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After You With The Milk

A Comedy

Ben Travers

Samuel French—London

New York—Sydney—Toronto—Hollywood



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CHARACTERS

Dottie
Ricky
Don
Leila
Fred

The action of the play takes place in the living-room of Fred's house

ACT I

Scene 1 Late afternoon—in the summer of 1935

Scene 2 One hour later

Scene 3 Later the same evening

ACT II

Scene 1 The next day—shortly before 10 a.m. in the morning

Scene 2 Later the same day—early afternoon

Time—the summer of 1935

ACT I*

SCENE 1

The living-room of Fred's house. The heat-wave summer of 1935. Four o'clock in the afternoon

The house is set in by a by-street of the residential area of Kensington. C upstage is the hall with the front door on the R. In the hall is the lower part of the staircase. A broad archway separates the hall from the room itself and there is a passage between the foot of the staircase and off L. The archway is of sufficient width to give a clear view of the hall from the living-room. There may be long curtains at either end of the archway but these are not drawn during the play

In the living-room itself there is a door in the L wall. There are windows in the R wall with gauze curtains and summer side-curtains. There is also a small window in the R back wall, giving a view of the front door outside from the room

The room is furnished elegantly with no expense spared but there is nothing ultra-modern about the furnishings or decorations. The sofa and chair covers are all of light summer material

When the CURTAIN rises, Dottie, wearing a thin summer dress, is lying on the sofa reading. She is feeling the heat and her dress may be disarrayed to keep her as cool as possible. She has taken off her shoes and they are on the floor by the sofa. There is a tumbler with a small amount of whisky and water left in it on the little table beside the sofa

The front door-bell rings

Dottie *(looking up and speaking to herself)* Who's that?

Dottie sighs, sits up and puts her book down. She puts on one shoe, pauses and finishes her drink, then puts on her other shoe

The front-door bell rings loudly

(Plaintively) Who is it? *(She rises and fixes her dress)*

Dottie exits into the hall and opens the front door cautiously, just wide enough for her to peer through

Ricky *(off)* Good afternoon. Is this Mr and Mrs Dunn's house?

Dottie Yes. I'm Mrs Dunn. Why?

Ricky *(off)* You are? Good Lord.

Dottie Who are you? What do you want?

*NB Paragraph 3 on page ii of this Acting Edition regarding photocopying and video-recording should be carefully read.

Ricky (*off*) No, I only said “Good Lord” like that because you look so young.

Dottie closes the front door

(*Off*) Oh, please open the door.

Dottie No, thank you. You may be one of those men.

Ricky (*off*) I’m not. Please listen. My name’s Dunn too. I’m your husband’s son.

Dottie No, you’re not. He’s in Australia.

Ricky (*off*) I know. But I’m here now. I’ve just got here.

Dottie (*in two minds*) Really? Truly? (*She opens the door again a little*) One minute—what’s your name?

Ricky (*off*) I’ve told you. Dunn.

Dottie Don’t be silly—your Christian name?

Ricky (*off*) Ricky. Rickaby. Rickaby Dunn.

Dottie Good heavens. (*She opens the door wider*)

Ricky enters. He is dressed in a new summer suit and new shoes

Dottie is doubtful and distrusting

I oughtn’t to let you in. Your father wouldn’t have.

Ricky Oh, then he’s still alive?

Dottie Of course he is. He’s in hospital.

Ricky Still there?

Dottie No, again. But he’s not bad this time. He’ll be out in a day or two.

Ricky Oh. Well, I must wait and see him then.

Dottie If he’ll see you. And you can’t wait here. You can come in for a minute or two because it’s so hot . . .

Dottie enters the living-room. Ricky follows Dottie downstage

Ricky Yes, isn’t it?

Dottie And then you must go away again.

Ricky You mean—right bang off?

Dottie Yes. I’ve heard about you, you see.

Ricky I guess you have. But I’m really quite harmless.

Dottie That’s what they always say.

Ricky Who do?

Dottie The men.

Ricky These men—I’m sorry I don’t quite—what men?

Dottie They break in and rape women and things. Especially in this very hot weather. It makes them want.

Ricky I don’t rape. I don’t see there’s any fun in it. Do you?

Dottie I don’t know; I’ve never had it done to. And if you don’t rape you do other awful things and always have.

Ricky I know my father says so.

Dottie Yes. So why aren’t you still in Australia?

Ricky I felt I ought to see the old man again. I heard he’d had a stroke.

Dottie That was months ago.

Ricky Yes, but I'd only just heard. I met a woman in Sydney who'd been in Kenya when you were there and knew all about you. Rosie Roberts.

Dottie Rosie—Oh, yes. She eloped to Australia with an Indian photographer.

Ricky She told me the whole thing—how the old man had sold up his estate in Kenya and come to live in London and had married you and had a stroke.

Dottie It wasn't marrying me gave him the stroke. Did Rosie say that?

Ricky No, no. Sorry. You married him five or six years ago, didn't you?

Dottie Yes. In Nairobi. He had no strokes then. Quite the opposite. I'm afraid he may get another now with you turning up like this.

Ricky Oh dear. I felt it was my duty. I got on the first ship I could. I only landed today. I worked my passage all the way home.

Dottie In this heat? Oh, then you'd better sit down for a minute.

Ricky Thank you. (*He sits*) I'm glad I called in anyhow.

Dottie Why?

Ricky To have discovered you. You're so much younger than I expected. And, if I may say so, much more attractive.

Dottie (*instinctively pleased*) Am I? (*Reacting*) Oh, it's no good your saying things like that. And did you imagine that your father had married some old hideosity?

Ricky Well . . . but fancy your consenting to marry *him*.

Dottie If you're going to say rude things about him . . .

Ricky No, I'm not. I came on purpose to try not to.

Dottie You've always hated each other. Why? He's a dear old man really. I'm very fond of him.

Ricky Then he must have improved with age. No, no—I didn't mean that either. But you know what he's like—no, no, you don't. You love him of course. Anyhow, you married him.

Dottie And I'm very glad I did.

Ricky Good. But . . .

Dottie But what?

Ricky You're such miles younger than he is.

Dottie Heavens, yes. Why shouldn't I be?

Ricky Honestly, I would like to make it up with him. Now that he's so near his grave.

Dottie Don't say that; he's not. Besides, he wants to be cremated.

Pause

(*In a tone of finality*) Well . . .

Ricky (*rising unwillingly*) Oh dear—has it come to that already?

Dottie (*after a moment's thought*) No. Sit down again. I'm not being like myself. I don't want you to think I'm—unfriendly.

Ricky I don't. And I wonder if I'm as bad as you've been given to think.

Dottie You don't look it but you must be—for Fred to be like he is about you.

Ricky He was like that from the moment I was born. He didn't think I was really his son. He told my mother so directly he saw me.

Dottie He was always argumentative.

Ricky My mother buzzed off somewhere and soon died. And there he was, left with me.

Dottie Does he still think you're not his. He never told me you weren't.

Ricky (*shrugging*) I think he decided to make the best of a bad job.

Dottie Whether it was his or someone else's.

Ricky Anyhow, we could never get on. It got worse and worse. Finally I quit and went to Australia.

Dottie (*gently*) I wonder whether he'd be different about you now.

Ricky He might. These strokes may have made him a bit feeble-minded.

Dottie He's not nearly as feeble-minded as I am. If it were him and not me you wouldn't still be here. (*She moves to the drinks table*) Soda or plain or just ice?

Ricky You're very kind. Just a little phtt from the syphon.

Dottie prepares two drinks while they continue talking

After all, why should he change. He's always been the same with me ever since he beat hell out of me as a kid.

Dottie That was silly of him. It can only have made you worse.

Ricky It did. When I was sent to school here in England it wasn't the old story that I got into bad company. I was the bad company the other boys got into.

Dottie Then at least your schooldays were happy.

Ricky While they lasted. When I was seventeen I was expelled from Charterhouse.

Dottie What had you done?

Ricky One of the housemaids.

Dottie It was nice that you were normal anyhow. (*She hands Ricky his drink*)

Ricky Thank you so much.

Dottie It must be so difficult at public schools when you've only each other—all boys together. Like those poor gaolbirds. I'm always so sorry for them about that. Never mind them now—go on about yourself. So then you went back to Kenya . . .

Ricky Yes, in disgrace. I worked on the estate, always at daggers drawn with the old man.

Dottie (*gently*) Was that all his fault?

Ricky No, a lot mine. Eventually he got me a job with a chap who sold tractors.

Dottie (*with sudden amused interest*) Oh, I know about that. It was Don Raeburn. And one afternoon you were caught in bed with his wife, Mabel.

Ricky My father told you, did he?

Dottie No. Don Raeburn told me himself. He lives in London now—quite close to here.

Ricky looks startled and becomes quite agitated

Ricky Good Lord, does he?

Dottie He's in some City thing—import and export or both or something.

Ricky Is he still friendly with my father?

Dottie Yes, he's (*hesitating*)—often in here. Why?

Ricky He'd go out of his way to dish any hopes I've got.

Dottie Yes, he's always been annoyed about you and Mabel.

Ricky Annoyed? Talk about my father hating me—I say, don't let Don know I'm back in England—please don't.

Dottie All right, I won't. Of course not. But Don's not here now; he's up north somewhere.

Ricky Oh, good. He can't be too far away for me.

Dottie He's got another wife now. A very nice girl. I've made great friends with her. Fred says she's a great improvement on Mabel.

Ricky He didn't know Mabel as well as I did.

Dottie Was it on account of Mabel you went to Australia?

Ricky Well, I couldn't stay in Kenya with Don around. There'd have been murder. And I thought if I quit he might take Mabel back.

Dottie (*keenly*) Then you did really go out of kindness to Mabel?

Ricky Sort of. I should have known Don better.

Dottie And in Australia—did you carry on the same way there?

Ricky I did all the things one does in Australia with sheep and docks and mines and beer. I did quite well at times but it never lasted.

Dottie I meant—about women?

Ricky On and off. Nothing that anyone has any regrets about.

Dottie How good and sensible. And you can't have done badly in other ways. You look quite prosperous.

Ricky I landed with twenty-eight quid. I went to Harrods and got fitted out. I thought I'd better look fairly civilized.

Dottie That's very nice and clean of you but you must have spent all your money.

Ricky Isn't it hell nowadays?

Dottie What about your luggage?

Ricky Only one old suitcase. I parked it at Harrods.

Dottie Aren't you going to get it out again before they close?

Ricky No hurry. I like being here. That is if you don't mind.

Dottie No, I don't now. (*After a pause*) I'm surprised at you.

Ricky Why, what have I done now?

Dottie Coming over like this and going and spending all your money like that. Are you really hoping to get reconciled?

Ricky (*with a blunt laugh*) It's a long shot but I've always gambled a bit.

Dottie Don't think me horrid but—it's really the thought of Fred's money, isn't it?

Ricky Yes.

Dottie (*pleased*) That's honest of you.

Ricky I guess it's best to be honest with you.

Dottie Yes, it is. And I'd like you to get some of it if you can. There's masses of it. There was even before he sold the estate. I'm glad there was. Oh, the money wasn't why I married him, at least, not my first reason. But I've become much fonder of him since I got it.

Ricky What was the first reason?

Dottie I went to stay with friends in Nairobi. I met him there. He really loved me right away and I—sort of—pitied him; he seemed lonely and uncared-for. I felt drawn towards him. He was so pleading and pathetic.

Ricky (*incredulously*) My father? Pathetic?

Dottie Well, pleading anyhow. And of course he offered me all I wanted. That came second but I thought oh well, if God chose to put it in my way ...

Ricky It may not have been God. It may have been the devil.

Dottie Yes, it's often difficult to know which is which. But it's turned out beautifully. I look after him and he looks after me. I'm in what they used to call a bed of roses.

Ricky Delightful. So long as it's all right about who else is in the bed.

Dottie I suppose I really married him out of kindness. But I'm like that. I always want to be kind to everybody. Like you—I'd like to try and help you with Fred. But why *does* he hate you so? You must have been wicked to him.

Ricky No—well, perhaps sometimes a bit wicked back. And, please, I'm not asking you to help me. That might upset him. I'll tackle him on my own. I suppose I'd better not go and see him in hospital?

Dottie Oh, no. You might have to stay in hospital yourself. I'll break it to him gently that you're here.

Ricky (*gratefully*) Will you?

Dottie Of course. I tell you I enjoy helping people even if they don't deserve it. I'm not a do-gooder, though I don't see there's any harm in being one. I don't give much money to charities and things. I do kind things which turn out to be frightfully mistaken and troublesome. I'm impulsive too. I do and say things on the spur of the moment. And drop bricks. People laugh at me about it.

Ricky I bet they love you all the same.

Dottie Oh yes, they do. (*She takes Ricky's glass and mixes him another drink*)

Ricky I don't see how they couldn't. I'm glad I came here if it were only to meet you.

Dottie Thank you. I'm glad you feel that I'm encouraging.

Ricky I do. You must have improved my father a lot.

Dottie I don't know. He dotes on *me* but I don't think he's changed much otherwise. He's still rather flarey at times. And he still loves to argue. But not with me for long because I always give way.

Ricky That was my trouble with him. Neither of us ever gave way.

Dottie How frightfully stupid. (*She hands Ricky his drink*)

Ricky Thank you so much.

Dottie I oughtn't to be giving you another drink. You should be going to get that suitcase.

Ricky My word, the old man's luckier than he deserves ...

Dottie So am I. Our marriage is just what marriage ought to be.

Ricky Oh? And what's that?

Dottie I think marriage is—have you ever been married?

Ricky shakes his head

I think marriage is something separate—apart from anything else in life; something that's sort of solid and settled and that's always there and always will be. So many people don't look on it that way. They just get together and marry and after a bit they squabble and part and only because they both want a little occasional—well, change of air.

Ricky Yes. But I suppose it depends a bit on where they go to get the change of air. (*After a pause, rather cheekily*) Do you—travel much?

Dottie looks at Ricky shrewdly. Her tone changes and she becomes practical though still friendly

Dottie Drink that up; you must go and get that suitcase. What do you do then? Have you got anywhere to stay?

Ricky That's all right; I'll find some small hotel or somewhere.

Dottie Hotel? You can't afford that. You've no idea what they charge nowadays, even the little fleabags. You can come back here; I've a perfectly good spare bedroom.

Ricky My God, talk about your being kind . . .

Dottie We've had all that. I'm so glad I can be.

Ricky Not so glad as I am. It's wonderful of you.

Dottie No, it isn't. I wouldn't want you to go anywhere else.

Ricky You wouldn't?

Dottie No. I never imagined you'd be—like you are.

Ricky I never imagined anybody would be like *you* are.

Dottie Well, that's all to the good, isn't it? I'll go and get your room ready. Fred might not like your being here, but . . .

Ricky Not like it? He'd be rabid.

Dottie Yes, and I don't do anything that'll worry him, poor old dear. So I won't tell him.

Ricky And surely it's quite reasonable. After all, you are my step-mother.

Dottie Oh, so I am. I hadn't really thought of that.

Ricky (*laughing*) You're a step in the right direction if ever there was one. What's your name by the way?

Dottie Dottie. Dorothy really. But I'm always Dottie. And just about right for me.

Ricky I'm Rickaby but always Ricky.

Dottie Yes, I know. Go on now, you'll have to hurry and it's so hot. Have you enough money for taxis?

Ricky Yes, I'm okay. (*He kisses Dottie on the cheek*) Thank you, dear Dottie. (*He kisses Dottie on the other cheek*) Thank you, reverend step-mother.

Ricky exits through the front door

Dottie stands wide-eyed. She looks at the front door and away again

Dottie Gosh.

CURTAIN

SCENE 2

The same. One hour later

Dottie is sitting on the sofa with her shoes on and not reading. There is a long drink on the table beside her. Her attitude is expectant

The front-door bell rings. Dottie goes quickly to answer the door

On opening the front door Dottie is shocked and steps back exclaiming

Dottie Don . . .

Don enters. He is dressed in a business man's suit. He puts his arms around Dottie and speaks heartily

Don Hallo, lovie. (*He lowers his voice*) Is he here?

Dottie No, he's still in hospital.

Don releases Dottie and comes downstage into the living-room

Don Aha. I was counting on that.

Dottie closes the front door and moves downstage

Dottie (*as she moves*) But Don, why didn't you tell me you were coming?

Don Didn't know myself till this morning. I only just had time to catch the train.

Dottie But haven't you been home?

Don I looked in. Leila was out, thank God. I left her a note.

Dottie Why, what did you tell her?

Don Oh, simply—I had to go out and dine with a man I met on the train—important business. Huh—I wonder how often that's been said. Well, come on, my love, give us a kiss.

Dottie kisses Don quickly on the cheek

Don No, a real one. What's the matter with you?

Dottie Nothing, dear. At least—(*She kisses him on the mouth abruptly*) More by-and-by.

Don What's all this? Why aren't you like you always are?

Dottie It's all so sudden and unexpected.

Don Makes it all the better. Come on—we're just right. A couple of hours before we go to dinner.

Don moves to kiss Dottie again but she backs away

Dottie No, wait, Don. Do give me time to tell you.

Don Tell me what?

Dottie We can't. Not now. I've got somebody else coming here.

Don (*aggressively*) What? Who?

Dottie Oh—just a friend.

Don Coming when?

Dottie Any time now.

Don How long for?

Dottie For the night. To stay here. In the spare bedroom.

Don Oh, be damned to that. Who is she?

Dottie Well, actually, it's a man.

Don Actually—I always love that actually. My God, Dottie, are you up to something?

Dottie Don't be silly. He's just a relation. A cousin.

Don A friend you said.

Dottie Yes, well actually he's a sort of distant cousin.

Don Oh, actually is he? He needn't think he's coming here.

Dottie He is, I tell you. He turned up here this evening, hoping to see Fred.

Don What about?

Dottie I think he wants to raise some money.

Don Well, give him some money and tell him to bugger off. Letting him in here—you're too kind-hearted, that's your trouble.

Dottie I like to be. It's a pity more people aren't.

Don Come on; I'll go to your room. And you get rid of him and come on up.

Dottie I can't send him away. You get so impatient, Don.

Don Yes, I damn well am impatient. I've been waiting for this—thinking of it all the way on the train.

Dottie Well, you must bottle it up, dear. Now, sit down and I'll give you a little drink.

Don Little one? (*Indicating her drink*) You look as if you're lashing into it all right. (*He sits*)

Dottie gives Don her drink

Dottie I don't want it now. You have it. There. (*She moves behind Don and strokes his head*)

Don (*grumpily*) I don't much care for this sweetie-pie stuff either.

Don drinks

Dottie Yes, you do; you know you do.

Don (*relenting*) Yes, yes; all right.

Don turns his face up, kisses Dottie and blows his cheeks out

But, my God, this heat. There's never been anything like it. I can't wait to get my clothes off.

Dottie Then take them off—upstairs I mean. You can have a shower and wait there in my room.

Don That's better—that's what I said all along. (*He finishes his drink and rises*) And tell this distant cousin he can get a damn sight more distant.

Dottie It's all rather difficult.

Don Why, what d'you mean?

Dottie It's the sort of muddle I seem to get into.

The front-door bell rings

There he is now.

Don Good. The sooner he's here the sooner he quits.

Don exits upstairs

Dottie goes into the hall, makes certain Don is out of sight, then opens the front door

Ricky enters carrying a well-worn suitcase

Dottie puts her fingers to her lips, gestures to Ricky to put down the suitcase and follow her. She looks upstairs quickly

Dottie enters the living-room and Ricky follows

Ricky (*in a hushed tone*) What's the matter? Someone upstairs?

Dottie Yes. It's all right. He can't hear from there.

Ricky Good Lord; not the old man?

Dottie No. Worse.

Ricky (*puzzled*) Worse?

Dottie Don Raeburn.

Ricky (*startled*) Don? You said he was in the north.

Dottie So he was. But he's come back suddenly. Like you did too.

Ricky But why is he here? And upstairs?

Dottie He's having a shower.

Ricky Why?

Dottie Well—it's terribly hot weather.

Ricky But why here?

Dottie He did go home but his wife's out.

Ricky Can't he shower in his own house without his wife?

Dottie Perhaps he likes to have her looking on.

Ricky (*as if to say "oh, rubbish" pleasantly*) Oh, Dottie.

Pause

Dottie looks perplexed, then gives in

Dottie Oh, what's the use? You've got to know, that's all. I'm afraid you may get a shock.

Ricky I've had a pretty good one already.

Dottie When Fred's not here Don sometimes comes to see me. And not only to see me. You know what I mean.

Ricky (*incredulously*) Don Raeburn—and you?

Dottie It began when Fred was in hospital that long first time. Don had always been like that about me.

Ricky And you let him? Him?

Dottie He's not happy at home like I am. He's got a very nice pretty young wife—I told you, didn't I? She and I are very fond of each other.

But Don doesn't get on with her.

Ricky (*seriously; bitterly*) She with him you mean.

Dottie I felt I had to try to console him.

Ricky Console him—that's good.

Dottie Yes, but I must be fair, I was rather ready myself. I'd always been keen on it and it had—given me up and I hadn't had it for so long and was so sort of pining. In fact if it hadn't been for Don I think I'd have gone out and tried to get a policeman or someone.

Ricky (*still bitter*) We all get like that at times, but Don Raeburn, my God...

Dottie Don't be disgusted with me, Ricky. I've always been faithful to Fred, at heart I mean. It was all right when we first married; he was like an old tiger. But he soon sort of dried up. I had to do what I could about it, but only after Fred couldn't.

Ricky Nobody's going to blame you for that but—with him of all people. I'm sorry but I don't think I can stay here now.

Dottie Don't say that, Ricky; don't. If it wasn't Don you wouldn't like whoever it was. Men never like other men who go with women they like. And I had to take pity on Don. Honestly, I think I'd have done it for his sake even if I hadn't wanted it myself. Out of kindness to him.

Ricky (*studying Dottie and softening*) I've never met anyone like you, Dottie.

Dottie (*decisively*) It's a pity more people aren't like me.

Ricky All this being kind to people and going as far as this with it.

Dottie Well, what greater kindness could there be? Especially when it means enjoying yourself at the same time.

Ricky With Don, that's what I can't get over.

Dottie You can't talk. You did it with Mabel.

Ricky Mabel's not you.

Dottie (*softly*) Isn't she? You mean that's really why you're so disappointed? Because it's me?

Ricky Yes. All right then that's what it is. I'm jealous.

Dottie Oh, Rickie; how sweet of you.

Dottie and Ricky study each other

Ricky Is he going to be here long?

Dottie Until dinner-time. Then he'll take me to dinner. And then he'll go home. I hope.

Ricky Waiting for you up there now, is he?

Dottie He's expecting me, you see. I didn't want him this evening...

Ricky Then tell him so.

Dottie I can't without hurting his feelings.

Ricky Then hurt them. No, that wouldn't be you. So what? Am I to go out again?

Dottie I hate you to have to. You could stay in your room. Only I suppose Don wouldn't like doing it with you along the landing.

Ricky But, good Lord, you haven't told him *I'm* here?

Dottie Of course not. I said you were a distant cousin staying the night.

Ricky So long as we don't meet. You don't want a fight on your hands.

(*Resignedly*) Okay—I'll go out again right away.

Dottie But you will come back, won't you?

Ricky Yes, now I will—later on.

Dottie Have a good dinner yourself. I'll give you some money.

Ricky No, I can manage. (*He indicates his suitcase*) I'll take that thing to my room if he's not about.

Dottie No, he's safely in mine. I'll show you yours. Oh, Ricky, thank you for being so understanding about me. It doesn't really matter, you know, because . . .

Ricky Because what?

Dottie Because it hasn't anything to do with real love.

Ricky I should hope not. Not in his case.

Dottie It's only what I said this evening about a little change of air. Don't blame me; you said you didn't.

Ricky (*kindly*) You? I wouldn't blame you if it were the hunchback of Notre-Dame.

Dottie Poor hunchback. I should think he might be rather interesting.

Dottie exits upstairs, Ricky following with his suitcase

(*Off*) It's the first room. Bring it in here.

A door closes upstairs. The telephone rings six or more times

Don enters hastily from upstairs. He is wearing a bath-gown and is carrying a small towel. His hair is ruffled

Don looks at the telephone apprehensively, throws the towel in the chair, lifts the receiver gingerly and listens without speaking. He is greatly startled and lays the receiver aside

Dottie enters hurriedly from upstairs

Don moves to meet her speaking quietly but agitatedly

Don Look out; it's Leila.

Dottie Don—you've got on Fred's bath-gown.

Don (*agitatedly*) It's Leila I tell you.

Dottie You shouldn't wear it. It seems to bring Fred into it.

Don points exasperatedly to the telephone

Don Leila.

Dottie Oh dear; is it? (*She picks up the receiver and speaks, ingenuously at first*) Hallo? Who is it? . . . Leila. (*Gushingly*) Leila, dear, how are you? . . . What, dear? . . . Don? Oh, is he back? . . . Here? No, why should he be? . . . What, dear? I don't quite understand . . . (*In a shocked tone*) Leila, what on earth—are you joking or something? . . . Leila, you can't really think? . . . The telephone—took the receiver off? That was someone who's staying here, a cousin . . . Leila, what is all this, I simply . . . Cousin's name? What's that got to do with it? . . . Oh, very well then, his name's Bertram Rogers . . . Now, listen, Leila; you're being most utterly . . . (*She replaces the receiver slowly*) She knows.

Don She can't know. She's just guessing.

Dottie We can't go on now. You'd better get dressed and go home.

Don I've told her I'm dining out, haven't I?

Dottie Oh, yes. With the man on the train. What a feeble thing to say.

Don What did she say on the phone?

Dottie The usual sort of thing—"You needn't think I don't know" and all that. She said she knows you're here now.

Don How can she? She hasn't a clue.

Dottie Get dressed anyhow. We'll have an early dinner and then you can go straight home.

Don Damn. It will be safer I suppose. But we'll still have time back here directly after dinner.

Dottie Oh, Don; with indigestion? No, dear.

Don Well, we'll see. What about this confounded Bertram Rogers?

Dottie He's upstairs; waiting to go out too.

Don Well, tell him to skip the waiting too. Blast all this.

Don exits upstairs forgetting his towel

Dottie speaks after he's gone

Dottie Have I time to change? Never mind—I'll go as I am. No, I've just time . . .

The telephone rings

Oh . . . (*She picks up the receiver*) Leila, is that you again? . . . Oh, I beg your pardon; yes, I'm Mrs Dunn . . . No, really—oh, that's wonderful . . . Yes, I'll come and get him; what time? . . . Oh, then I'll be waiting for him here . . . yes, ten o'clock onwards. How kind of the doctor. Give him my love, my husband I mean. . . . Yes; thank you so much.

Ricky enters from upstairs

Ricky He's back in your room; I heard him. Can I have a latchkey?

Dottie There's one in the writing-table drawer. Ricky, I've just heard—Fred's coming back tomorrow morning.

Ricky Oh dear; so soon. Then that'll be it, won't it.

Dottie And it's all right about him. (*She indicates upstairs*) Nothing tonight. His wife's getting nose-y so we're going out now. Instead of doing it.

Ricky I'm glad, Dottie, terribly glad. But I bung off first, do I?

Dottie Yes, go now. And you needn't be too late coming back.

Ricky You won't hear me come in. I'll be here already. Look, there are about a dozen keys in this drawer.

Dottie I'll find it for you.

Dottie moves to Ricky by the writing-table and searches for the key

Don enters from upstairs. He is fully dressed and speaks as he enters

Don Dottie, I left a towel here; you'd better . . .

Don breaks off as he sees Ricky. He is completely taken aback. Don and Ricky stare at each other in silence. Don speaks in a tone of fierce irony to Dottie

Bertram Rogers is good.

Ricky (*to Dottie*) Who's he?

Dottie You. It was the first name that came into my head.

Ricky I'm not very keen on Bertram.

Ricky decides to play it cool. Don is fierce

Don Rogers is appropriate anyhow. (*To Dottie*) What the hell is he doing here?

Dottie (*indignantly*) Why shouldn't he be here? (*More calmly*) He's come to see Fred and make friends again.

Don Has he, by God. A fat chance he's got—I'll see to that.

Dottie (*sharply*) No, you won't. Don't you dare to interfere.

Don Here. With you.

Ricky And the same to you.

Don Don't you dare utter. (*To Dottie*) And you telling me he was some damned cousin.

Ricky Distant.

Dottie I told you that because you weren't to be trusted.

Ricky As you have just so clearly indicated.

Don Letting him stay here in this house. That'll please Fred, won't it?

Dottie No, it won't. Any more than it would please Fred to know that you're here. And what for.

Don That's right. Give me away. And yourself.

Ricky Don't worry. I'm only amazed at the extent of her benevolence.

Don That'll do. You stop talking high-falutin' cock and get out.

Dottie Now stop it, Don. I won't have rows in this house. It's no good your being insulting to him. You're only here to do to me what he did to Mabel. (*She is now quite complacent*)

Don That was something entirely different.

Dottie Of course it was different. That's the only reason why people do it. Because it's different with everybody.

Ricky Especially with the hunchback of Notre-Dame.

Don What the hell are you talking about?

The door bell rings. They all look surprised. Don moves to look through the window commanding a view of the porch

Oh, my God—Leila.

Dottie Leila?

Ricky Who's Leila?

Dottie The wife. I told you she was nosey. Leave it to me. Don, go in the dining-room. (*She points L*) No, that's too near. Go through the back door and wait outside.

Don Oh, be damned to that.

Dottie (*commandingly*) Go on. Do.

Don Hell, what a mess-up. To say nothing of finding that bastard here.

The door bell rings

Dottie (*to Don*) Go on I tell you. I must let her in.

Don Why?

Dottie To tell her you're not here of course.

Don Well, be careful what you say. You know what you're like.

Don moves to exit L, remembers his towel and picks it up, then exits L

Dottie Ricky, dear, you go upstairs.

Ricky Can't I be here, discovered?

Dottie No, I'll see her first and call you down. Be nice to her.

Ricky I'll try.

Dottie And remember you're not yourself. You're Bertram Rogers.

Ricky Bertram—I do dislike that.

Dottie It can't be helped.

There is a prolonged ring of the door bell

Ricky exits upstairs

(Calling) Coming. *(She ensures Ricky is out of sight then goes to open the front door)*

Leila enters, wearing a day dress

Leila moves downstage into the living-room. She is very self-confident. Dottie closes the front door and follows Leila

Leila *(talking as she enters)* That took a bit of organizing didn't it?

Dottie Leila, you're really being very silly.

Leila Knowing Don, I think that's what you're being.

Dottie Why have you come here like this?

Leila To have a few words with Don. Where is he? Taking cover somewhere.

Dottie I told you. Only my cousin is here.

Leila *(contemptuously)* Cousin. It's a pity I came so soon. I might have caught you and Don hard at it.

Dottie That's silly. As if I'd have stopped to go down and answer the door.

Leila When Fred was in hospital all that time Don was here almost every afternoon.

Dottie *(taken aback)* Who told you that?

Leila I didn't need telling. I observed for myself.

Dottie Leila, how sneaky. But you couldn't have seen anything. You must have been very disappointed.

Leila That's more than you were. I didn't care much at the time—I was having a little flutter of my own . . .

Dottie Oh, Leila, were you? Who with?

Leila But now—when he comes here to you straight from King's Cross . . .

Dottie He did not, I tell you . . .

Leila This is the finish, darling. And I'll damn well stay here and tell him so.

Dottie That's nice for me. I've got things to do.

Leila Then you won't be doing them with Don.

Dottie I've got my cousin to see to.

Leila (*laughing ironically*) Oh, this cousin. Why does the alibi always have to be a cousin? Really, Dottie, you are the most transparent liar.

Dottie (*indignantly*) I am not transparent. All right then, you wait a minute.

Dottie moves to the foot of the stairs and calls

Bertram . . .

Ricky (*off, cheerfully*) Hallo.

Dottie Come down here.

Leila loses her confidence and looks puzzled. She ignores Dottie's confident smile

Ricky enters from upstairs. He assumes a rather exaggerated gaiety

Leila surveys Ricky and immediately likes the look of him. Dottie looks pleased with herself

Dottie Here he is—Mrs Raeburn—my cousin Bertram . . .

Ricky Rogers.

Dottie Rogers.

Ricky (*to Leila*) Hallo.

Leila Hal-lo. I didn't think you really existed.

Ricky I'm glad you do. (*To Dottie*) Her name again?

Leila Leila.

Ricky Yes, what a nice name. Mine, I'm afraid, is Bertram. I'm waiting to catch up with my god-parents.

Leila You can always be Bertie. Bertie's rather sweet. Where on earth did you get him from, Dottie?

Dottie He lives in the country.

Leila (*to Ricky*) Where?

Ricky Oh, in the bush. You know—a long way away.

Dottie He farms.

Leila He doesn't look much like a farmer to me.

Ricky I only do it in a small way—pigs and gumboots and manure. It's very monotonous. Monotonous manure—it sounds like a song, doesn't it? Be—my—monotonous manure . . .

Dottie He pops up sometimes to visit me.

Leila Why haven't I heard of you before? And aren't you rather in the way here tonight?

Ricky Am I? What of?

Dottie Leila's got some mad idea that her husband's here with me tonight.

Leila So he is. He's probably waiting fuming in your bed.

Dottie He is *not* in my bed. Is he?

Ricky I haven't heard any fuming. What about giving Leila a drink?

Dottie She didn't come here for that.

Leila No, I certainly did not. (*To Ricky*) I'll have a gin and it, half and half on the rocks.

Ricky moves to the drinks table

Ricky I'll fix it.

Dottie (*put out*) Oh, Ricky, must you?

Leila Ricky?

Ricky That's her pet name for me.

Leila Ricky? Not short for Rickaby by any chance?

Ricky (*to Dottie*) There's no need for any secret about it now, is there?

Dottie Oh, very well then—he's really Fred's son.

Leila Rickaby Dunn. But this is terrific. You must be the lad who performed on Mabel.

Ricky I am. Or was. One or two lumps of ice?

Leila One. Do tell me, what was Mabel like?

Ricky In appearance? Or bed?

Dottie No, Leila, please. We don't want to go back into Mabel now.

Leila But why all this Bertram stuff?

Dottie We were keeping him dark because Fred doesn't know he's here. Fred doesn't like him, you see.

Leila Doesn't like him—my God, you should hear Don.

Dottie Well, that proves that Don isn't here, doesn't it?

Leila What does? Of course he's here.

Leila takes her drink from Ricky

Thanks.

Dottie (*warming up*) Oh, don't go on—sitting there and being ridiculous and starting to drink. I've a lot to do. Fred's coming home tomorrow morning.

Leila Oh, I'm glad—dear old Fred. (*To Ricky*) Do tell me all about Mabel.

Dottie (*genuinely struck with an idea*) I know—I've an idea. Ricky's just going out, all on his own—

Leila How very accommodating of him.

Dottie Why don't you go out to dinner with him?

Ricky reacts, not liking this proposal at all

Ricky What? No, listen, Dottie . . .

Leila That's one way of getting rid of me. Don't be so dumb.

Dottie But you like Ricky—you've taken to him.

Ricky No, she hasn't.

Leila Yes, I have; very much. That's not the point.

Dottie He can tell you all about Mabel and everything.

Ricky No, I wouldn't. (*Pointedly*) It wouldn't be kind to Mabel.

Leila Oh, I'd quite like to dine with Ricky later on, when I've disposed of Don.

Dottie becomes highly indignant

Dottie Leila, stop being like this; it's hateful of you and you know how I hate people hating.

Leila Try hating yourself for a change. It's about time.

Dottie Now you're being angry with me of all people. When I hate anybody to be angry too.

Ricky Now, please—Dottie—girls . . .

Leila I'm not in the least angry.

Dottie Yes, you are.

Leila I'm not. But really—trying to send me to dinner with Ricky so that you can have dinner with Don. And not only dinner.

Dottie Don't be so damn silly. You know perfectly well that Don's dining with his friend off the train.

Leila Oh so he is. And how did you know that, Dottie.

Dottie (*aghast*) I've done it again.

Pause

Leila finishes her drink and rises

Leila All right then. I *will* go with Ricky.

Ricky No. I'm sorry; but after all this . . .

Dottie Yes, go with her, Ricky. I want you to.

Ricky No, I can't. I won't.

Dottie It'll help me. Here, come here. You haven't a latchkey. I'll give you mine. (*She picks up her bag*)

Leila (*to Ricky*) I'm going home to change. You can come and wait for me if you like.

Ricky I'll come along later.

Dottie No, now. Here you are—here's my key.

Ricky stands by Dottie. He makes protesting gestures and indicates the whereabouts of Don. Dottie acknowledges silently and hands Ricky the key and a fistful of Treasury notes

Go along, dear Ricky. I know what I'm doing—as much as I ever do.

Leila moves upstage

Leila Well, are you coming or not?

Dottie Yes, he is.

Ricky reluctantly puts the notes in his pocket

Leila (*calling*) You needn't come home, Don. Or try to see me if you do.

This is the finish. That's really all I came here to tell you.

Dottie Don't be unkind to him, Leila.

Leila moves to the front door

He won't be staying on here you know.

Leila Well, I don't care. He'd better go to his bloody Club.

Leila exits through the front door

Ricky dallies a moment looking at Dottie. Dottie smiles

Dottie It's all right. He'll be gone long before you come back.

Ricky unwillingly follows Leila out and closes the door behind him

Dottie goes into the hall, faces L and calls loudly

You can come back in now.

Dottie re-enters the living-room

Don enters from L of the hall and moves downstage

Did you hear all that?

Don Not a word. I went outside. A bit *infra dig* but I thought it safer.

Dottie You needn't have. Leila knows all about us.

Don She can't.

Dottie She does. I told her.

Don (*incredulous*) Told her?

Dottie I did what you said I might—I dropped a brick.

Don (*more in sadness than anger*) Dottie, you are the most . . .

Dottie (*cutting in*) I lied as long as I could. I wish I hadn't now. I hate lying. Especially if I'm caught out.

Don You confessed to her?

Dottie Only by mistake. But I'm glad really. It makes me feel happier about it.

Don Oh, does it, what about me? Did she know I was here?

Dottie Yes, she left some rude messages. But I'm sure she'll forgive us. She said she didn't really care.

Don Huh—I know better. What's happened to that damned Ricky?

Dottie Oh, he—went out.

Don He'd better stay out. You having him here and kidding me he was someone else.

Dottie That was only to spare your feelings.

Don Thank you; I'll spare his feelings . . .

Dottie He is Fred's s . . . oh, by the way, Fred's coming home tomorrow.

Don Is he though? Good job it isn't tonight. Come on, let's go upstairs.

Dottie After this? Of course not. With Leila knowing.

Don That makes no difference. She'll divorce me anyhow; you know that, don't you?

Dottie Oh, nonsense.

Don She's been wanting to. She's told me so. And now here's her chance, cut and dried.

Dottie But you don't want that.

Don Me? No, of course I don't.

Dottie You still love Leila.

Don Well—I would if she'd let me.

Dottie And you're married. Marriage ought to mean something above all that.

Don I daresay it should. But if you go and break it up—confessing to her with your usual brilliance.

Dottie Don, don't be rude and angry like that.

Don What do you expect? Both my marriages gone west. The first one thanks to your bloody Ricky and now this.

Dottie Ricky only did what you've been doing.

Don Not at all. Mabel was married to me. You're married to an incapacitated old crock who can't function.

Dottie Don't speak like that of Fred. He loves me even if he can't still manage. (*With a sudden thought*) And whatever happens—listen to me; listen to me. Fred must never never be told. If he got to find out about me with you he'd have another stroke and die.

Don Oh, rubbish. Fred's not senile. He's only just seventy.

Dottie Seventy is senile with getting strokes.

Don And don't kid yourself he won't find out. If Leila brings a divorce she'll cite you as co-respondent.

Dottie Rubbish. Leila would never do that. I'll speak to her myself and tell her not to. I can make her understand that you don't really mean a thing to me . . .

Don Oh, indeed?

Dottie Or me to you. It's simply been relief for both of us. It didn't count for anything else.

Don Is that all I've meant to you?

Dottie Yes, and me to you. You know that as well as I do.

Don Well, you began it.

Dottie Oh, Don, that's not true. You persuaded me.

Don You didn't need much persuasion.

Dottie I did it more for your sake than my own. I'd never have forced myself to give way if you hadn't suggested it.

Don (*relaxing*) Well, never mind all that. Come on, let's have one more go.

Dottie (*firmly*) No, Don.

Don It may be our last chance for a long time.

Dottie It's no good, Don; I say no. It's always the woman that says.

Don (*indignantly*) Well, what am I supposed to be here for?

Dottie I don't want you here. No, I'm sorry, that's unkind. But do please go. Never mind about dinner.

Don Dinner—who wants to go and eat dinner when we might be . . .

Pause

Dottie, relaxed, shakes her head with a gentle smile

Dottie No, we mightn't.

Don becomes indignant

Don God, what a bloody mess-up all round. A nice evening's job you've done. You're an imbecile—that's what you are, an imbecile. (*He strides to the front door. He halts and recovers himself*) No, forget it. I'm sorry. Oh, come on, Dottie.

Dottie Darling, you mustn't go to bed with an imbecile. You might get prosecuted.

Don emits an angry muffled exclamation

Don exits through the front door, slamming it behind him

CURTAIN

SCENE 3

The same. Some hours later

The window curtains are drawn and the lights are on

Leila, in an evening dress, is lying full-length on the sofa. She is in a giggly, pleasant stage of intoxication

Ricky is sitting apart. He is quite sober, very tolerant and friendly towards Leila but a bit bored

Leila *(as if calling)* Rik-ky . . .

Ricky That's all right; I'm still here.

Leila Why are you sunnly so aloof?

Ricky A what?

Leila Loof. You were so bright all through dinner. You literally sparkled. Oh, come on.

Ricky Come on whither?

Leila Come and sit beside me. I feel like being sat beside.

Ricky rises

Ricky Certainly. Anything to oblige. But there isn't much room, Leila.

Leila There is if I move my legs. *(She moves her legs down with an effort)* There now.

Ricky sits beside Leila

Like in the taxi. You kissed me when we got in the taxi.

Ricky I'm very well-mannered.

Leila You put your arm round me too.

Ricky You requested me to lend support.

Leila You put it here.

Ricky I couldn't avoid that. You put your arm up.

Leila Did I? Like this? *(She giggles and raises her arm)*

Ricky Yes, and then clamped it down on my hand.

Leila Did I? Like this? *(She giggles again)*

Ricky Yes. An even firmer clamp.

Leila Let's do it again. Don't you want to?

Ricky By all means if you wish. It makes a nice change. I was on the other side before.

Leila *(holding her bosoms)* Oh, I think they're both much the same. What's the matter, Ricky? I don't think you're being very forward.

Ricky I was backward as a boy. I've never caught up.

Leila What are we here for anyway?

Ricky I told you. I phoned Dottie and she said bring you here.

Leila Why didn't we go to my house?

Ricky No, thank you. Your husband may be there by now.

Leila Huh! Don's safely upstairs in bed with Dottie.

Dottie enters from the room L carrying a tray on which are two cups of black coffee. She is wearing a chic garment like a sort of dressy peignoir with a zip at the back and slippers

Ricky rises as she enters

Dottie's manner is rather bossy and impatient

Dottie Here you are—black coffee. That may help. (*To Ricky*) How is she?

Ricky Better. But I'm not sure better than what.

Dottie I did so want her to be talkable-to. (*To Leila*) Here, take this and drink it; it'll do you good. Drink it in sips.

Leila All right, I know; I've done it before.

Dottie (*to Ricky*) I'm very glad you telephoned.

Ricky I wanted to steer clear of Don.

Dottie I told you what he said about Leila divorcing him. Absurd of course but I thought I'd better see her again at once. But I wanted to see her sober. You never told me she was drunk on the telephone.

Leila I'm not drunk. What a vulgar expression.

Dottie Then sip that coffee and get sober. I want to talk to you about you and me and Don.

Ricky (*confidentially*) I doubt if she's in the right shape tonight.

Dottie Then I'll have to leave it over till the morning.

Ricky Oh, then she's sleeping here, is she? Where? In your bed? With you?

Dottie No, I'd rather she didn't do that.

Leila That goes for me too.

Dottie Do you mind if she has your bed?

Leila No, I don't mind.

Dottie (*ignoring Leila*) And you sleep down here on the sofa?

Ricky (*with a sigh*) Oh, all right, Dottie. Anything you say.

Leila I like it on sofas too.

Dottie Thank you, Ricky. Would you mind going and putting on your pyjamas?

Ricky Not at all but I haven't got any.

Dottie Well, you can wear Fred's bath-gown. It's in my room.

Ricky Righto. I can do with a cold shower too. (*He glances at Leila*) And I don't think I'm the only one.

Ricky exits upstairs

Dottie moves to Leila, takes the cup from her and puts it on the small table. She sits beside Leila, her manner becoming much more amicable

Dottie There. Now you're more yourself, aren't you?

Leila How can I be more? I'm myself already. (*She laughs*)

Dottie That's right, darling. You're looking better.

Leila I'm only feeling a little bit sort of vague.

Dottie You're not really angry, are you—about me and Don?

Leila Yes, I am; I'm furious.

Dottie It's all over between us, Leila.

Leila Oh, don't say that.

Dottie I mean between me and Don. We never went to bed you know—tonight I mean.

Leila Why did you ever? Did you really like it with Don? He's so bossy.

Dottie Poor Don, he was wanting. Well, I was too.

Leila He's never had much sense of humour about it, has he?

Dottie No, but I didn't bother about that. I was always in too much of a hurry.

Leila I'd like it with *Ricky*. He's got some fun. But he doesn't seem eager.

Dottie (*gently*) Men don't get very eager about girls who are feeling vague.

Leila You'd like it with him too, wouldn't you?

Dottie (*self-consciously*) I? Oh, but Leila, I couldn't.

Leila Why what's stopping you?

Dottie Ricky's my step-son. It's one of the things you're not supposed to do.

Leila Who says so?

Dottie I think it's in the prayer-book—a woman may not marry—oh, that's marriage. But I expect the prayer-book means going to bed with too. You never quite know—they're always altering the prayer-book. (*Becoming more persuasive and pressing*) But never mind that now. Listen, Leila dear. Finding Ricky here will upset Fred very badly to begin with. *Then*—this is the real point, darling. If, on top of that, Fred gets to know about Don and me it will kill him. And you don't want that—you like old Fred.

Leila Of course I do. I love him. At times.

Dottie Yes, like you do me. And you don't really want to divorce Don, do you?

Leila I most certainly do. He asked for it.

Dottie That only gives you the opportunity to be kind. Go on, forgive him and take him back.

Leila I don't mind forgiving him but I'm damned if I shall take him back.

Dottie Oh, do, Leila. He'd love you to. And I'm through with him you know. So don't be afraid of hurting my feelings.

Ricky enters from upstairs. He is wearing Fred's bath-gown and an old pair of slippers

Ricky (*as he enters*) All clear.

Leila Oh, look at him. He's all undressed.

Ricky Sorry, not quite all.

Ricky indicates to Dottie to get rid of Leila. Dottie responds readily

Dottie Yes. So come along, Leila. (*Authoritatively*) First on the left upstairs.

Dottie helps Leila up off the sofa

You won't want a nightie this weather.

Leila Who said I wanted a nightie?

Dottie Pop along now. You don't need any help.

Leila I don't seem to be getting it anyway.

Dottie Get into bed by yourself. Anybody can do that.

Leila Yes, but not many people have to.

Leila exits upstairs unsteadily

Dottie turns to Ricky

Ricky Thanks for the dinner Dottie. I've got the change upstairs. There isn't much of it.

Dottie That's all right. I'm sorry to have landed you with her. I had to get rid of her to get rid of Don.

Ricky (*waving this aside*) I know. That's okay. We're alone again. That's what I've been waiting for.

Dottie Oh, Ricky—me too.

Ricky holds Dottie and kisses her. After a few moments Dottie pulls away, then takes Ricky and kisses him

Dottie I shouldn't have done that, should I?

Ricky Done what?

Dottie Kissed you back like that. I've been feeling like it ever since you went to Harrods.

Ricky It happens that way. You only have to meet someone for five minutes.

Dottie Yes, but isn't it awful our being the someones?

Ricky What's awful about it?

Dottie Darling, don't you see? Whether Fred lets you stay or not, there won't be anything we can do about it.

Ricky That's tomorrow. We don't have to think of that now.

Dottie Oh, but yes, we do . . .

Ricky Oh, but no, we don't. I'll get bunged out all right, especially now with Don on the war-path. We may not see each other again for years.

Dottie That's what I mean. It would be so awful to have begun and not be able to go on.

Ricky Dottie, we can't begin considering things the way we are.

Dottie I don't want to consider; I'm simply bursting not to. I'm only saying we couldn't go on being sorry that we weren't still having a lovely time together if we'd never had one.

Ricky We'd be sorrier still never to have had it.

Dottie But think how we might yearn to go on. I don't want to have to yearn. It only drives me to do silly sorts of Don things. (*Refectively, as if to herself*) Of course most people would say "if it's the only chance you'll get why not take it?"

Ricky (*laughing*) That's the best consideration of all.

Ricky kisses Dottie

Have you got anything on under this thing?

Dottie Darling, in this heat? What do you suppose.

Ricky Wouldn't we get on better without it?

Dottie Oh, Ricky—down here?

Ricky Leila says she likes it on sofas. I should think she's a pretty good expert.

Dottie She might come down again.

Ricky Not likely. It was all she could do to get up.

Dottie I wish I didn't feel this little sort of forbidding thing about it.
(*Pause*) It unzips at the back of the neck; I don't know why.

Ricky I do. They make them that way so that the gentleman can assist the lady. (*Ricky moves to unzip Dottie's dress*)

Dottie stops him

Dottie No, wait a moment. I know now what that little thought is.

Ricky Oh, Dottie, don't have thoughts.

Dottie No, listen. With Don it was just relief-giving. Just one of those things you have to have, like food and hair-do's. With me there was no more moral harm in it than having a good meal. You see people come into restaurants . . .

Ricky Dottie, we can't have people in restaurants now.

Dottie No, you must let me tell you. They sit at the table, all smiles and gloating over the menu and their stomachs ooze nearer and nearer the table in anticipation; and they get the meal and although it may not be nearly as good as it looked on the menu, it gives them satisfaction and they go away and forget it. Going with Don didn't mean any more to me than that—just a sort of meal. It simply didn't count between me and Fred. With you—oh, Ricky, I think you'd count.

Ricky You mean you honestly feel like that about me? Already?

Dottie (*vehemently*) Good God, you needn't think I want to. I can't help it. With you it would make me feel guilty towards Fred.

Ricky Well, I'd hate to saddle you with a guilty conscience. But when it's something you can't resist—like this.

Ricky kisses Dottie

Oh, Dottie, can't you square your conscience—when you simply can't help it . . . ?

Dottie I don't want to have to. I've never had a guilty conscience—I don't want to begin one—(*She puts her hand to the back of her neck*) You have to undo a little catch thing at the top.

Ricky unzips Dottie's dress. It begins to slide off her shoulders

The door bell rings. Ricky steps back. Dottie holds up her dress

Don (*off, in a mild tone*) Dottie . . .

Ricky has an outburst of anger but keeps his voice low

Ricky Oh, damn and blast that man.

Dottie 'Sh, Ricky . . .

Ricky Why should I hush? I hated him before and now I bloody well detest him.

Don (*off*) Dottie—open up. Do please.

Dottie It may be meant.

Ricky What do you mean—meant?

Dottie By providence. To stop us when we shouldn't.

Ricky Don Raeburn is hardly my idea of providence.

Don (*off*) Dottie, I know you're there—lights on and everything. Please, Dottie...

Dottie I *must* let him in. We'll have trouble with the neighbours. Zip me up, darling. (*She calls*) All right—one minute.

Ricky zips up Dottie's dress, controlling himself

Ricky Sorry. But, damn it, I'm only human.

Dottie Go up to my room. I'll get rid of him.

Ricky Send him home. He'll have a nice big bed all to himself.

Ricky exits upstairs

Dottie goes to open the front door

Don enters. At the outset his manner is penitent and pacific. He moves downstage

Dottie closes the door and follows Don

Dottie Don, what on earth have you come back for?

Don I had to see you again. Leaving you like that—I'm so deeply sorry.

Dottie Oh, is that all it is?

Don Please forgive me. I behaved almost like a cad. I lost control of myself. I was so—terse.

Dottie Never mind. I forgive you. Of course I do. (*She kisses Don abruptly on the cheek*) There.

Don Thank you. That's my kind darling. Oh, I wish I'd stayed with you.

Dottie What for? You're not going to begin that again, are you?

Don I suppose I've left it a bit late. That stinking Ricky's back here now. I heard his voice through the door.

Dottie We were just going to bed. I mean to each other's. To our—each ones.

Don It was really finding him here made me so terse.

Dottie Don't start on him again either. Now run along.

Don Well, give us a little kiss.

Dottie No. No more kisses of any size. Do you want to make things worse with Leila?

Don Leila, yes—she's not come home. Where is she?

Dottie I'm seeing to Leila. She came back here. She's upstairs in my spare bedroom.

Don Thank God she's somewhere. Here—wait a minute. You told me Ricky was sleeping there.

Dottie He's sleeping on this sofa.

Don (*tersely*) Then where is he now? I'm not having Leila stay in the house with that feller. Have they met?

Dottie (*irritated*) Don't be a fool; of course they've met. They met when Leila first came.

Don While I was outside that back door?

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