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SF PERUSALS

Absurd Person Singular

A Comedy

by Alan Ayckbourn

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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ABSURD PERSON SINGULAR, a comedy by Alan Ayckbourn. Directed by Eric Thompson; setting by Edward Burbridge; costumes by Levino Verna; lighting by Thomas Skelton; production stage manager, Frederic de Wilde. Presented by the Theatre Guild, Philip Langner and Armina Marshall, in association with Michael Codron. At the Music Box, 239 West 45th Street, New York, N. Y. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

JANE ..... *Carole Shelley*
SIDNEY ..... *Larry Blyden*
RONALD ..... *Richard Kiley*
MARION ..... *Geraldine Page*
EVA ..... *Sandy Dennis*
GEOFFREY ..... *Tony Roberts*
(DICK and LOTTIE: *Voices Off Stage—tape*)

ACT ONE

Last Christmas. Sidney and Jane's kitchen.

ACT TWO

This Christmas. Geoffrey and Eva's kitchen.

ACT THREE

Next Christmas. Ronald and Marion's kitchen.

Absurd Person Singular

ACT ONE

Last Christmas.

SIDNEY *and* JANE HOPCROFT'S *kitchen of their small suburban house. Although on a modest scale, it is a model kitchen. Whilst not containing all the gadgetry it does have an automatic washing machine, a fridge, an electric cooker and a gleaming sink unit. All these are contained or surrounded by smart formica-topped working surfaces with the usual drawers and cupboards. The room also contains a small table, also formica-topped and matching chairs.* JANE, *a woman in her thirties, is bustling round wiping the counter top cupboard doors, working surfaces—in fact, anything in sight—with a cloth. She sings happily as she works. She wears a pinafore and bedroom slippers but under this, a smart new party dress. She is unimaginatively made up and her hair is tightly permed. As she works,* SIDNEY *enters, a small dapper man of about the same age. He has a cheery, unflappable manner. He wears his best, rather old fashioned, sober suit. A dark tie, polished hair and shoes complete the picture.*

SIDNEY. (*Crosses Left of table.*) Hallo, hallo. What are we up to out here, eh?

JANE. (*Without pausing in her work.*) Just giving it a wipe.

SIDNEY. (*Crosses Left of cabinet.*) Dear oh dear. Good gracious me. Does it need it? Like a battleship. Just like a battleship. They need you in the Royal Navy.

JANE. (*Giggling.*) Silly . . .

SIDNEY. No—the Royal Navy.

JANE. Silly . . .

SIDNEY. (*He goes to the back door, Upstage Center turns the Yale knob, opens it and sticks his hand out.*) Still raining, I see.

JANE. (*Crosses door Upstage Center.*) Shut the door, it's coming in.

SIDNEY. Cats and dogs. Dogs and cats. (*He shuts the door, wiping his wet hand on his handkerchief. Striding to the Center of the room and staring up at his digital clock. Crosses to table, puts hands on table.*) 18.23. (*Consulting his watch.*) 18.23. Getting on. Seven minutes—they'll be here.

JANE. Oh. (*She straightens up and looks round the kitchen for somewhere she's missed. She finds somewhere else to polish.*)

SIDNEY. (*Crosses Left of table.*) I've got a few games lined up.

JANE. Games?

SIDNEY. Just in case.

JANE. Oh good.

SIDNEY. (*Sits on Left chair.*) I've made a parcel for "Pass the Parcel," sorted out a bit of music for musical bumps and thought out a few forfeits.

JANE. (*Follows above table, wipes his handprints.*) Good.

SIDNEY. I've thought up some real devils.

JANE. I bet.

SIDNEY. (*Right arm on table.*) Just in case. Just in case things need jollying up. (*Seeing* JANE *still wiping, she moves his arm off.*) I don't want to disappoint you but we're not going to be out here for our drinks, you know.

JANE. Yes, I know.

SIDNEY. The way you're going—

JANE. They might want to look—

SIDNEY. I doubt it—

JANE. The ladies might.

SIDNEY. (*Chuckling knowingly.*) I don't imagine the wife of a banker will particularly choose to spend her evening in our kitchen. Smart as it is.

JANE. No?

SIDNEY. I doubt if she spends very much time in her own kitchen. Let alone ours.

JANE. Still . . .

SIDNEY. Very much the lady of leisure, Mrs. Brewster-Wright. Or so I would imagine.

JANE. What about Mrs. Jackson?

SIDNEY. (*Doubtfully.*) Well—again, not a woman you think of in the same breath as you would a kitchen.

JANE. (*Right of table.*) All women are interested in kitchens. (*She resumes polishing.*)

SIDNEY. (*Ironic.*) Oh, if you're looking for a little job . . .

JANE. What's that?

SIDNEY. A small spillage. My fault.

JANE. (*Very alarmed.*) Where?

SIDNEY. In there. On the sideboard.

JANE. (*Crosses Upstage Right Center to sink counter.*) Oh, Sidney. (*She snatches up an assortment of cloths, wet and dry.*)

SIDNEY. (*Rises.*) Nothing serious.

JANE. Honestly. (*She goes out into the sitting room, Right.* SIDNEY, *in the meantime, goes Upstage Center to the back door, opens it, sticks a hand out.*)

SIDNEY. Dear oh dear. (*He closes the door and dries his hand on his handkerchief at sink counter.*)

JANE. (*Returning.*) Honestly.

SIDNEY. Could you see it?

JANE. (*Crosses Left to cabinet.*) You spoil that surface if you leave it. You leave a ring. (*She returns her dishcloth to the sink, her dry cloths to the drawer and now takes out a duster and a tin of polish.*) Now that room's going to smell of polish. I had the windows open all day so it wouldn't. (*Crosses to Right.*)

SIDNEY. Well then, don't polish.

JANE. (*Turns at Downstage Right door.*) I have to polish. There's a mark. (*She goes to door and then pauses.*) I know, bring the air freshener.

SIDNEY. Air-freshener?

JANE. Under the sink. (*She goes out.*)

SIDNEY. Ay, ay, Admiral. (*He whistles a sailor's horn-pipe, amused.*) Dear oh dear. (*He opens the cupboard under the sink, rummages and brings out an aerosol tin. He is one of those men who likes to read all small print. This he does, holding the tin at arm's length to do so. Downstage Left of working counter reading:*) Shake can before use. (*He does so. Reading:*) Remove cap. (*He does so. Reading:*) Hold away from body and spray into air by depressing button. (*He holds can away from body, points it in air and depresses the button. The spray hisses out over his shirt front.*) Dear oh dear. (*He puts down the tin, wipes his shirtfront with a dishcloth at sink counter.* JANE *enters Downstage Right—crosses Center.*)

JANE. What are you doing?

SIDNEY. Just getting this to rights. Just coming to terms with your air freshener.

JANE. That's the fly spray. (*Takes it.*)

SIDNEY. Ah.

JANE. Honestly. (*She puts the canister on top of the washing machine.*)

SIDNEY. My mistake.

JANE. For someone who's good at some things you're hopeless.

SIDNEY. Beg your pardon, Admiral, beg your pardon. (*He crosses Downstage Right Center.* JANE *puts away the duster and polish. Checking his watch with the clock.*) Four and a half minutes to go.

JANE. And you've been at those nuts, haven't you?

SIDNEY. Nuts?

JANE. (*At washing machine.*) In there. In the bowl. On the table. Those nuts. You know the ones I mean.

SIDNEY. I may have had a little dip. Anyway, how did you know I'd been at those nuts? Eh? How did you know, old eagle-eye. (*Crosses to* JANE.)

JANE. Because I know how I left them. Now come on, out of my way. Don't start that. I've got things to do.

SIDNEY. (*Closing with her.*) What about a kiss then?

JANE. (*Trying to struggle free.*) Sidney—

SIDNEY. Come on. Christmas kiss.

JANE. Sidney. No, not now. What's the matter with you? Sidney— (*She pauses, sniffing.*)

SIDNEY. What's the matter now?

JANE. What's that smell?

SIDNEY. Eh?

JANE. It's on your tie. What's this smell on your tie? (*They both sniff his tie.*) There. Can you smell?

SIDNEY. Oh, that'll be the fly spray.

JANE. Fly spray?

SIDNEY. Had a bit of a backfire.

JANE. It's killed off your after shave.

SIDNEY. (*Back—Right to Center. Jovially.*) As long as it hasn't killed off my flies, eh. (*He laughs. Crosses Downstage Right Center.* JANE *laughs. Suddenly cutting through this.*) 18.28. Two minutes.

JANE. (*Crosses to work counter. Nervous again.*) I hope everything's all right.

SIDNEY. When?

JANE. (*Crosses to* SIDNEY.) For them. I want it to be right.

SIDNEY. Of course it's right.

JANE. (*Fusses with his tie, brushes lapels, etc.*) I mean. I don't want you to be let down. Not by me. I want it to look good for you. I don't want to let you down . . .

SIDNEY. You never have yet . . .

JANE. No, but it's special tonight, isn't it? I mean, with Mr. and Mrs. Brewster-Wright and Mr. and Mrs. Jackson. It's important.

SIDNEY. Don't forget Dick and Lottie Potter. They're coming too.

JANE. Oh, well, I don't count Dick and Lottie. They're friends.

SIDNEY. I trust by the end of this evening, we shall all be friends. Just don't get nervous. That's all. Don't get nervous. (*He crosses above table, checks his watch. She crosses Left, straighten Left chair.*) One minute to go. (*A slight pause. The front door chimes sound.*) What was that?.

JANE. The front door.

SIDNEY. They're early. Lucky we're ready for them.

JANE. Yes. (*He starts Right. Sudden panic.*) I haven't sprayed the room. (*She goes to sink cupboard for spray.*)

SIDNEY. (*Crosses to Downstage Right door.*) All right, all right. You can do it whilst I'm letting them in. Plenty of time.

JANE. (*Rushing to pass him.*) It doesn't take a second. (JANE *snatches up the air freshener and follows* SIDNEY *out into the sitting room. A silence.* JANE *comes hurrying back into the kitchen. She puts away the air freshener, removes her pinny, straightens her clothing and hair in the mirror, creeps back to the kitchen door and opens it a chink. Voices are heard.* SIDNEY'S *and two others. One a jolly hearty male voice and one a jolly hearty female voice. They are* DICK *and* LOTTIE POTTER *whom we have the good fortune never to meet in person but quite frequently hear whenever the door to the kitchen is open. Both have loud, braying, distinctive laughs.* JANE *closes the door, cutting off the voices, straightens her hair, and dress for the last time, grips the door handle, takes a deep breath, is about to make her entrance into the room when she sees she is still wearing her bedroom slippers.*) Oh. (*She takes off her slippers and holding them in her hand, she scuttles round the kitchen looking for her shoes. She can't find them.*) Oh. (*She hur-*

ries back to the door, opens it a fraction. Jolly chatter and laughter is heard. JANE *stands for a long time, peeping through the crack in the door, trying to catch sight of her shoes. She sees them. She closes the door again. She stands lost.*) Oh. Oh. (*She patters round the kitchen agitatedly.*) Oh. (*The door opens.* SIDNEY *comes in laughing. He closes the door.*)

SIDNEY. (*Fiercely, in a low voice.*) Come on. What are you doing?

JANE. I can't.

SIDNEY. What?

JANE. I've got no shoes.

SIDNEY. What do you mean, no shoes?

JANE. They're in there.

SIDNEY. Where?

JANE. By the fireplace. I left them so I could slip them on.

SIDNEY. Well, then, why didn't you?

JANE. I didn't have them. I forgot.

SIDNEY. Well, come and get them.

JANE. No—

SIDNEY. It's only Dick and Lottie Potter.

JANE. You fetch them.

SIDNEY. I can't fetch them.

JANE. Yes, you can. Pick them up and bring them in here.

SIDNEY. But I—

JANE. Sidney, please.

SIDNEY. Dear oh dear. What a start. I say, what a start. (*He opens the door cautiously and listens. Silence.*) They've stopped talking.

JANE. Have they?

SIDNEY. Wondering where we are, no doubt.

JANE. Well, go in . . . Here.

SIDNEY. What?

JANE. (*Handing him her slippers.*) Take these.

SIDNEY. What do I do with these?

JANE. The hall cupboard.

SIDNEY. You're really expecting rather a lot tonight, aren't you?

JANE. I'm sorry.

SIDNEY. Yes, well it's got to stop. It's got to stop. I have to entertain out there, you know. (*He opens the door and starts laughing heartily as he does so.* SIDNEY *goes out closing the door.* JANE *making still more adjustments to her person and checking her appearance in the mirror. At length the door opens, a bellow of laughter, by* SIDNEY—*who returns carrying her shoes behind him.*) Yes, I will. I will. I'll tell her that, Dick— (*He laughs until he's shut the door. His laugh cuts off abruptly. Thrusting* JANE'S *shoes at her, ingraciously.*) Here.

JANE. Oh thank goodness.

SIDNEY. Now for heaven's sake, come in.

JANE. (*Struggling into her shoes.*) Yes, I'm sorry. What did Dick say?

SIDNEY. When?

JANE. Just now? That you told him you'd tell me.

SIDNEY. I really can't remember. Now then, are you ready?

JANE. Yes, yes.

SIDNEY. It's a good job it's only Dick and Lottie out there. It might have been the Brewster-Wrights. I'd have had a job explaining this to them. Walking in and out like a shoe salesman. All right?

JANE. Yes.

SIDNEY. Right. (*He throws open the door, jovially.*) Here she is. Here she is at last. (*Pushing* JANE *ahead of him. Hearty cries of "Ah ha" from* DICK *and* LOTTIE.)

JANE. (*Going in.*) Here I am.

SIDNEY. (*Closing the door behind him.*) At last. (*A silence. A long one.* SIDNEY *returns to the kitchen. Conversation is heard as he opens and closes the door. He starts hunting round the kitchen opening drawers and*

not bothering to shut them. After a second, the door opens again.)

JANE. (*As she enters.*) Yes, well you say that to Lottie, not me. I don't want to know that . . . (*She closes the door.*) What are you doing? Oh, Sidney, what are you doing? (*She hurries round after him, closing the drawers.*)

SIDNEY. Bottle opener. I can't find the bottle opener. I can't get the top off Lottie's bitter lemon. (*Crosses Right.*)

JANE. (*Crosses Left.*) It's in there.

SIDNEY. In there?

JANE. Why didn't you ask me?

SIDNEY. Where in there?

JANE. On the mantelpiece.

SIDNEY. The mantelpiece?

JANE. It looked nice on the mantelpiece.

SIDNEY. It's no use having a bottle opener on a mantelpiece is it? I mean, how am I— (*The door chimes sound.*)

JANE. Somebody else.

SIDNEY. Alright, I'll go. I'll go. You open the bitter lemon. With gin.

JANE. Gin and bitter lemon.

SIDNEY. And shake the bottle first. (SIDNEY *opens the door. Silence from the room. He goes out, closing it.*)

JANE. (*To herself.*) Gin and bitter lemon—shake the bottle first . . . gin and bitter lemon—shake the bottle first . . . etc. (*She has a last check round the kitchen to make sure she's closed everything. She returns to the door and opens it very slightly. There can now be heard the chatter of five voices. She closes the door and feverishly straightens herself. The door opens a crack and* SIDNEY'S *nose appears. Voices behind him.*)

SIDNEY. (*Hissing.*) It's them.

JANE. Mr. and Mrs. Brewster-Wright?

SIDNEY. Yes. Ronald and Marion. Come in.

JANE. Ronald and Marion.

SIDNEY. Come in. (*He opens the door wider, grabs her arm, jerks her through the door and closes it.*)

JANE. (*As she is dragged in.*) Gin and bitter lemon—shake the bottle first . . . (*Silence. Another fairly long one. The door bursts open and* JANE *comes rushing out. Over her shoulder.*) Wait there! Just wait there! (*She dashes to the sink and finds a tea towel and a dish cloth.*)

(RONALD, *a man in his mid-forties, enters. Impressive, without being distinguished. He is followed by an anxious* SIDNEY. RONALD, *holding one leg of his trousers away from his body. He has evidently got drenched.*)

SIDNEY. (*Right of* RONALD.) Oh dear oh dear. I'm terribly sorry.

RONALD. (*Left of door.*) That's alright. Can't be helped.

JANE. (*Crosses to him.*) Here's a cloth.

RONALD. Oh, thank you—yes, yes— (*Rejecting the dish cloth.*) I'll just use this one, if you don't mind.

SIDNEY. Well, what a start, eh? What a grand start to the evening. (*With a laugh.*) Really, Jane.

JANE. I'm terribly sorry. I didn't realize it was going to splash like that.

RONALD. Well, tricky things, soda siphons. You either get a splash or a dry gurgle. Never a happy medium.

JANE. Your nice suit.

RONALD. Good God, it's only soda water. Probably do it good, eh?

JANE. I don't know about that.

RONALD. (*Returning the tea towel.*) Thanks very much. Well, it's wet enough outside there. I didn't expect to get wet inside as well.

SIDNEY. No, no—

JANE. Terribly sorry.

RONALD. Accidents happen. Soon dry out. (*Pause.*) I'll run around— (*Crosses Left to stool.*) for a bit.

SIDNEY. (*Crosses to* RONALD.) I'll tell you what. I could let you have a pair of my trousers from upstairs just while yours dry.

JANE. Oh yes.

RONALD. (*Sitting on stool.*) No, no. That's alright. I'll stick with these. Hate to break up the suit, eh? (*He laughs. So do* SIDNEY *and* JANE.)

(MARION, *a well-groomed woman, a little younger than* RONALD *and decidedly better preserved, comes in Right.*)

MARION. Alright, darling?

RONALD. Yes, yes.

MARION. (*Crosses Center.*) Oh! (*She stops short in the doorway.*) Isn't this gorgeous? Isn't this enchanting.

JANE. Oh.

MARION. (*Crosses to* JANE.) What a simply dishy kitchen. (*To* JANE.) Aren't you lucky?

JANE. (*Crosses Right below bridge.*) Well . . .

MARION. (*Crosses sink and cupboards Upstage Right.*) It's so beautifully arranged. Ronnie, don't you agree? Isn't this splendid.

RONALD. Ah.

MARION. Just look at these working surfaces and you must have a gorgeous view from that window, I imagine.

SIDNEY. (*Crosses to below back door.*) Well . . .

MARION. It must be stunning. You must look right over the fields at the back.

SIDNEY. No—no.

JANE. No, we just look into next door's fence.

MARION. Well, which way are the fields?

JANE. I've no idea.

MARION. How extraordinary. I must be thinking of somewhere else.

SIDNEY. Mind you, we've got a good ten yards to the fence . . .

RONALD. On a clear day, eh?

SIDNEY. (*Turns to* RONALD.) Beg pardon?

MARION. Oh look, Ronnie, do come and look at these cupboards.

RONALD. Eh?

MARION. Look at these, Ronnie. They're so easy to open and shut.

JANE. (*Crosses to* MARION—*Left of her.*) Drawers—here, you see . . .

MARION. Drawers! Oh, lovely deep drawers. Put all sorts of things in these, can't you? And then just shut it up and forget them.

SIDNEY. Yes, yes, they're handy for that . . .

MARION. (*Crosses Right of cupboards.*) No, it's these cupboards. I'm afraid I really do envy you these. Don't you envy them, Ronnie?

RONALD. I thought we had cupboards.

MARION. Yes, darling, but they're nothing like these. Just open— (*Does so.*) and shut that door. It's heaven.

RONALD. (*Crosses Right to bridge—gets instruction book.*) Cupboard's a cupboard.

JANE. (*Crosses Left—washing machine. Proudly.*) Look. Sidney's Christmas present to me . . .

MARION. (*Crosses to washing machine. Picking up the air freshener from the top of the washing machine.*) Oh lovely. What is it? Hair spray?

SIDNEY. No, no. That's the fly spray, no. My wife meant the machine. (*He takes the spray from her and puts it down.* RONALD *crosses Right to chair and sits.*)

MARION. Machine?

JANE. Washing machine. Here . . .

MARION. Oh, that's a washing machine. Tucked under there. How thrilling. What a marvelous Christmas present.

JANE. Well, yes.

MARION. Do tell me, how did you manage to keep it a surprise from her?

SIDNEY. Well . . .

MARION. I mean, don't tell me he hid it or wrapped it up. I don't believe it.

SIDNEY. No, I just arranged for the men to deliver it and plumb it in.

JANE. They flooded the kitchen.

MARION. (*Crosses to table, puts on spray.*) Super.

JANE. You see, it's the automatic. It's got—all the programmes and then spin-drying and soak.

MARION. (*Crosses to washer.*) Oh, good heavens. Ronnie, come here at once and see this.

RONALD. (*Who has found an instruction booklet in one of the drawers and is reading it avidly.*) Just coming . . .

MARION. (*Bending to read the dial.*) What's this? Whites . . . coloureds . . . my God, it's apartheid.

JANE. Beg pardon?

MARION. What's this? Minimum icon? What on earth is that?

JANE. No, minimum iron.

MARION. Don't tell me it does the ironing too. (*Crosses to above table.*) Ronnie, have you seen this extraordinary machine?

RONALD. Yes. Yes . . .

MARION. It not only does your washing and your whites and your blacks and your coloureds and so on, it does your ironing.

SIDNEY. No, no . . .

JANE. No . . .

MARION. (*To* JANE.) We shall soon be totally redundant. (*She picks up the spray and fires it into the air and inhales.*) What a poignant smell. It's almost too good to waste on flies, isn't it. Now where . . . ? It's a little like your husband's gorgeous cologne, surely?

JANE. Oh, well . . .

(*The DOORBELL chimes.*)

MARION. Oh, good gracious. What was that? Does that mean your shirts are cooked or something.

SIDNEY. No, front doorbell.

MARION. Oh, I see. How pretty.

SIDNEY. (*Starts Right.*) Somebody else arrived.

JANE. (*Goes ahead.*) Yes, I'd better . . .

SIDNEY. (*Tries.*) Won't be a minute.

JANE. (*She goes.*) No, I'll go.

SIDNEY. No—

JANE. No, I'll go. (JANE *hurries out closing the door.*)

MARION. (*Crosses Downstage Left to* SIDNEY.) I do hope your Mr. and Mrs. Potter don't feel terribly abandoned in there. They're splendidly jolly, booming people, aren't they?

SIDNEY. Yes, Dick's a bit of a laugh.

MARION. Enormous. Now, you must tell me one thing, Mr. Hopcraft. How on earth did you squeeze that machine so perfectly under the shelf? Did you try them for size or were you terribly lucky?

SIDNEY. No, I went out and measured the machine in the shop.

MARION. Oh, I see.

SIDNEY. And then I made the shelf, you see. So it was the right height.

MARION. No, I mean how on earth did you know it was going to be right?

SIDNEY. Well, that's that way I built it.

MARION. No. You don't mean this is you?

SIDNEY. Yes, yes. Well, the shelf is.

MARION. (*Turns.*) Ronnie!

RONALD. Um?

MARION. (*Crosses above table to* RONALD.) Ronnie, darling, what are you reading?

RONALD. (*Vaguely consulting the cover of his book.*) Er . . .

SIDNEY. (*Crosses Downstage Left of table counter.*) Ah, that'll be the instruction book for the stove.

RONALD. Oh, is that what it is. I was just trying to work out what I was reading. Couldn't make head or tail. (*Puts book on table.*)

MARION. Darling, did you hear what Mr. Hop—er.

SIDNEY. Hopcroft.

MARION. Sidney, isn't it? Sidney was saying . . . ?

RONALD. What?

MARION. Darling, Sidney built this shelf on his own. He went out and measured the machine, got all his screws and nails and heaven knows what and built this shelf himself.

RONALD. Good Lord. (*Immediately picks book up and reads.* MARION *crosses Upstage to sink.*)

SIDNEY. I've got some more shelves upstairs. For the bedside.

MARION. Those curtains are really the most insistent colour I've ever seen. They must just simply cry out to be drawn in the morning. (*Crosses Upstage Center.*)

JANE. (*Sticks her head round the door.*) Dear—it's Mr. and Mrs. Jackson.

SIDNEY. Oh. Geoff and Eva, is it? Right, I'll be in to say hallo.

MARION. (*Crosses above table.*) Geoff and Eva Jackson?

SIDNEY. Yes. Do you know them?

MARION. Oh yes. Rather. Darling, it's Geoff and Eva Jackson.

RONALD. Geoff and Eva who?

MARION. The Jacksons.

RONALD. Oh, Geoff and Eva Jackson.

MARION. That's nice, isn't it?

RONALD. Yes?

JANE. Are you coming in?

SIDNEY. Yes, yes.

MARION. Haven't seen them for ages. (*Pause.*)

JANE. They've left the dog in the car.

SIDNEY. Oh, good.

MARION. Have they a dog?

JANE. Yes.

MARION. Oh, how lovely. We must see him.

JANE. He's—very big—

SIDNEY. Yes, well, lead on, dear. (JANE *opens the door. A burst of conversation from the sitting room.* JANE *goes out.* SIDNEY *holds the door open for* MARION, *sees she is not following him and torn between his duties as a host, follows* JANE *off.*) We'll be in here. (*He closes the door.*)

MARION. Ronnie . . .

RONALD. (*Now studying the washing machine.*) Mm?

MARION. Come along, darling.

RONALD. I was just trying to work out how this thing does the ironing. Don't see it at all. Just rolls it into a ball.

MARION. (*Crosses Downstage Right Center.*) Darling, do come on.

RONALD. (*Crosses to table. Picks up book.*) I think that woman's got it wrong. (*He straightens up and moves to her.*)

MARION. Darling . . .

RONALD. Um?

MARION. (*Checking makeup in mirror.*) Make our excuses quite shortly, please.

RONALD. Had enough, have you?

MARION. We've left the boys . . .

RONALD. (*Crosses Left—sits on stool.*) They'll be alright.

MARION. What's that man's name?

RONALD. Hopcraft, do you mean?

MARION. No, the other one.

RONALD. Oh, Potter isn't it?

MARION. Well, I honestly don't think I can sit through many more of his jokes.

RONALD. I thought they were quite funny.

MARION. And I've never had quite such a small gin in my life. Completely drowned.

RONALD. Really? My scotch was pretty strong.

MARION. That's only because she missed the glass with the soda water. Consider yourself lucky.

RONALD. I don't know about lucky. I shall probably have bloody rheumatism in the morning.

SIDNEY. (*Sticks his head round the door. Laughter and chatter behind him.*) Er—Mrs. Brewster-Wright, I wonder if you'd both—

MARION. Oh yes, we're just coming. We can't tear ourselves away from your divine kitchen, can we, Ronnie? (*Turning to* RONALD *holding up the fingers of one hand and mouthing.*) Five minutes.

RONALD. Righto.

(*They go out, closing the door. Silence.* JANE *re-enters with an empty bowl. She hurries to the cupboard and takes out a jumbo bag of crisps, Upstage Right Center and pours them into the bowl. She is turning to leave when the door opens again and* SIDNEY *hurries out, looking a little fraught.*)

SIDNEY. (*At door.*) Tonic water. We've run out.

JANE. Down there in the cupboard.

SIDNEY. (*Crosses Left to Cabinet.*) Right.

JANE. Do you think it's going alright?

SIDNEY. Fine, fine. Now get back, get back there.

JANE. (*As she goes.*) Will you ask Lottie to stop eating all these crisps. Nobody else has had any. (JANE *goes out closing the door behind her.* SIDNEY *searches first one cupboard, then another. But can't find any tonic.*)

SIDNEY. Oh dear oh dear. (SIDNEY *hurries back to the party closing the door behind him. After a second* JANE *turns looking worried, closing the door behind her. She searches where* SIDNEY *has already searched. She finds nothing.*)

JANE. Oh. (*She crosses Left to cabinet.* SIDNEY *re-enters with a glass with gin and a slice of lemon in it. He closes the door.*)

SIDNEY. (*At door.*) Is it there?

JANE. Yes, yes. Somewhere . . .

SIDNEY. Well, come along. She's waiting.

JANE. I've just—got to find it . . .

SIDNEY. Oh dear oh dear.

JANE. I tidied them away somewhere.

SIDNEY. Well there was no point in tidying them away, was there? We're having a party.

JANE. Well—it just looked—tidier. You go back in, I'll bring them.

SIDNEY. Now that was your responsibility. We agreed buying the beverages was your department. I hope you haven't let us down.

JANE. No. I'm sure I haven't.

SIDNEY. Well, it's very embarrassing for me in the meanwhile, isn't it? Mrs. Brewster-Wright is beginning to give me anxious looks.

JANE. Oh.

SIDNEY. Well then. (SIDNEY *goes back in with glass.*)

(JANE *stands helplessly. She gives a little whimper of dismay. She is on the verge of tears. Then a sudden decision. She goes to a drawer, reaches to the back and brings out her housekeeping purse. She opens it and takes out some coins. She runs to the Center of the room and looks at the clock. She opens back door, looks outside, closes it, goes to Left closet. She emerges holding a pair of men's large wellington boots in one hand and a pair of plimsolls in the other. Mentally tossing up between them, she returns the plimsolls to the cupboard. She slips off her own shoes and steps easily into the wellingtons. She rummages again and pulls out a large man's gardening raincoat. She holds it up, realizes it's better than nothing and puts it on. She hurries back to door—buttoning the coat as she does so, opens it and steps out. It is evidently pelting down. She*

stands in the doorway holding up the collar of the coat and ineffectually trying to protect her hairdo from the rain with the other hand.)

JANE. (*Frantic.*) Oh . . . (*She dives back into the cupboard and re-emerges with an old trilby hat. She looks at it in dismay. After a moment's struggle she puts it on and hurries back to the Center of the room. She returns to the back door, hesitates for a second and then closing door, plunges out into the night. After a moment,* SIDNEY *returns still clutching the glass.*)

SIDNEY. (*Crosses below bridge.*) Jane? Jane! (*He looks round puzzled.*) Good gracious me. (*He peers around for her.*)

(EVA *comes in. In her thirties, she makes no concessions in either manner or appearance.*)

EVA. (*Crossing back door.*) May I have a glass of water?

SIDNEY. Beg your pardon?

EVA. I have to take these. (*She holds a couple of tablets enclosed in a sheet of tinfoil. She crosses to the back door and stands taking deep breaths of fresh air aloud.*)

SIDNEY. (*Crosses Left cabinet.*) Oh yes. There's a glass here somewhere, I think. (*Finding a tumbler.*) Here we are. (*Crosses sink—puts water in glass.* EVA *closes door, stands abstractedly staring ahead of her, tearing at the paper round the pills without any effort to open them. A pause.* SIDNEY *looks at her.*) Er—

EVA. What? Oh, thanks. (*Crosses to above table. She goes to the sink for the glass.*)

SIDNEY. (*Follows Right of her.*) Not ill, I hope?

EVA. What?

SIDNEY. The pills. Not ill?

EVA. It depends what you mean by ill, doesn't it?

SIDNEY. Ah.

EVA. If you mean do they prevent me from turning into a raving lunatic, the answer's probably yes. (*She laughs somewhat bitterly.*)

SIDNEY. (*Laughing too.*) Raving lunatic, yes . . . (*He is none too certain of this lady.*) but then I always say, it helps to be a bit mad, doesn't it? I mean, we're all a bit mad. I'm a bit mad. (*Pause.*) Yes. (*Pause.*) It's a mad world, as they say.

EVA. (*Surveying the pills in her hand which she has now opened.*) Extraordinary to think that one's sanity can depend on these. (*She puts them both in her mouth and swallows the glass of water in one gulp.*) Frightening, isn't it? Alarming. Do you know I've been taking pills of one sort or another since I was eight years old. What chance does your body have . . . My husband tells me that even if I didn't need them, I'd still have to take them. My whole mentality is geared round swallowing tablets every three hours, twenty four hours a day. I even have to set the alarm at night. You're looking at a mess. A wreck. (*She still holds the glass and is searching round absently as she speaks, for somewhere to put it. Crosses Downstage Right Center.*) Don't you sometimes long to be out of your body and free? Free just to float? I know I do. (*She opens the pedal bin Right Center with her foot and tosses the empty glass into it.*) Thanks. (*She puts the screwed up tinfoil into* SIDNEY'S *hand and starts for the door.* SIDNEY *gawps at her.* EVA *pauses.*) My God, was that our car horn?

SIDNEY. When?

EVA. Just now.

SIDNEY. (*Crosses Right Center.*) No, I don't think so.

EVA. If you do hear it, it's George.

SIDNEY. George?

EVA. Our dog.

SIDNEY. Oh yes of course.

EVA. We left him in the car, you see. We have to

leave him in the car these days, he's just impossible. He's alright there, usually, but lately he's been getting bored and he's learnt to push the horn button with his nose. He just rests his nose on the steering wheel, you see.

SIDNEY. That's clever.

EVA. Not all that clever. We've had the police out twice.

SIDNEY. A bit like children, dogs.

EVA. What makes you say that?

SIDNEY. Need a bit of a firm hand now and again. Smack if they're naughty.

EVA. You don't smack George, you negotiate terms.

SIDNEY. Ah. (*He retrieves the glass from the waste-bin.*)

EVA. He was only this big when we bought him, now he's grown into a sort of yak. (*Crosses to door, turns back.*) When we brought him home he—my God was that me?

SIDNEY. What?

EVA. Did I put that glass in there?

SIDNEY. Er—yes.

EVA. My God, I knew it, I'm going mad. I am finally going mad. (*She goes to the door and opens it. Chatter behind—slams it shut.*) Will you please tell my husband if he drinks any more, I'm walking home.

SIDNEY. Well, I think that might be better coming from you as his wife.

EVA. (*Laughing.*) You really think he'd listen to me? He doesn't even know I'm here. As far as he's concerned, my existence ended the day he married me. I'm just an embarrassing smudge on a marriage license. (EVA *goes out closing the door.*)

SIDNEY. Ah. (*Puts glass on table, starts to pick up foil—then he finds* JANE'S *discarded shoes on the floor, He picks them up, stares at them, then looks at ceiling and places them on the draining board. Puzzled he crosses to the back door and calls out into the*

night.) Jane! (*He listens. No reply.* MARION *comes in.*) Jane!

MARION. I say—

SIDNEY. Rain . . . (*Closes the back door.*)

MARION. (*Crossing Left to table.*) Oh yes, dreadful. (*Closes Downstage Right door.*) I say, I think you dashed away with my glass.

SIDNEY. (*Crosses to table Left of her.*) Oh, I'm so sorry. (*Handing it to her.*) Here.

MARION. Thank you. I was getting terribly apprehensive in case it had gone into your washing machine. (*She sips the drink.*) Oh, that's lovely. Just that teeny bit stronger. You know what I mean. Not too much tonic . . .

SIDNEY. No, well . . .

MARION. (*She sips.*) Perfect.

SIDNEY. Actually, that's straight gin, that is.

MARION (*She sips.*) Oh good heavens! What are you trying to do to me? I can see we're going to have to keep an eye on you, Mr.—er—

SIDNEY. No, no. You're safe enough with me.

MARION. Yes, I'm sure . . .

SIDNEY. The mistletoe's in there.

MARION. Well, what are we waiting for? Lead on, Mr.—er— (*She ushers him in front of her.*)

SIDNEY. Follow me. (*He goes through the door.*)

MARION. (*As she turns to close it, looking at her watch.*) My God. (MARION *closes the door.*)

(*A pause.* JANE *arrives at the back door still in her hat, coat and boots. She is soaking wet. She carries a carton of tonic waters. She rattles the back door knob but she has locked herself out. She knocks gently then louder but no one hears her. She rattles the knob again, pressing her face up against the glass. We see her mouth opening and shutting but no sound. Eventually, she gives up and hurries away. After a second,* SIDNEY *returns.*

He has the crisp bowl which is again empty. He is about to refill it when he pauses and looks round the kitchen, puzzled and slightly annoyed. He goes to the back door and opens it.)

SIDNEY. Jane! Jane! (*He turns up his jacket collar and runs out, leaving the door ajar. As soon as he's gone, the doorbell chimes. Pause. It chimes again, several times.* RONALD *comes in from the sitting room.*)

RONALD. I say, old boy, I think someone's at your front—oh. (*He sees the empty room and the open back door. He turns and goes back into the room.*) No, he seems to have gone out. I suppose we'd better— (*His voice cuts off as he closes the door. The doorbell chimes once more.* SIDNEY *returns, closing the back door. He finds a towel and dabs his face and hair.*)

SIDNEY. Dear oh dear. (*He shakes his head and returns to his crisps. Suddenly, the living room door bursts open and* JANE *enters hurriedly in her strange garb, her boots squelching. She shuts the door behind her and stands against it, shaking and exhausted.* SIDNEY *turns, gapes at her, continuing to pour a steady stream of crisps on to his feet.*)

JANE. (*At door Right.*) Oh, my goodness.

SIDNEY. What are you doing?

JANE. Oh.

SIDNEY. (*Utterly incredulous.*) What do you think you're doing?

JANE. (*Still breathless.*) I went— I went out—to get the tonic.

SIDNEY. *Like that?*

JANE. I couldn't find— I didn't want—

SIDNEY. You went out—and came in again, like that?

JANE. (*Crosses Downstage Center of table—puts tonic down.*) I thought I'd just slip out the back to the off-license and slip in again. But I locked myself out. I had to come in the front.

SIDNEY. (*Crosses to table.*) But who let you in?

JANE. (*In a whisper.*) Mr. Brewster-Wright.

SIDNEY. Mr. Brewster-Wright? Mr. Brewster-Wright let you in like that? (JANE *nods.*) What did he say?

JANE. I don't think he recognized me.

SIDNEY. I'm not surprised.

JANE. I couldn't look at him. I just ran straight past him and right through all of them and into here.

SIDNEY. Like that?

JANE. Yes.

SIDNEY. But what did they say?

JANE. They didn't say anything. They just stopped talking and stared and I ran through them. I couldn't very well—

SIDNEY. You'll have to go back in there and explain.

JANE. No, I couldn't.

SIDNEY. Of course you must.

JANE. Sidney, I don't think I can face them.

SIDNEY. You can't walk through a respectable cocktail party, the hostess, dressed like that without an apology.

JANE. (*On the verge of tears again.*) I couldn't.

SIDNEY. (*Furious.*) You take off all that—and you go back in there and explain.

JANE. (*With a wail.*) I just want to go to bed.

SIDNEY. Well, you cannot go to bed. Not at 19.47. Now, take off that coat.

(RONALD *opens the kitchen door. He is talking over his shoulder as he comes in.* JANE *has had no time to unbutton her coat. Rather than face* RONALD, *she rushes out of the back door hatless, abandoning her head gear, in the middle of the kitchen table.* SIDNEY, *trying to stop her, lunges after her vainly. The door slams behind her.* SIDNEY *stands with his back to it.*)

RONALD. Well, I think I'd better, I mean . . . (*In*

the doorway Right. He has caught a glimpse of violent activity, but isn't sure what.) Ah, there you are, old chap.

SIDNEY. Oh, hallo. Hallo.

RONALD. Just popped out did you?

SIDNEY. Yes, just popped out.

RONALD. (*Closes door.*) Well—something rather odd. Someone at the door just now. Little short chap. Hat, coat, boots and bottles. Just stamped straight through. You catch a glimpse of him?

SIDNEY. (*Crosses Downstage Left of table.*) Oh, him.

RONALD. Belong here, does he? I mean—

SIDNEY. Oh yes.

RONALD. (*Crosses Right of table.*) Ah. Well, as long as you know about him. Might have been after your silver. I mean, you never know. Not these days.

SIDNEY. No, indeed. No, he—he was from the pub.

RONALD. Really?

SIDNEY. Brought round our order of tonic, you see. (*He has picked up* JANE'S *hat, absently. Aware that he is holding it.*) Silly fellow. Left his hat. (*He walks to the back door, opens it and throws out the hat. He closes the door, crosses Downstage Left of table.*)

RONALD. Not the night to forget your hat.

SIDNEY. No, indeed.

RONALD. Mind you, frankly, he didn't look all there to me. Wild eyed. That's what made me think—

SIDNEY. Quite right.

RONALD. Ought to get him to come round the back, you know. Take a tip from me. Once you let tradesmen into the habit of using your front door, you might as well move out, there and then.

SIDNEY. (*Crosses Upstage Left corner table.*) Well, quite. In my own particular business, I always insist that my staff . . .

RONALD. Oh yes, of course. I was forgetting you're a—you're in business yourself, aren't you?

SIDNEY. Well, in a small way at the moment. My wife and I. I think I explained . . .

RONALD. Yes, of course. And doing very well.

SIDNEY. Well, for a little general stores, you know. Mustn't grumble.

RONALD. Good to hear someone's making the grade.

SIDNEY. These days.

RONALD. (*Starts rise.*) Quite. (*A pause.*)

SIDNEY. (*Crosses Downstage Right of* RONALD—RONALD *sits.*) I know this isn't perhaps the moment, I mean it probably isn't the right moment, but nonetheless, I hope you've been giving a little bit of thought to our chat. The other day. If you've had a moment.

RONALD. Chat? Oh yes—chat. At the bank? Well, yes, it's—probably not, as you say, the moment but, as I said then—and this is still off the cuff you understand— I think the bank could probably see their way to helping you out.

SIDNEY. Ah well, that's wonderful news. (RONALD *starts rise*—SIDNEY *crosses above table,* RONALD *sits again.*) You see, as I envisage it, once I can get the necessary loan, that means I can put in a definite bid for the adjoining site—which hasn't incidentally come on to the market. I mean, as I said this is all purely through personal contacts.

RONALD. Quite so, yes.

SIDNEY. I mean the site value alone—just taking it as a site . . . you follow me.

RONALD. Oh yes.

SIDNEY. (*Sits Upstage side of table.*) But it is a matter of striking while the iron's hot—before it goes off the boil . . .

RONALD. Mmmm . . .

SIDNEY. I mean, in this world it's dog eat dog, isn't it. No place for sentiment. Not in business. I mean, alright, so on occasions you can scratch mine. I'll scratch yours—

RONALD. Beg your pardon.

SIDNEY. Tit for tat. But when the chips are down it's every man for himself and pull up the ladder and I'm all right Jack, I regret to say—

RONALD. Exactly.

(*The sitting room door opens.* GEOFFREY *enters. Mid thirties. Good looking, confident, easy going.*)

GEOFFREY. (*Crosses Left.*) Ah. Is there a chance of sanctuary here? (SIDNEY *rises.*)

RONALD. Hallo.

GEOFFREY. Like Dick Potter's harem in there.

SIDNEY. Dick still at it?

GEOFFREY. (*Sits Left chair.*) Yes. Keeping the ladies amused with jokes . . .

RONALD. (*Half rise.*) Is he. Oh dear. I'd better . . . in a minute . . .

GEOFFREY. (RONALD *sits.*) You'll never stop him. Is he always like that? Or does he just break out at Christmas?

SIDNEY. Oh no. Dick's a great laugh all the year round . . .

GEOFFREY. Is he?

RONALD. You don't say?

SIDNEY. He's a very fascinating character, is Dick. I thought you'd be interested to meet him. I mean so's she. In her way. Very colourful. They're both teachers, you know. But he's very involved with youth work of all types. He takes these expeditions off to the mountains. A party of lads. Walks in Scotland. That sort of thing. Wonderful man with youngsters . . .

RONALD. Really?

SIDNEY. Got a lot of facets.

RONALD. Got a good looking wife . . .

SIDNEY. Lottie? Yes she's a fine looking woman. Always very well turned out . . .

GEOFFREY. Yes, she seems to have turned out quite well.

SIDNEY. She does the same as him with girls . . .

RONALD. I beg your pardon?

SIDNEY. Hiking and so on. With the brownies, mainly.

RONALD. Oh, I see.

GEOFFREY. Oh. (*Pause.*)

RONALD. Better join the brownies, then, hadn't we? (*He laughs.*)

SIDNEY. (*Laughs at length.*) Yes, I like that. Better join the brownies. (*He laughs.*) You must tell that to Dick. That would tickle Dick no end.

GEOFFREY. (*After a pause.*) Nice pair of legs.

RONALD. Yes.

SIDNEY. Dick?

GEOFFREY. His wife.

SIDNEY. Lottie? Oh yes. Mind you, I don't think I've really noticed them . .

GEOFFREY. Usually, when they get to about that age, they tend to go a bit flabby round here . . . (*He pats his thigh.*) But she's very trim . . .

RONALD. Trim, oh yes.

GEOFFREY. Nice neat little bum . . .

SIDNEY. Ah.

RONALD. Has she? Hadn't seen that.

GEOFFREY. I was watching her, getting up and stretching out for the crisps . . . Very nice indeed.

RONALD. Oh, well, I'll keep an eye out. (*Pause.*)

SIDNEY. That'll be the hiking . . .

GEOFFREY. What?

SIDNEY. (*Tapping his thighs, somewhat self-consciously.*) This . . . you know. That'll be the hiking . . .

RONALD. Yes. (*Pause.*) How did you happen to see those?

GEOFFREY. What?

RONALD. Her . . . (*He slaps his thighs.*) I mean when I saw her just now she had a great big woolly—thing on. Down to here.

GEOFFREY. Oh, you can get around that . . .

RONALD. Really?

GEOFFREY. I've been picking imaginary peanuts off the floor round her feet all evening . . . (RONALD *laughs uproariously.*)

RONALD. You'll have to watch this fellow, you know.

SIDNEY. (*Blank.*) Oh yes?

RONALD. Don't leave your wife unattended if he's around.

SIDNEY. (*Blank.*) Oh, no?

RONALD. Lock her away . . .

SIDNEY. (*Getting the joke at last and laughing.*) Ah-ha! Yes . . .

(SIDNEY *puts tonic on sink, goes to the door.* JANE *is out there, getting very wet.* SIDNEY *waves her away with secretive gestures. Before the others can see her,* SIDNEY *crosses Downstage to table.*)

GEOFFREY. Still raining, is it?

SIDNEY. (*Holding out his hand.*) Yes. Yes.

RONALD. I'll tell you what I've been meaning to ask you . . .

GEOFFREY. What's that?

RONALD. Remember that party we were both at—during the summer—Malcolm Freebody's . . .

GEOFFREY. When was this?

RONALD. Eva . . . Your wife was off sick . . .

GEOFFREY. That's nothing unusual.

RONALD. I remember it because you were making tremendous headway with some woman that Freebody was using on his public relations thing . . .

GEOFFREY. Was I?

RONALD. Blonde. Sort of blonde.

GEOFFREY. (*A short thought.*) Binnie.

RONALD. Binnie, was it?

GEOFFREY. Binnie something. I think . . .

RONALD. Make out alright, did you?

GEOFFREY. Well . . . you know . . .

RONALD. Really?

GEOFFREY. You have no idea. Absolute little cracker. Married to a steward on P. and O. Hadn't seen him for eight months . . . (*Makes "Va Voom" gesture.*)

RONALD. (*Chuckling.*) Good Lord . . .

SIDNEY. (*Imitates* GEOFFREY.) Ah—ha—oh—ha—ha—ha—ha (*And other noises of sexual approval. The others look at him.*)

GEOFFREY. What have you done with yours? Buried her in the garden?

SIDNEY. (*Guiltily.*) What? No, no . . . She's about. Somewhere.

GEOFFREY. Wish I could lose mine, sometimes. Her and that dog. There's hardly room for me in the flat . . . I mean between the two of them, they have completely reduced that flat to rubble. I mean I'm very fond of her, bless her, she's a lovely girl—but she just doesn't know what it's all about . . . She really doesn't.

RONALD. Maybe. I still think you're pretty lucky with Eva . . .

GEOFFREY. Why's that?

RONALD. Well, she must have a jolly good idea by now about your—er—

GEOFFREY. Yes. I should imagine she probably has . . .

RONALD. Well, there you are . . .

GEOFFREY. Oh now, come off it. Nonsense. She chooses to live with me, she lives by my rules. I mean we've always made that perfectly clear. She lives her life to a certain extent; I live mine, do what I like within reason . . . It's the only way to do it . . .

SIDNEY. Good gracious.

RONALD. I wish you'd have a chat with Marion. Convince her.

GEOFFREY. Any time. Pleasure.

RONALD. Yes, well, perhaps not . . . on second thoughts.

GEOFFREY. No, seriously. Any man, it doesn't matter who he is—you, me, anyone— (*Pointing to* SIDNEY.) Him . . . They've just got to get it organised. I mean face it, there's just too much good stuff wandering around simply crying out for it for you not . . . (*The living room door opens.* EVA *appears. Altering his tone immediately. To* SIDNEY:) Anyway, I think that would be a good idea. Don't you?

EVA. (*Coolly at Right door.*) Are you all proposing to stay out here all night?

SIDNEY. Oh dear. We seem to have neglected the ladies.

EVA. Neglected? We thought we'd been bloody well abandoned.

GEOFFREY. Can't manage without us, you see.

EVA. We can manage perfectly well, thank you. It just seemed to us terribly rude, that's all . . .

GEOFFREY. Oh good God . . .

EVA. Anyway. Your jolly friends are leaving . . .

SIDNEY. (*Crosses Right.*) Oh really. Dick and Lottie? I'd better pop out and see them off, then. Excuse me . . . (SIDNEY *goes off to the sitting room.*)

EVA. (*Crosses Left to above* GEOFFREY.) And, darling, unless you want to see our car towed away again, horn blazing—we'd better get our coats . . . (*Hands on his shoulders.*)

GEOFFREY. He's not at it again . . .

EVA. Past his supper time . . .

GEOFFREY. Oh, honestly, Eva . . .

EVA. Don't honestly Eva me, darling. He's your dog . . .

GEOFFREY. What do you mean, he's my dog . . .

EVA. (*Sweetly.*) Your house, your dog, your car, your wife . . . we all belong to you, darling . . . we all expect to be provided for . . . Now are you coming please? (*Crosses Right.* RONALD *laughs. She turns back*

at door.) And your wife is looking slightly less than pleased, I might tell you . . . (RONALD'S *laugh dies.* EVA *goes out.*)

RONALD. Oh. (*He looks at his watch.*) I suppose I'd better er . . . (*Half rises.*)

GEOFFREY. Oh. Ronnie. By the way . . .

RONALD. Mmmm? (*Sits.*)

GEOFFREY. I wondered if you heard anything on the grapevine— (*Rises—sits Upstage side of table.*) about the new building Harrison's having put up . . .

RONALD. You mean that new shopping complex?

GEOFFREY. Yes, has he got anyone yet?

RONALD. What, you mean in your line?

GEOFFREY. Yes. Has he settled on an architect. Or is it still open?

RONALD. Well, as far as I know, it's still wide open. I mean it's still a gleam in his eye as far as I know . . .

GEOFFREY. Well. If you get a chance to put in a word. I know you're fairly thick with him . . .

RONALD. Yes, of course, I'll mention it, if the topic comes up. I mean I'm sure you could do as good a job as anyone.

GEOFFREY. Look, I can design, standing on my head, any building that Harrison's likely to want.

RONALD. Yes well, as I say, if the topic comes up I'll mention it . . .

GEOFFREY. I'd be grateful . . . (MARION *comes in.*)

RONALD and GEOFFREY. (*Rise.*) Ah. (*Cross to Right.*)

MARION. Alright, darling, we're off . . . (GEOFFREY *sits Downstage corner of table.*)

RONALD. Right.

MARION. Had a nice time out here?

RONALD. (*At door, turns back.*) Oh, yes, grand.

MARION. Good. As long as you have . . . (RONALD *goes off into living room.*) This really is a simply loathsome little house. I mean how can people live in them. I mean, Geoff, you're an architect, you must be able

to tell me. How do people come to design these sort of monstrosities in the first place, let alone persuade people to live in them . . .

GEOFFREY. Well . . .

MARION. Oh, God. Now he's going to tell me he designed it . . .

GEOFFREY. No. I didn't do it. They're designed like this mainly because of cost and people who are desperate for somewhere to live aren't particularly choosy.

MARION. Oh come. Nobody can be this desperate . . .

GEOFFREY. You'd be surprised . . .

MARION. Anyway, it's been lovely to see you. It's been ages. You must come up and see us . . .

(SIDNEY *and* RONALD, *now in his overcoat and carrying* MARION'S *coat, return.*)

RONALD. (*Crosses to her.*) Darling . . .

MARION. (*Crosses Right.*) Sidney, we've had a simply lovely time. Now some time you must come up and see us . . . and your wife, that's if you ever find her . . .

SIDNEY. Yes, yes, indeed . . . (*They all go out, chattering, closing the door. Silence. After a pause,* SIDNEY *returns. He closes the door. He smiles. Quite pleased. He munches a crisp. A knocking at the back door. Rather tentative. It is* JANE. SIDNEY *frowns. His concentration disturbed.*) Just a minute. (*He crosses to the back door and opens it.* JANE *falls in. A sodden mass. Recoiling:*) My word.

JANE. (*Crosses Downstage Left of table.*) I saw them leaving.

SIDNEY. Yes. All gone now. They said for me to say goodbye to you. (*Crosses Downstage Right of table.*)

JANE. Oh.

SIDNEY. Where have you been?

JANE. In the garden. Where else? Where do you think?

SIDNEY. Oh— I don't know. You might have been for a stroll.

JANE. In this?

SIDNEY. Oh. Still raining is it?

JANE. Yes. (*Pause.*) Sidney, if you'd only explained to them . . . I could've . . . I mean I've been out there for ages. I'm soaking . . .

SIDNEY. Yes. Well, your behaviour made things very difficult. Explanations, that is. What could I say . . .

JANE. You could have explained.

SIDNEY. So could you. It was really up— (*Crosses to her.*) to you, wasn't it?

JANE. Yes, I know but . . . I just thought that you might have . . . that you would've been . . . (*He offers chips—she shakes "No." She gives up.* JANE *starts to peel off her things.*)

SIDNEY. (*Crosses to Right of table.*) All went off rather satisfactorily, anyway . . .

JANE. (*Emptying a wellington boot into the sink.*) Good . . . I'm glad . . .

SIDNEY. So am I. I mean these people just weren't anybody. They are people in the future who can be very very useful to us . . .

JANE. (*Emptying the other boot.*) Yes . . . (*She takes coat off—puts on chair back.*)

SIDNEY. Now Jane you mustn't behave that way. You really mustn't. You see, you get yourself all worked up. And then what happens?

JANE. Yes. (*Sits.*)

SIDNEY. Right. Enough said. All forgotten, eh? (*Pause.*) Oh dear . . .

JANE. What? (*Taking boots off.*)

SIDNEY. We never got around to playing any of our games, did we?

JANE. No.

SIDNEY. In all the excitement. Never mind. Another year. (*Crosses to Right.*) Well. I think I'll have a look

at television. Should be something. Christmas Eve. Usually is. Coming in, are you? (*Turns at door.*)

JANE. In a minute . . .

SIDNEY. Right then.

(SIDNEY *goes out closing the door.* JANE *puts things in closet Left—boots and coat. She stands. She sniffs. She has finished putting away her things. Her eye lights on the dirty things scattered about. She picks up a glass or so and puts them in the sink. She picks up the damp cloth and wipes first where the glasses were standing and then slowly, in wider and wider circles, till she has turned it, once more into a full scale cleaning operation. As she cleans she seems to relax. Softly at first, then louder, she is heard to sing happily to herself. She hums, "Release Me" phrase.*)

CURTAIN

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

This Christmas.

GEOFFREY *and* EVA JACKSON'S *kitchen in their fourth floor flat. One door leading to the sitting room, one into a walk-in cupboard. The room gives an immediate impression of untidiness. It is a room continually lived in, unlike the* HOPCROFT'S *immaculate ship's bridge. While it gives signs that the owners have a certain taste for the trendy home-spun in both equipment and furnishings, some of the equipment, particularly the gas stove, has seen better days. Besides the stove, the room contains a table [natural scrubbed wood], kitchen chairs [natural scrubbed wood], a sideboard [natural scrubbed wood] and a fridge and a sink.*

EVA, *unmade up, unkempt and baggy-eyed, sits at the table—Left chair, in her dressing gown. She is writing with a stub of pencil in a notepad. Whatever it is, is difficult to word. She and the floor around her are ringed with screwed up pieces of paper. In front of her is an open Scotch bottle. After a minute, she tears out the page she's been working on, screws that up as well and tosses it on the floor to join the others. She starts again. A door slams. From the sitting room, the sound of a large dog barking.* EVA *looks up alarmed, consults her watch, gives a moan and quickly closes the notepad to cover up what she's been writing.* GEOFFREY'S *voice is head Off.*

GEOFFREY. Darling? Eva . . . Eva! Quiet, George! (GEOFFREY *backs in from the sitting room.* GEORGE *is*

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