burnt, but never mind. (*He butters a piece of toast*) Do you have any lemon marmalade?

SARAH (*looking up at him*) No.

FLAHERTY (*spreading marmalade on his toast*) A pity, I don't care for orange. All them bright bits of peel in it, y'know. (*He puts the toast on a plate, picks up his cup of coffee and takes toast and coffee to the easy chair* *RC*) I like the lemon stuff with a golliwog on the lid. (*He settles himself in the easy chair*)

(*SARAH watches, fascinated*)

Nice place you've got here. (*He takes out his "New Statesman" and puts on his spectacles. He takes a swig of coffee and a bite of toast as he reads*)

(SARAH, by this time, is almost on the edge of her seat)

SARAH. Are you quite comfortable?

FLAHERTY. Oh, yes. What d'ye think Sir Alfred Munnings would have said about Picasso's Blue Period?

SARAH. I beg your pardon?

FLAHERTY. 'Tis a competition in the *New Statesman*.

SARAH. Oh.

FLAHERTY. Listen to this. (*He reads*) "Let us imagine", it says, "that Sir Alfred Munnings had been asked to write the foreword to the catalogue of a Picasso exhibition and *vice versa*. Readers are invited to submit their ideas of the results. Entries should not exceed five hundred words." That'd be two hundred and fifty words each, I suppose.

SARAH. I wouldn't know.

FLAHERTY. You don't go in for these competitions?

SARAH. Not even if they're five words each.

(CYNTHIA enters briskly from the hall)

CYNTHIA (*as she enters*) Sarah, I've been thinking . . . (*She stops as she sees Flaherty*)

FLAHERTY (*rising*) Good day to ye, ma'am.

CYNTHIA. Are you the sweep?

FLAHERTY. I am. Dermot Ignatius Eamon McMorragh Flaherty. (*He resumes his seat*)

SARAH. We were doing a competition in the *New Statesman*.

CYNTHIA (*crossing to R of the sofa*) You were what?

FLAHERTY. Sure I won meself a book token not a month since.

CYNTHIA. Could you postpone this week's entry until you've swept the chimney?

FLAHERTY. We'll discuss it later. (*He feels around his mouth with his tongue*) One o' them bits of peel is stuck in me tooth. (*He rises and takes his cup back to the table*) The coffee was on the cold side, too.

CYNTHIA. I'm sorry your breakfast wasn't satisfactory, Mr Flaherty.

FLAHERTY. Ah sure, how were you to know I was coming for a cup of coffee. (*He moves up c*) Will I bring me cart round to the front door?

CYNTHIA. No. (*She picks up Flaherty's plate and puts it on the table*) Bring your things through here.

(FLAHERTY turns to go)

I don't want a mess at the front.

FLAHERTY (*stopping and turning*) Did I hear the word "mess" from your lips? I could dance all over your house with a bag of soot

under each arm and a brush balanced on the tip o' me nose and not a fleck of soot would ye find.

(FLAHERTY exits by the garden door)

CYNTHIA (moving to R of the sofa) What are you thinking about, Sarah? You know what there is to be done and here you are reading the *New Statesman* with the sweep.

SARAH. What was Picasso's Blue Period?

CYNTHIA. Would you please clear that breakfast table.

(The front door off R is heard to open and close)

MRS D'ARCY (off) It's only me.

CYNTHIA. Thank goodness. That's Mrs D'Arcy.

(SARAH rises, crosses to the table and reluctantly stacks the crockery on the tray.)

MRS D'ARCY enters from the hall. She is in her fifties and is dressed very smartly in a picture hat and costume. She has a very prominent nose)

MRS D'ARCY (crossing to R of Cynthia) I'm sorry I'm late.

CYNTHIA. Mrs D'Arcy, you're very late. I particularly wanted you here early. (She collects Sarah's coffee-cup from the floor)

MRS D'ARCY. I'm sorry, Miss Walling. I was just coming out to come when this arrived. (She flourishes a letter) I had to change into me best. I can't stay.

CYNTHIA. What do you mean, you can't stay? (She moves to Mrs D'Arcy) What is that?

MRS D'ARCY. It's from Sir Robert Brunning, my plastic surgeon. He's going to do me nose at last.

CYNTHIA. But the sweep's here.

MRS D'ARCY. Yes, miss. I'm sorry, but I must go—I said I'd be free any time he could fit me in. (She crosses to the fireplace)

CYNTHIA (handing the cup to Sarah) You won't be at the hospital all day.

MRS D'ARCY. No. He says he only wants to look at my nose today. But you never can tell. Last time the dentist said that things was a bit slack and he whipped three teeth out. (She examines her nose in the mirror over the fireplace)

CYNTHIA (picking up the newspaper from the sofa) Do get back as soon as you can. (She moves to L of the sofa) Would you have time to take the tray before you go? (She moves up c and puts the paper on the sideboard)

MRS D'ARCY. Oh, yes, I'll have time for that. (She sighs) I only wish D'Arcy was here to see it when it's done. "Sheila," 'e used to say, "when the pools come up, we'll have that nose of yours ironed out." (She crosses to the table and helps Sarah to stack the tray) Does Mr Henry know Sir Robert Brunning? Do they work together?

SARAH (moving R) My brother's a psychiatrist.

MRS D'ARCY. Well, they all stick together, don't they, like plumbers and decorators. It's going to cost a hundred pounds or more. I tried the National Health but they wouldn't wear me. Like my 'at?

SARAH. Lovely. I thought you were off to Ascot.

MRS D'ARCY. No, not Ascot. It was for the Derby, nineteen-thirty-one. Take my tip, never throw an 'at away. (*She picks up the loaded tray, crosses and looks in the mirror*) Oh, dear, I do wish D'Arcy was alive to see me new nose, I'm sure 'e'd think his insurance money was well spent.

(*MRS D'ARCY exits to the kitchen. SARAH moves to the telephone and lifts the receiver*)

CYNTHIA. Who are you telephoning?

SARAH. Paul. I told him I might meet him for coffee.

CYNTHIA. If you want to make arrangements like that you should get up earlier.

SARAH (*replacing the receiver*). Now don't take it out on me because Mrs D'Arcy is having time off.

CYNTHIA (*moving below the sofa*). You seem to forget this is my holiday—I've done nothing but work.

SARAH (*crossing to RC*). Whose fault is that? No-one asked you to turn father's old study into mother's bedroom.

CYNTHIA. Henry thinks it's wrong for her to have her room right at the top of the house.

SARAH. Henry is like all psychiatrists, he's never happy until he has *something* wrong with everyone.

(*HENRY WALLING enters from the hall. He is in his thirties and is smartly but soberly dressed. He wears heavy, horn-rimmed spectacles, and carries a brief-case*)

I'm sure he invents half those complexes.

HENRY. I can assure you I don't, Sarah. Why is the front door open?

CYNTHIA. Mrs D'Arcy probably left it open for the sweep. Henry, why are you here so early?

HENRY. I'm having a little difficulty with one of my patients. She's run away.

SARAH (*crossing to the sideboard*). From you? (*She picks up her newspaper*)

CYNTHIA (*sharply*). Sarah! (*She moves c*) Who is she, Henry?

HENRY (*crossing to R of Cynthia*). Rosita Hernandez. The Araguyan Ambassador's stepdaughter.

CYNTHIA. What's the matter with her?

HENRY. She never got on with her stepfather. Given her very bad inhibitions. I could hardly get her on the couch at first—and now she's cured I couldn't get her off it. She tried to make me a substitute for her father.

SARAH. She must be in a bad way. (*She moves and sits on the upstage arm of the easy chair L*)

HENRY. That'll do, Sarah. I've made excellent headway with the girl. I can't understand what's gone wrong.

SARAH. Probably your diagnosis.

CYNTHIA. Why are you here?

HENRY. She's developed a dependence on me, so she may be coming here. If she does, let me know at once.

(*CYNTHIA moves to the table and folds the cloth.*)

(*MRS D'ARCY enters from the kitchen*)

MRS D'ARCY. Well, I'll be off, now, Miss Cynthia. (*She crosses to Henry*) Oh, Mr Henry—I'm just off to Sir Robert Brunning, 'e's going to do me nose. Do you know him?

HENRY. I have met him. He's very expensive, you know.

MRS D'ARCY. You're telling me. If I mention your name would there be a discount?

HENRY. I hardly think so. I don't know him well. (*He puts his brief-case on the table*) Has anyone called for me today or yesterday?

MRS D'ARCY. I don't know, sir. I've only just come.

(*FLAHERTY enters from the garden with his brushes*)

FLAHERTY (*to Henry*) Good day to you, sir. (*He glances at Mrs D'Arcy*) This will be the lady of the house? (*He does a slight "take" at Mrs D'Arcy's nose*)

MRS D'ARCY. I'm the housekeeper. (*She crosses to R*) Come this way. I'll be back as soon as I can, Miss Cynthia. And next time you see me, my nose'll be straighter than them brushes. I'm going to have it done.

FLAHERTY (*crossing to R*) The sooner the better.

(*MRS D'ARCY and FLAHERTY exit to the hall*)

HENRY. Is that the sweep?

SARAH (*rising*) Is that psychiatry—or did you guess from his brushes? (*She drops her paper into the easy chair L and moves above the sofa*)

CYNTHIA (*to Henry*) I'm having an electric fire put in mother's new room. I thought I'd have the chimney swept first.

HENRY. An excellent idea. Is the room finished?

CYNTHIA. We have to tidy up after the sweep. It should be ready when she comes home tomorrow.

SARAH (*turning over the papers in the drawer on the table behind the sofa*) Cynthia is throwing away father's old papers.

HENRY. Quite right. This clinging to the past is most unhealthy.

SARAH. Here's an old photograph of all of us.

(*HENRY moves to R of Sarah*)

I was rather an attractive baby. You look dreadful, Cynthia—your knickers are hanging down.

(CYNTHIA puts the folded cloth on the table and moves to R of Henry)

HENRY (taking the photograph from Sarah) I remember that. I got my cricket colours that year. First time I wore that blazer.

CYNTHIA. It was taken when we were evacuated. It must have been the year father was killed.

SARAH. Could I have it to show Paul?

CYNTHIA (taking the photograph from Henry) No, you could not. He's the last person to see it.

SARAH. He'd love to see you looking like that.

CYNTHIA. I'm sure he would, but he's not going to.

SARAH. I know you both hate Paul Martell but mother likes him. (She moves to the fireplace)

HENRY (moving below the sofa) I wouldn't call mother an astute judge of character. She spoils you, Sarah. The whole idea of letting you attend a drama school is ridiculous. All that has come out of it so far is that unemployed actor.

(FLAHERTY, unnoticed by the others, appears at the hall door and leans on the jamb. CYNTHIA puts the photograph in the drawer)

SARAH. He's writing a play. The time will come when Martell will be a household word.

HENRY. His name already is a household word. He's a typically uncouth adolescent. He's only interested in your money.

SARAH. My money! I haven't any.

HENRY (loudly) No, but mother has and the sooner he finds out it isn't yours, the better.

(CYNTHIA picks up the drawer, turns and sees Flaherty)

CYNTHIA. Sh! (She puts the drawer on the table up RC)

FLAHERTY (coming easily into the room) Don't mind me, miss. I'm from a big family meself. One of me sisters ran off with a tinker. What a shenanigans that caused. (He crosses to the garden door) Better get me sack. There might be a bit of soot.

CYNTHIA. You won't find any soot. The chimney hasn't been used for years.

FLAHERTY. I'll get me sack, all the same. Never know what ye'll find. Couple of dead cats up me last one.

(FLAHERTY exits to the garden)

HENRY (to Sarah) The money we spent on your education was completely wasted. You're ready to marry the first lout that looks at you.

SARAH. You've only met Paul once.

HENRY. That was enough. I'm trained to observe people, don't forget. His motives were very plain.

SARAH (*impassioned*) I can decide who I want to marry without being psychoanalysed. I don't care if my education is wasted—I don't care!

(FLAHERTY *enters from the garden carrying his sacks*)

HENRY. Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself.

CYNTHIA (*seeing Flaherty*) Shhhh!

FLAHERTY. Don't be shushing them.

(SARAH *sits in the easy chair* L. HENRY *crosses to the fireplace*)

Let them have their say. I mind me father saying he'd throw this tinker I'm speakin' of into the bog. The last time I seen them they was crackin' a bottle celebrating me sister's seventh son.

CYNTHIA (*crossing and putting the tablecloth on the sideboard*) Suppose you tell us about your family some other time, Mr Flaherty. I should like that chimney swept.

FLAHERTY (*crossing to the hall door*) Sure enough, it'll be done. I don't like to hear the young girl say education is wasted. It never is. I was head boy at a Christian Brother's school meself and I never regretted it. And how much better for you to have a feller like me for to sweep your chimney.

HENRY. If you ever get round to it.

(CYNTHIA *transfers a tray of drinks from the sideboard to the table behind the sofa*)

FLAHERTY. Ye'll not know I've been in the room.

(FLAHERTY *exits to the hall*)

HENRY (*crossing to R*) He's certainly never out of this one. (*To Sarah*) I'll deal with you later. I must get back.

(FLAHERTY *enters from the hall*)

(*To Flaherty*) What do you want now?

FLAHERTY (*crossing to Cynthia*) About the brush, ma'am.

CYNTHIA. What about it?

FLAHERTY. Will I give ye a shout when I think it's through?

CYNTHIA. No, thank you.

FLAHERTY. You must see the brush come through. Tell you what I'll do. When it ought to be through I'll stamp on the floor above—like this. (*He stamps violently*) That'll let you know.

(FLAHERTY *exits to the hall*)

HENRY. Do you have to have a man like that to sweep the chimney?

CYNTHIA. He was all we could get at short notice.

HENRY. I must get back. Miss Parker may have heard something about Rosita.

CYNTHIA. We'd better wash up, Sarah.

(SARAH rises)

We can't do anything upstairs until he's finished.

(*There is a thud from above. They all start*)

That brush *can't* be through yet.

HENRY. What the devil is that?

SARAH. There's the first dead cat.

CYNTHIA (*crossing to Henry*) Will you be here tomorrow?

HENRY. I don't know. I'd like to meet mother if I can. But there's this Hernandez business and I'm supposed to be taking Pamela down to Sussex—she's jumping there.

CYNTHIA. You must bring her to dinner next week. (*She crosses, collects the tablecloth from the sideboard and hands it to Sarah*)

SARAH. Yes, do. She needn't dismount—she can have her meals off the mantelpiece.

HENRY. If she does come, I sincerely hope you'll be out.

SARAH. If you give me due warning I'll make a point of it.

(SARAH exits to the kitchen)

HENRY. It's essential that mother sleeps in that room. She has a fixation about father's old study.

(*There is another thud from above*)

CYNTHIA. From the noise he's making there won't be any room left for her to sleep in. Good-bye, Henry.

HENRY. Good-bye, Cynthia.

(*CYNTHIA crosses and exits to the kitchen. HENRY collects his brief-case and moves to the hall door.*)

FLAHERTY enters from the hall. He looks shaken and carries a large, dusty, black and white shoe

What is it now? What's that?

FLAHERTY. A shoe.

HENRY. I can see that. Is it yours?

FLAHERTY. I'd say it was yours—'twas up your chimney. Come down and give me a crack on the head. (*He rubs his head*)

HENRY. No great damage seems to have been done.

FLAHERTY (*eyeing the drinks*) Me head's buzzing. I think it's the shock.

HENRY. Sit down. I'll get you a drink. (*He puts his brief-case on the right arm of the sofa, moves to the table behind the sofa and pours a whisky*)

FLAHERTY (*sitting in the easy chair* *RC*) John Jameson, please. Slap on me head it came, heel first. Will I put it on the floor?

HENRY. Put it where you like. (*He crosses to Flaherty with the drink*)

(*FLAHERTY puts the shoe on the floor and takes the drink*)

FLAHERTY. Thank you. (*He sniffs*) This isn't John Jameson.

HENRY. It's Vat sixty-nine. I don't drink Irish whiskey.

FLAHERTY. You should. Aren't you havin' one? *(He drinks)*

HENRY. I don't drink in the mornings, thank you.

FLAHERTY. You'll drink *this* morning.

HENRY. If you're sure you're feeling better, I'll be on my way. I have an appointment elsewhere.

FLAHERTY. Ye have one with me first. *(He picks up the shoe)*

HENRY. What are you talking about? You're not trying to hold me responsible for the injury.

FLAHERTY. I hadn't thought of it.

HENRY. Don't. I'm a member of the medical profession.

FLAHERTY. Then this shoe should be right up your street, Mr Walling.

HENRY *(impatiently)*. What are you talking about? Oh, throw the damned thing away.

FLAHERTY. And what about the other one?

HENRY. You mean there are two? Well, throw them both away. I don't know what all this fuss is about. *(He moves to R of the sofa)*

FLAHERTY. Ah, sure, the shoes is nothing. *(He rises)* It's what they was on. The other one isn't down yet.

HENRY. What they were on?

FLAHERTY *(putting the shoe and his glass on the coffee-table)*. I'll tell ye the way it was. I had me first length of brush up a few feet and—wham! There's a stoppage. I shoved a bit harder—no move. So I takes out the brush and sticks me hand up the flue. What do I see? Two shoes, on a ledge. While I was wavin' me flashlight one of them come crack on me skull. I takes another look and I see they was bein' worn.

HENRY. Worn?

FLAHERTY. Indeed they were. One of them still is.

HENRY. Worn—by whom?

FLAHERTY. There ye have me. And the feller who worn 'em won't be tellin' ye. For there's little enough left of him.

HENRY. *Left of him?*

FLAHERTY. I'd say it was many years since he went up your chimney.

HENRY. Are you trying to tell me there's someone up that chimney? Is this some sort of joke?

FLAHERTY. It was no joke for the feller up there.

HENRY. A body—in our chimney?

FLAHERTY. It's there right enough. Will you take a look? *(He waves his flashlight)* I have my flashlight. *(He turns to the hall door)*

(SARAH enters from the kitchen and moves down L)

HENRY. I—I suppose I'd better. *(He snatches the shoe from the coffee-table)* Don't leave that there!

SARAH *(moving below the sofa)*. Good heavens, what's that?

HENRY *(turning to Sarah)*. Oh—it's—er—one of Mr Fogarty's.

FLAHERTY. "Flaherty!"

HENRY. Yes, yes, of course. Mr Flaherty was just—er—showing it to me.

SARAH (*moving to L of Henry*) What on earth for?

FLAHERTY. I found it up—

HENRY (*moving to Flaherty; quickly*) —stairs. (*He nudges Flaherty*) In his sack.

FLAHERTY (*falling in*) Ah, yes indeed, miss. I didn't know it was there. I've been asking Mr Walling what he thinks of it. You see that, Mr Walling, ye wouldn't get a shoe like that these days.

HENRY (*looking in horror at the shoe*) No. It's a very fine shoe indeed.

FLAHERTY (*taking the shoe from Henry*) If you're coming to view this little obstruction, we'd better go.

HENRY. Yes. Yes, of course.

SARAH. Have you found another dead cat?

HENRY. *No!*

FLAHERTY. It's something I thought Mr Walling might help me with. A little difficulty.

(HENRY crosses to the hall door)

SARAH (*moving to L of Flaherty*) I'll give Mr Flaherty a hand. We can manage.

HENRY. *No!* You stay here.

(HENRY rushes out to the hall, dragging FLAHERTY with him. SARAH stares after them, aghast, then picks up Flaherty's glass.

CYNTHIA enters from the kitchen and crosses to Sarah)

CYNTHIA. What are doing, Sarah?

SARAH (*crossing to c*) Henry's just gone rushing upstairs with the sweep.

CYNTHIA. Henry has? With the sweep? Don't be ridiculous!

SARAH. It's the truth, I tell you. They were tossing a large shoe back and forth. (*She waves the glass*) They've been drinking whisky, too.

CYNTHIA. Are you sure you haven't been drinking whisky? (*She takes the glass from Sarah*)

SARAH. It's the truth, I tell you. (*She crosses to the hall door*) I think something has gone wrong up there.

CYNTHIA (*putting the glass on the coffee-table*) Why didn't you go up? You know Henry is in a hurry.

SARAH. I offered to. He nearly shrieked the place down.

CYNTHIA. I can't see Henry wanting to help the sweep.

SARAH. I can't think what's come over him. He looked as though he'd jumped straight off his own consulting couch.

CYNTHIA (*crossing to the hall door*) Well, I'm going up to see what's the matter,

(HENRY enters from the hall, crosses to the table behind the sofa, pours himself a stiff drink, then moves below the sofa and sits on it, staring straight before him. CYNTHIA and SARAH watch him, fascinated)

(She crosses to R of the sofa) What's the matter with you, Henry?

SARAH. Was there something up the chimney?

(HENRY takes a gulp)

HENRY. There was—(he gulps) someone up there.

SARAH (moving RC) You mean that Mr Flaherty was stuck up there?

HENRY. No—not Flaherty.

CYNTHIA. Then *who*? Henry, what has come over you?

HENRY. He—he's found a body up there.

CYNTHIA. A *body*? You mean a human body?

HENRY. Yes. What's left of one.

CYNTHIA. Let's get this straight. You mean there's a dead body up *our* chimney?

(HENRY nods, rises, moves behind the sofa and pours another drink for himself)

HENRY. How did it get there? (He moves and sits at the left end of the sofa, taking his drink and the bottle of whisky with him)

CYNTHIA. Henry, are you sure there's no mistake about this?

HENRY. I've seen it myself—with Flaherty's flashlight.

CYNTHIA. But how long has it been there?

(FLAHERTY enters from the hall, carrying the shoe. SARAH and CYNTHIA stare at it. FLAHERTY crosses, picks up his glass and sits R of Henry on the sofa. HENRY pours some whisky into Flaherty's glass)

HENRY. Years. It's nearly gone. One of its shoes fell on Mr Flaherty.

FLAHERTY. Did you tell them? (He drinks)

(CYNTHIA crosses above the sofa to L of it)

HENRY. I had to.

(SARAH moves to R of the sofa)

FLAHERTY. I'd say it was best. (He looks at his glass) You should get some Highland Mist. What did you say this was?

HENRY. Vat sixty-nine.

FLAHERTY (savouring) It's not bad, but I prefer Highland Mist if I can't get John Jameson. Good luck. (He drinks)

HENRY. Cheers! (He drinks)

CYNTHIA (taking the bottle from Henry) Don't sit there like a pair of whisky tasters. (She puts the bottle on the table behind the sofa) What are we going to do? (She moves to the fireplace)

SARAH. Is—is it far up?

FLAHERTY (*holding the shoe about four feet from the ground*) About that high, I'd say, wouldn't you, Mr Walling?

(HENRY *nods dismally*)

SARAH. Is that it's shoe?

FLAHERTY. It is. (*He displays it airily*)

(SARAH *recoils*)

Size ten, I'd say, Mr Walling.

(HENRY *eyes the shoe with aversion*)

A fair-sized feller, he was.

CYNTHIA. What I can't understand is how could anyone be up our chimney without us knowing?

FLAHERTY. I knew a feller, Malachy Quigley, shot four Black and Tans and shoved 'em up the chimney—not a soul knew until one Christmas his grandson started pokin' about for Santa Claus.

SARAH (*sitting on the right arm of the sofa*) What's a Black and Tan?

FLAHERTY. A crowd of fellers Lloyd George sent . . .

CYNTHIA. Be quiet, Mr Flaherty! Henry, there must be some simple explanation.

HENRY. What—for instance?

CYNTHIA. A—a workman mending the slates fell down the chimney.

FLAHERTY. Houdini couldn't have got down that chimney, miss. Anything bigger than a leprechaun would have to go up—and it's no leprechaun, not with size ten black and white shoes. (*He looks admiringly at the shoe*)

CYNTHIA (*turning away*) Will you put that revolting shoe down?

HENRY. Mr Flaherty, it might be as well if you tidied up. I want to speak to my sisters.

(FLAHERTY *looks around at the others, then rises*)

FLAHERTY. Ah, sure, I know how it is. When little Patrick found the Tans up the chimney, they had a great family conference. (*He puts the shoe and his glass on the coffee-table*) They called in their uncle. A great feller he was—a Police Superintendent. Yes, indeed.

(FLAHERTY *exits to the hall*)

HENRY (*rising and putting his glass on the coffee-table*) You hear? That should be our next move.

SARAH (*rising*) To get Malachy Quigley's uncle?

HENRY. No! The police.

CYNTHIA (*turning*) Do you really think so, Henry?

HENRY. What else does one do when human remains are found?

SARAH (*crossing to the telephone*) I'd better ring them.

HENRY. No!

SARAH. What shall we do, then?

HENRY (*pacing up and down*) I must think—I must think.

(*The telephone rings. They all start. SARAH lifts the receiver*)

SARAH (*into the telephone*) Heath three-o-four-nine . . . Oh, hullo, Paul . . . We're in a terrible flap here . . . We've found someone up the chimney . . .

(HENRY and CYNTHIA rush to Sarah. HENRY slaps his hand over the mouthpiece)

HENRY. You idiot! Get rid of him!

SARAH. Why—what did I say?

HENRY. You almost told him what we'd found. Say you'll call back.

SARAH (*into the telephone*) Sorry, Paul . . . No, I can't come to lunch . . . We've got the sweep here. I'll call you back. (*She replaces the receiver*)

HENRY. Haven't you a grain of sense? Do you have to tell everyone?

SARAH. They'll have to know sooner or later.

HENRY. Have they?

CYNTHIA. You mean—don't tell the police?

HENRY (*crossing to L*) Once they find out it will be in every newspaper in the country. I can see the headlines now. "Well-known psychiatrist finds body up chimney." I shall be ruined.

SARAH. Oh, I don't know. You might get more patients.

CYNTHIA (*crossing to c*) My chances of a Headship wouldn't be improved.

HENRY. Exactly! Who's going to trust children to a woman who took up two columns in the *News of the World*?

SARAH. She'd have to do a lot more than that to get *two* columns.

HENRY. Be quiet, Sarah.

(SARAH moves up c)

CYNTHIA. We can't just ignore it, Henry.

HENRY. I look at it this way. Whoever it is can't be missed. He's been there for years. (*He sits on the sofa*) A few days while we think things out can't make any difference.

SARAH. What about Mr Flaherty? I can just see him telling the owners of the next twenty chimneys he sweeps what he found up ours. (*She moves and sits on the left arm of the sofa*)

CYNTHIA. That's a point.

HENRY. I'll deal with Flaherty. A pound note and he'll forget all about it.

CYNTHIA. You think so.

HENRY. You leave him to me. Now, for the time being we tell *no-one*. Is that plain, Sarah?

SARAH. Why pick on me?

HENRY. Because you've already half told that Martell youth.

(FLAHERTY enters from the hall, carrying his brushes)

FLAHERTY. I've tidied up and left the asbestos sheet against the fireplace. (He moves to the garden door)

CYNTHIA (crossing and closing the hall door) Thank you very much.

FLAHERTY. Of course, your chimney's not swept. (He puts his brushes outside the garden door) But then the police won't want anything disturbed.

(There is an awkward silence)

Before I'm on me way, could I just have a drop of that Vat sixty-nine?

HENRY (rising; eagerly) Yes. There's no hurry, is there, Cynthia? I'll get it for you. (He collects Flaherty's glass from the coffee-table, moves above the sofa and pours a whisky)

CYNTHIA. Do sit down, Mr Flaherty. (She moves the chair R of the table and sets it C)

FLAHERTY (sitting C) Thank you.

CYNTHIA (moving R) I think now would be a good time for Mr Flaherty to tell us about his sister that ran off with a tailor.

(HENRY takes the drink to Flaherty)

FLAHERTY. A tinker it was. (He takes the glass from Henry) Thanks. (He raises the glass) Here's to himself above, God rest him. (He drinks then puts his glass on the coffee-table)

(CYNTHIA sits on the right arm of the easy chair RC. SARAH sits on the sofa and puts her feet up. HENRY stands L of Flaherty)

Ah, well, he was a clever feller this tinker. Sean Plunkett was his name. 'Twas him put me on to the *New Statesman*. He won a competition once. Ah, reminds me. (He puts on his spectacles and takes out his newspaper) I made a few notes for this week's competition.

HENRY. Mr Flaherty . . .

FLAHERTY. No. It's Sir Alfred Munning's foreword. It's my own composition. (He reads) "Visitors to the Picasso Exhibition are asked to empty their pockets at the entrance as the management cannot be responsible for any articles lost when they stand on their heads to look at the pictures." (He looks around for approval)

(The others smile feebly)

I'll tidy it a bit, of course. Oh, by the way, the police will want me address.

HENRY. Mr Flaherty, we were—er—thinking of not mentioning this to the police. (He pauses) Not for the moment, that is.

FLAHERTY. Were you not?

HENRY. We have been talking things over, and we've come to the conclusion that no useful purpose would be served by calling in the police—at this stage.

FLAHERTY (*blandly*) At what other stage would you call them? They don't like to be left out of these things for long. They'd raise hell if ye didn't call 'em at once.

HENRY. We could always pretend that we have only just discovered the—er—remains.

FLAHERTY. Ye could, except they might wonder what the blazes you were doing half-way up the chimney.

SARAH. We could say we heard a bird up there.

HENRY. Yes. No, you see, people in our position can't afford any unpleasant publicity.

FLAHERTY (*knowingly*) Ah, sure. Ye'd like to have a poke around the family first before you tell the police. Malachy had the same idea.

CYNTHIA (*rising*) You don't think that this body has anything to do with us? (*She crosses above the sofa to L of it*)

FLAHERTY. Well, 'tis up *your* chimney, miss.

HENRY. Yes, but we're quite confident that there's some simple explanation.

FLAHERTY. Y'are? I'd like to know what the hell it is, then.

SARAH. So should we.

HENRY. We don't *know* what. That's why we'd like a little time. Meanwhile, we'd be grateful if you'd keep what you found to yourself. After all, it might not do your business any good.

FLAHERTY. To tell the truth I was thinkin' of having an advertisement done—American style—"Flaherty gets *everything* out of your chimney—but *everything!*"

(SARAH giggles)

HENRY. It wouldn't do, I can assure you. Another thing—my mother will be home from Scotland tomorrow. We must warn her before the police come.

FLAHERTY (*confidentially*) I get you—give her a chance to skip off if she knows anything.

CYNTHIA (*indignantly*) Certainly not! We want to break it to her gently.

HENRY. If she found her home full of police and reporters the shock would probably kill her.

FLAHERTY (*rising and crossing to the hall door*) I'd better be fixing that asbestos back again.

HENRY (*with a look of triumph at Cynthia*) That's very kind of you. We appreciate it.

(CYNTHIA moves to the fireplace)

(*He replaces the chair at the table*) Don't worry, I'll see you don't lose by it.

FLAHERTY. I only hope it's the right thing I'm doing.

CYNTHIA. Of course it is. We'll tell the police you understood we were going to report it at once.

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