SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an excerpt - an appetiser, if you will - from a full Samuel French title.

This sample is just for you to try out, and it can't be used for performance, downloaded, printed or distributed in any way.

Take it for a whirl and see if it tickles your fancy!

For more information about licensing this or other shows, or to browse thousands more plays and theatre books to buy please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
or, in the US www.samuelfrench.com

SF PERUSALS

The Borzoletti Monstrance

A mystery

Norman Robbins

Samuel French — London
www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk

© 2013 BY NORMAN ROBBINS

Rights of Performance by Amateurs are controlled by Samuel French Ltd, 52 Fitzroy Street, London W1T 5JR, and they, or their authorized agents, issue licences to amateurs on payment of a fee. **It is an infringement of the Copyright to give any performance or public reading of the play before the fee has been paid and the licence issued.**

The Royalty Fee indicated below is subject to contract and subject to variation at the sole discretion of Samuel French Ltd.

Basic fee for each and every performance by amateurs in the British Isles	Code L

The Professional Rights in this play are controlled by SAMUEL FRENCH LTD.

The publication of this play does not imply that it is necessarily available for performance by amateurs or professionals, either in the British Isles or Overseas. Amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised in their own interests to apply to the appropriate agents for written consent before starting rehearsals or booking a theatre or hall.

The right of Norman Robbins to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

ISBN 978 0 573 11037 5

Please see page iv for further copyright information

CHARACTERS

David Reeves-Mercer, late 20s
Jean Reeves-Mercer, 25
Harold Crossley, about 30
Brenda Treshunt, late 70s
Austin Reeves-Mercer, early 50s
Father Carmody, late 60s
Marcia Vale, 70s
Iona Vale, 40s
Sylvia Jones, 40s

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place in the Terrace Room of Redston Hall, Kent, home of the Reeves-Mercer family since 1769

ACT I
SCENE 1 An August morning
SCENE 2 The same day, early afternoon

ACT II
SCENE 1 Ten days later, mid-afternoon
SCENE 2 Late morning, the following day

Time — the present

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

(See also page ii)

This play is fully protected under the Copyright Laws of the British Commonwealth of Nations, the United States of America and all countries of the Berne and Universal Copyright Conventions.

All rights including Stage, Motion Picture, Radio, Television, Public Reading, and Translation into Foreign Languages, are strictly reserved.

No part of this publication may lawfully be reproduced in ANY form or by any means — photocopying, typescript, recording (including video-recording), manuscript, electronic, mechanical, or otherwise—or be transmitted or stored in a retrieval system, without prior permission.

Licences for amateur performances are issued subject to the understanding that it shall be made clear in all advertising matter that the audience will witness an amateur performance; that the names of the authors of the plays shall be included on all programmes; and that the integrity of the authors' work will be preserved.

The Royalty Fee is subject to contract and subject to variation at the sole discretion of Samuel French Ltd.

In Theatres or Halls seating Four Hundred or more the fee will be subject to negotiation.

In Territories Overseas the fee quoted above may not apply. A fee will be quoted on application to our local authorized agent, or if there is no such agent, on application to Samuel French Ltd, London.

Video-Recording Of Amateur Productions

Please note that the copyright laws governing video-recording are extremely complex and that it should not be assumed that any play may be video-recorded for *whatever purpose* without first obtaining the permission of the appropriate agents. The fact that a play is published by Samuel French Ltd does not indicate that video rights are available or that Samuel French Ltd controls such rights.

Children and Performance Legislation

For any productions utilizing children, producers will need to be aware of the appropriate child safeguarding and children in performance legislation in place. For details of the requirements you should contact your local County Council child performance advisor.

For my son and daughter-in-law

Adam and Anne

Other plays and pantomimes
by Norman Robbins
published by Samuel French Ltd

And Evermore Shall Be So
At The Sign of "The Crippled Harlequin"
Aladdin
Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves
Babes in the Wood
Cinderella
Dick Whittington
The Dragon of Wantley
The Grand Old Duke of York
Hansel and Gretel
Hickory Dickory Dock
Humpty Dumpty
Jack and Jill
Jack and the Beanstalk
The Late Mrs Early
Nightmare
The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe
Practice to Deceive
Prepare to Meet Thy Tomb
Prescription for Murder
Pull the Other One
Puss in Boots
Red Riding Hood
Rumpelstiltzkin
Sing a Song of Sixpence
Slaughterhouse
Sleeping Beauty
Snow White
Tiptoe Through the Tombstones
Tom, the Piper's Son
A Tomb with a View
Wedding of the Year
The White Cat
The Wonderful Story of Mother Goose

ACT I

SCENE 1

The Terrace Room of Redston Hall. An August morning

The room is quite imposing. Almost all the rear wall is occupied by a series of french windows, that lead out on to a broad, balustraded terrace overlooking a mature garden and distant hills. To the R *of the terrace, a small table and two chairs are set, and* L*, a lounger and parasol. On the table, the remains of a breakfast can be seen. On the parapet, a half-empty glass of orange juice stands, opposite an open window. Heavy-looking pelmets and curtains hang at the windows.* L *of the window is a door leading into the room beyond. Upstage of the* L *wall is a long table, and on this stand a marble bust, a table lamp, a bowl of flowers, and a framed photograph of a dog. Over this, a pair of wall-mounted lamps. Downstage of the table are double doors that lead out to a hall, the kitchen, upstairs, etc., and these doors are open. Left of them are light switches that control both the central light and the wall-mounted lights. Further downstage, a writing desk and chair with matching wall lamps above, and downstage of these, another small table on which stands a bronze statuette and a bowl of ceramic flowers. The wall* R *is dominated by a central white marble fireplace and surround. Wall lamps are at each side of this. Fire-dogs, irons, etc. are in the hearth, contained by a white fender. Below the fireplace is a door leading into the library, and upstage of the fireplace, a door leading into the music room. Slightly upstage of the fireplace, a comfortable-looking easy chair is angled towards it, and a large matching sofa is* L*, also slightly angled* R*. Behind this, a long, narrow table on which a vase of flowers stands. In front of the sofa, a long, low, coffee table. A mixture of portraits, scenic views, tapestries and framed photographs fill almost every other inch of wall space, and the room is thickly carpeted. The whole effect should be money, comfort, age and upper class*

When the scene begins, sunlight bathes the terrace. David Reeves-Mercer is on his back atop the sofa, feet resting on the arm R*, apparently fast asleep. He is in his late twenties, though looks younger, and is usually totally care-free in attitude. He wears only a light, unfastened dressing gown, bedroom slippers and garish boxer shorts. Discarded newspaper*

sections litter the coffee table and the space around it, and a single section rests on his stomach, under his downstage arm

After a moment, a bleary-eyed Jean Reeves-Mercer enters through the double doors, wearing a pale silk pyjama suit, and slippers, topped with a silky dressing gown. She is slightly younger and more volatile than her brother, and at the moment, appears to be suffering from a bad hangover. She is sipping at the mug of coffee she carries as she enters

Jean (*seeing David and groaning*) Oh, God. A naked poof on the sofa. That's all I need before breakfast. (*She halts at the* L *end of the sofa and behind it*)

David (*without moving*) Morning.

Jean (*sourly*) What are you doing here? Boyfriend kicked you out, has he?

David (*raising his head*) Quite the reverse, dear heart. I've brought him down for the weekend.

Jean (*dismayed*) You haven't.

David If we're going to have a civil partnership, I had to let him meet his future in-laws.

Jean (*glancing round distastefully*) Where is he?

David (*wickedly*) Now you've tottered out of it, probably in your room, trying on your frocks.

Jean (*hotly*) If he lays a finger ——

David (*sitting up; exasperated*) Oh, knock it off, Jean. How many times have I told you? He's not gay, and neither am I. We share an apartment. For *financial* reasons. And the only reason he won't want to bed you on sight is because he happens to have excellent taste. (*Pointedly*) Which is more than I can say for the (*scornfully*) honourable George de Vere Milland.

Jean Gorgeous George? (*Moving sluggishly to the easy chair*) What's *he* got to do with it?

David (*smugly*) Obviously you've not seen the papers. According to the *Telegraph*, he's just announced his engagement to the Telford trollop.

Jean (*in disbelief*) You're joking.

David (*tossing the paper over his head, towards her*) See for yourself. (*He swings himself into a sitting position*) Face like a bottle of warts and ten stone overweight, but Daddy left her sixty million, so she attracts men like a compost heap draws flies. (*In mock sympathy*) Lost out again, dear heart. Sex doesn't stand a chance against the chinky chink chink of gold.

Jean (*sitting, and ignoring the paper*) Get stuffed. (*Defensively*) He's not at all like that. If he's going to marry Sophie Telford, it must be

because he loves her. He wouldn't propose just because her father left her a fortune. (*She sips at the coffee*)

David (*standing*) True, I suppose. He'd have done it *whoever* had left it to her.

Jean (*scowling*) Oh, cover yourself up. You look like an ad for a porno mag ... If Treasure walked in, you'd give her a heart attack.

David (*moving round to the windows*) Very unlikely, dear. She's seen it all before. She was changing my nappies and powdering my bum before you were even born. (*Thoughtfully*) Mind you ... I think she's got the hots for me now. She dished up breakfast an hour ago in a pink thong and no bra. (*He steps on to the terrace and raises his arms to the sun*) Definitely not her colour.

Jean (*ignoring this*) Where's Dad?

David (*turning*) In the study. With Father C.

Jean (*groaning*) Oh, God. What's *he* want?

David (*supporting himself on the frame*) Another shot at converting us, I expect. How should *I* know? You're the fixture. I'm just the visiting black sheep. (*He bleats*)

Jean (*sourly*) And how long do we have to endure you this time? (*She sips at the coffee*)

David (*shrugging*) All depends. If he coughs up the necessary, we could be gone Sunday night. (*Lightly*) On the other hand ...

Jean You'll dig your grubby little claws in, till you've worn him down.

David (*grinning*) Such an elegant turn of phrase. But not short of the mark. What's the point of being a Reeves-Mercer if you can't spend your ancestors' ill-gotten gains?

Jean (*dryly*) It may have escaped your notice, David, but we're not exactly rolling in it, these days. We still owe thousands in death duties.

David (*lightly*) Which shouldn't be a problem for much longer.

Jean (*frowning*) Why's that?

David (*disgustedly*) Don't you read anything but *OK* and *Harper's Bazaar*? Work it out for yourself? I'm going to join Harold. (*He turns back on to the terrace*)

Jean In the garden?

David In the pool. If you peep over here, you can see him in all his glory. (*He peers over the parapet. Calling*) Oy. There's a lady present. Get your trunks on, you filthy swine.

Jean (*annoyed*) He's not naked?

David (*turning his head to her*) As the day he was born. (*Calling down again*) I never knew you were *Jewish,* Harry. (*He laughs*) Who was your dad? A bloody elephant?

Jean (*standing*) Get him out of there, now.

Harold Crossley enters through the double doors L. *He is about 30, dressed in light slacks, a short-sleeved shirt and casual shoes*

Jean sees him

(*Sharply*) Who are *you*? (*She clutches her dressing gown to her*)

Harold (*taken aback*) Harold Crossley. David's flatmate. (*Quizzically*) Jean??

David moves back to the windows, looking amused

Jean (*tightly*) He said you were in the pool. Without your trunks.

Harold looks blank and shakes his head

(*To David; glowering*) Was that supposed to be funny?

David (*stepping into the room*) It made *me* laugh ... And it serves you right for jumping to conclusions. (*To Harold*) My sweet little sister thought we were gay.

Jean looks furious and embarrassed

Harold (*frowning*) What?

David (*moving down between them*) Because of the flat share.

Harold Oh. (*Smiling at Jean*) Well you needn't worry on that account. We're strictly *hetero*sexual. (*To David*) Aren't we, Dave? (*He puts his arm around David's shoulder and gives him a hearty kiss on the cheek*)

David (*yelping in fright*) Get off. (*He frantically pushes him away*)

Harold (*reproachfully*) You didn't say that last night.

David (*annoyed*) Knock it off, bird-brain. (*Hastily wrapping his dressing gown round him and fastens the belt*) She'll think we *are* gay, now.

Harold (*raising an eyebrow*) With a reputation like yours? (*To Jean*) Believe me. He makes Casanova look like an amateur. It's a good job you're living down here, and not in London. What you don't see, you don't have to worry about.

Jean (*dryly*) The day *he* worries me's the day I'll ride on horseback down High Street, stark naked. (*She sits again*)

David (*to Harold*) See? I told you she was weird. Better get you out of here before you go blind in one eye.

Harold (*frowning*) What?

David (*explaining*) It happened to *him*, you know. Peeping Tom. When he looked at her.

Harold (*blankly*) Who?
David (*sighing deeply*) Lady Godiva, you berk.
Jean (*to Harold, wearily*) Just ignore him, Harold. I'm sure you must do normally.
David (*indignantly*) No, he doesn't. He breathes in every word I utter. (*Smugly*) He may be only a commoner ...

Harold reacts

... but he appreciates having a superior being for a flatmate ... if only for the benefit of my classical education. (*Grandly*) And now ... if you'll excuse me ... I'll withdraw to my room and change to more suitable attire. (*To Harold, in normal tones*) They're a bit conservative in these parts, so if I'm going to show you round town, I'd better wear something decent. (*He heads for the double doors*)
Jean (*sharply*) And not my Jasper Conran. I've only worn it twice.

David glowers at her then exits

Harold (*after a moment*) He's not gay, you know.
Jean No. But he *is* a pain in the backside, and it winds him up when he thinks I think he is. How you can share a flat with him, I can't imagine.
Harold (*moving to the sofa and sitting*) We don't see each other much, to be honest. I'm usually at work before he surfaces, and he's on the town by the time I get back. It's only weekends we get in each other's way. (*Sighing*) Still ... one more rent rise, and I'll have to be looking for somewhere cheaper. The outgoings are almost more than the income. God knows how some people manage.
Jean (*with feeling*) Tell me about it. Just because we've lived here since Dick's days, the locals think we're rolling in it. Little do they know.
Harold I suppose it'll help if the sale goes through. The Americans'll jump at it, of course. Or the Russians. *They're* not short of a rouble or two.
Jean (*frowning*) We're not selling the place. Did he say we were?
Harold (*hastily*) No, no. I didn't mean the Hall. I meant the Monstrance.
Jean (*blankly*) Monstrance?
Harold From the Convent.
Jean (*baffled*) Do you mind if we start again? I haven't a clue what you're on about.
Harold Well ... they're closing it down, aren't they? Moving the nuns to a rest home, or something? I heard about it on the grapevine.
Jean (*staring at him*) St Gudrun's, you mean?
Harold (*uncertainly*) I suppose so.

Jean (*amused*) Of course they're not closing it down. It's been there for centuries. Three of them, at least. One of our relatives was a nun there.

Harold (*nodding*) David told me. An ancestor's sister, wasn't it? The one who persuaded Sir Martin to donate the Monstrance to them?

Jean (*dismissively*) So the story goes. Though we don't know if it's true or not.

Harold (*frowning*) But ——

Jean It's possible. Of course it is. The old boy was richer than Midas. And he did take Lady C to Florence for their honeymoon. It's mentioned in his diaries. But there isn't a word about the Monstrance in them, and you'd think if he'd paid a fortune to have it made, he'd at least have mentioned it. I mean ... you don't donate a thing like that to the average convent, do you? And that's all the place was. Almost no one had ever heard of it. That's how it escaped the Reformation. What on earth would nuns want with a lump of gold encrusted with more jewels than Victoria's crown? They were an Order of Poverty, for God's sake.

Harold (*after a pause*) It's certainly a striking piece, though.

Jean (*pulling a face*) Too grotesque for my liking. (*She sips at her coffee*) Ugh. Cold.

Harold But typical Borzoletti, wouldn't you say? And maybe the finest piece he ever crafted. As I said ... the right collectors will give their eye teeth for it.

Jean I don't know which grapevine you've listened to, but if St Gudrun's *was* closing down, we'd have been the first to know about it. The family have been benefactors since seventeen sixty-nine ... though none of us are Catholics. (*She rises and moves towards the double doors* L) And if the rumour *was* true, there'd be no question of the Monstrance being put up for sale. It'd be given to a needy parish, or the missions in Africa. Religious items are never offered to the general public.

Harold (*awkwardly*) Not strictly true. Ecclesiastical items do turn up in sale-rooms round the country.

Jean (*halting by the door and turning to him*) Maybe paintings and things.

Harold And plate.

Jean (*firmly*) But not *consecrated* plate.

Harold I'm afraid so. Though it does lose its blessing the minute it's sold, I understand. I checked it out.

Jean (*moving back towards him*) But that's disgusting.

Harold (*shrugging*) Not really. It's more a case of making the best of your assets. I mean ... ornate things like a Monstrance hardly ever get *used* these days. Clergy are terrified at the thought of them being

stolen, and insurance premiums are out of this world. Could you imagine the panic if the Borzoletti went missing? It must be worth millions.

Jean (*dryly*) A little optimistic, wouldn't you think? It's only an ornamental bread basket. A bit of gold and a handful of jewels.

Harold But made by Borzoletti. And that's the difference. It's the only known Monstrance he ever made, the only piece that's ended up in the UK, and the last thing he created before someone murdered him in seventeen seventy-three.

Jean (*frowning*) Who told you that? That he was murdered?

Harold It's in the new book about him. I was looking through it when I heard the news about the Convent closing and the Monstrance being put up for sale. Talk about coincidence.

Jean (*curious*) So why the interest in Borzoletti?

Harold The job, I suppose.

Jean looks at him blankly

Didn't Dave tell you? I work for Steadman and Waterfield. The Hatton Garden Goldsmiths.

Jean Oh. No. He didn't mention it. (*Curious*) So what else does it say about him?

Harold Not much more than we knew already. Though some of the colour plates are pretty amazing. The goblet he made for Pius the Sixth, for example ... and the Menari bowl that vanished when the Nazis took over in France. They're still in the dark about his parentage, though they've turned up a letter from the chap who adopted him in seventeen forty-five that suggests his mother may have been a foreigner of some kind. The only other new thing is a possibility his killer was some kind of nobleman. Possibly the husband of one of his conquests. (*He grins*) Something of a ladies' man, our Teodoro. At least eight are claiming direct descent, even though it puts them on the wrong side of the blanket, so to speak.

Brenda Treshunt enters through the double doors. She is a plump motherly woman in her late 70s, and Housekeeper to the family, though never treated as a servant by any of them. She carries an empty tray and crosses to the windows, intending to exit on to the terrace

He never married, you see?

Brenda (*as she walks*) If you're wanting breakfast, you'd better get a move on. They'll be clearing the room in ten minutes.

She goes on to the terrace and begins clearing the table R*, stacking the things on the tray, and picking up the glass of orange juice*

Harold (*to Jean, sotto voce*) That the housekeeper?
Jean (*whispering*) Mrs Treshunt. Fondly known as Treasure. (*She grimaces*) Though she's more like Mrs Danvers in my opinion.
Harold (*puzzled*) Who?
Jean The housekeeper in *Rebecca*.
Harold Sorry?
Jean It's a book by Daphne DuMaurier.
Harold Never read it, I'm afraid. So what's she do, this Mrs Danvers?

Brenda comes back into the room with the tray

Brenda She goes mad and burns the house down. (*She moves to the doors* L) And don't think I've not considered her example. Ten minutes.

Brenda exits

Harold (*dismayed*) Oh my God. She heard us.
Jean (*ruefully*) I think she's half bat. She could hear a woodlouse wearing carpet slippers. (*She grins*) Good job she's not the vindictive type. She'd have poisoned me by now.
Harold Do you not get on with her, then?
Jean (*amused*) Treasure? Of course I do. We couldn't run this place without her. She's been with us since Henry the Eighth was alive. God knows what'll happen when she goes.
Harold (*curiously*) Is it true she laid into a burglar, once? I did hear the story.
Jean Laid into him? (*Giggling*) She damn near *killed* him. Don't ever confront her when she's close to a proverbial blunt instrument. It'll be more than your life's worth. Half a dozen of her during World War Two, and it wouldn't have lasted six years, I can tell you.
Harold So what exactly did she do to him?
Jean (*shrugging*) No idea. Except it was rather painful, and not the kind of thing one discusses in polite society. It happened before I was born. And long before the political correctness idiots passed the Protect the Criminal Act. Otherwise she'd have been in the dock for rearranging his gender. As it was, she became a local hero. And still is.

The sound of a raised voice is heard down R

Austin (*off*) No, no, *no*. You can talk ...

The door down R *opens and Austin Reeves-Mercer storms into the room, followed by an embarrassed-looking Father Carmody. The former is in his early 50s, forceful, and wears dark trousers, cream shirt, a coloured tie, and a contrasting waistcoat. The latter, who is in his late 60s, wears a dark suit and clerical collar*

... till you're blue in the face, but the answer's *still* no. In my opinion, it's nothing short of *sacrilege*. (*He crosses* L)

Father C (*soothingly*) I quite understand your feelings, Austin, but the fact remains, we have no *choice* in the matter. (*He closes the door behind him*)

Austin (*scornfully*) Of course you have a choice. You just don't sell it. (*He suddenly notices the others and looks accusingly at Harold*) Who are you?

Harold (*rising and extending his hand*) Harold Crossley. David's flatmate from London.

Jean (*helpfully*) They arrived last night.

Austin (*shaking hands with him without warmth*) Pleased to meet you. Now if you'll excuse me ——

Father C If you think about it logically ——

Austin (*turning to him sharply*) There isn't the *need* to think about it, Charles. I've made my position clear. For a sacred object to go to auction in a public sale-room is an abomination. It goes against everything your religion teaches and you know it. You can't have items consecrated one day, then deconsecrated the next just because it suits your purpose.

Father C (*patiently*) It's hardly a case of suiting one's purpose. Without the money, we've no way of ensuring the disbursed sister's comfort and health at Bethlehem House. The fees are quite considerable ... as they are at any old people's home.

Austin (*testily*) Then leave them where they are. I'm sure they'd be a damn sight happier.

Father C We haven't that option, I'm afraid. The convent's fabric is sadly in need of repair. At least two million pounds would be required to restore it to acceptable standards, and with only six of the sisters remaining there ... all over the age of seventy ... it's no longer a viable proposition.

Jean (*interrupting*) So it is true? You are closing the Convent?

Austin (*brusquely*) Stay out of this, Jean. It's none of your business.

Jean (*standing*) It is if they're selling the Monstrance. Our family gave it to them. How dare they try to sell it?

Father C With great reluctance, I admit, Miss Jean. But though it is unusual for a monstrance to be sold at auction, it's not unknown.

According to church law, it's standard practice when disposing of unwanted assets.

Jean (*hotly*) Then you should be ashamed of yourselves. And if it's so unwanted, why don't you hand it back to those who gave it to you in the first place?

Father C (*mildly*) I wish it were that simple. But we do need the money.

Austin (*scornfully*) Oh, yes. A few thousand pounds is going to make a lot of difference, isn't it?

Harold (*nervously*) A little underestimation, wouldn't you think?

Austin (*glaring at him*) And what would *you* know about it?

Harold (*awkwardly*) Well ... it *is* a Borzoletti piece. And one of his fruit bowls sold in New York last year for over three million.

Austin (*scornfully*) Don't be ridiculous.

Father C (*mildly*) It's true, Austin. I saw an article on the internet.

Harold (*apologetically*) And that was one of his lesser pieces. Some Russian paid almost four million for a pair of candlesticks, three years before. It's in the new book by Thompson and Valderman.

Austin (*to Father C, bitterly*) So that's what it's really about, is it? All this malarky over St Gudrun's falling down is smoke and mirrors. (*Accusingly*) You're trying to cash in on the get-rich-quick wagon, and need an excuse to dispose of the Borzoletti without being too obvious.

Father C (*tiredly*) Of course we want the best price for it. The church has many needs and most of the unwanted items from St Gudrun's have already been sold to provide them. The Monstrance is the jewel in its crown. Its sale will ensure the sisters will be well provided for, and the remaining money will aid the poorer parishes and missions overseas.

Austin (*tightly*) It may have escaped your attention, Charles, but for the past twenty years or so, that particular piece of plate has brought more tourists to Redston, hoping for a glimpse of it, than your precious church did in five hundred years. If it hadn't been for television and *The Antiques Road Show*, we'd have died on our feet like almost every other village in the country is doing. Getting rid of the Monstrance is not an option. If that goes, Redston's finished. And as for us, we may as well call in the bailiffs, knock this place down, and sell the site to build affordable housing. (*He scowls*) Providing anyone'll want it, seeing as there'll be no work available.

Father C I think you're overreacting, Austin. Even without the Monstrance ——

Austin (*cutting in*) You don't see it, do you? No monstrance ... no tourists. No tourists ... no income. No income ... no Redston. It's as plain as the nose on your face. (*He speaks more reasonably*) Look ... If the church is so desperate for funds, then why not put it on permanent display and make a charge for seeing it? Like the *Mappa Mundi* in Hereford?

Father C We couldn't possibly.

Austin (*annoyed*) Of course you could. You just don't want to. (*Fuming*) If I had the money, I'd buy the thing myself. God *knows* what'll happen to it if it goes up for auction.

Harold At least it won't be melted down. According to the book, it'd only be worth a few thousand in real terms ... cost of the gold and jewels, etc. It's the name that collectors'll pay for. There's only a handful of known pieces in the world, and they're all in museums or private collections.

Jean (*bristling*) I don't care where they are. The Monstrance belongs in Redston, and that's where it's staying. When Sir Martin donated it to the Convent, his intention was that it would stay there forever. It'll leave this village over my dead body.

She turns angrily and hurries out of the room

There is an awkward silence. Unsure what to do, Harold sits again, trying to be invisible

Father C (*uncomfortably*) I'm afraid your daughter's reaction is much the same as many of my own parishioners. Such items are treated with great reverence in our faith, and it's a shame to see one offered at a public auction. But we truly have no choice. It has to go. Which is why I came to see you this morning.

Austin (*letting out a deep sigh*) It's not your fault, I know. You're only following orders. (*Moving* L) It's just that it's all been a bit of a shock. If I'd known about it earlier ... I might have been able to arrange something.

Father C It was only discussed last week. At the Cardinal's meeting with Bishop Logan.

Austin (*turning to him*) But you must understand how we feel about it. It's part of our family history.

Father C Which is why I wanted to tell you personally. The Reeves-Mercers have been good friends to the Mother Church ... despite our religious differences. We didn't want you to feel we'd done this without considerable deliberation.

Austin (*heavily*) No. Of course not. (*Resignedly*) I'll see you out, shall I? (*He turns* L)

Father C (*hesitantly*) There is another thing.

Austin (*disinterestedly*) Yes? (*He turns back*)

Father C I understand provenance counts for quite a lot in cases like this, and I wondered if ... well ... if you have any paperwork relating to its purchase?

Austin (*blankly*) Paperwork?

Father C Confirming the Monstrance is indeed the work of Teodoro Borzoletti.

Austin (*frowning*) Well, of course it's his work. Who else's would it be? Half the world could recognize it. It's been photographed more times than I have.

Father C (*mildly*) Twice, actually. Once in ninteen-fourteen at the request of Cardinal O'Keefe, and again in nineteen fifty-two ... which is the print they've reproduced ever since. But that's all beside the point. A letter or receipt from Sir Martin, or perhaps Borzoletti himself —— ?

Harold (*interrupting*) He couldn't write.

Both look at him, suddenly remembering that he is there

(*Embarrassed*) Borzoletti. He couldn't write. Or *read*, for that matter. (*Lamely*) Sorry. It's none of my business. I — er — I'll go look for David. (*He rises and makes to exit* L)

Austin (*suddenly*) No. No, it's all right. The whole village'll be embroiled once the news gets out. And at least you seem to know what you're talking about. (*To Father C*) Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, Charles. There's nothing in *our* archives at all. I'd have thought the convent held all the relevant details.

Father C (*ruefully*) Most likely it did. But the repository was destroyed by fire in eighteen forty-two and many of its contents were lost to us. (*To Harold*) One of the sisters perished through trying to save what she could, so all we know of the Monstrance's origins came down to us verbally.

Austin Then you probably know as much as *we* do.

Father C (*sighing*) Ah, well. We'll just have to rely on Dr Jones's authentication.

Harold Indiana Jones.

They both look at him

I mean ... Sylvia Jones. From the British Museum? (*Explaining*) We call her Indiana because of Harrison Ford. You know. *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, et cetera.

Austin (*curious*) You *know* this woman?

Harold Well ... not personally. But I have seen her. She does occasional work for Steadman and Waterfield ... the company I work for ... and *they* think she's the bee's knees. She's got a huge reputation.

Austin (*to Father C*) And you're taking the Monstrance to her for authentication?

Father C Not exactly. She's coming down here. To Redston Village. We're expecting her later today.

Austin (*disgustedly*) Nothing like a *fait accompli* to prevent objections, is there? I'm surprised you decided to tell me before the sale went through. Still ... now we know how things stand, it does mean we no longer have to carry on with our yearly donation to St Gudrun's. With three or four million in your coffers, you won't even miss our pittance.

Father C (*protesting*) Hardly a pittance, Austin. Without your family's support over the past two hundred years, we'd have been in a sorry state.

Austin (*coldly*) I only hope you'll return the gesture if we lose Redston Hall. Which is quite possible considering our present financial position. We might well be in the hands of the National Trust by the end of the year.

Father C (*stunned*) I'd no idea.

Austin (*bitterly*) Of course you hadn't. We don't broadcast our problems in the way some people do. But the truth of the matter is, without tourists here, we're finished. And if the Monstrance ends up in a private collection somewhere on the other side of the world ... (*He throws up his hands*)

Brenda enters the room through the main doors

Brenda (*heavily*) Mrs Vale and her daughter.

Austin (*turning to her*) What?

Brenda They've just arrived. And not sounding too happy.

Austin (*sighing*) Are they ever? What is it this time? Not the hunt, again?

Brenda Something to do with the convent, as far as I can make out. They're practically foaming at the mouth.

Austin (*frowning*) Convent? (*To Father C*) I thought this was all top secret?

Father C (*hastily*) It's nothing to do with me. Apart from the sisters and myself, no one in Redston knows anything about it.

Austin Obviously someone did. We may be related, but the Vales and I have never seen eye to eye. If they're baying for blood on account of the convent, it has to be connected to the sale of the Monstrance.

Father C It can't possibly be.

Brenda (*patiently*) Do you want me to show them through?

Austin (*thinking furiously*) Ask them to wait in the Morning Room. Tell them I'm on the phone or something. Talking business. And for God's sake don't let them know Charles is with me. They'll tear him limb from limb.

Brenda exits again

Father C (*mildly amused*) A slight exaggeration, I hope?
Austin (*scowling*) Not if you know them like I do. Marcia Vale's a direct descendant of Edmund Reeves, Sir Martin's brother, and still believes the Redston Estate would have gone to them if Martin hadn't married Catherine Mercer, instead of remaining a widower. Even more to the point, in her eyes, almost half the Reeves fortune was squandered on a piece of religious bling, for the benefit of the Catholic Church ...

Father C opens his mouth to speak but Austin slightly raises his voice and continues

... which she hates with far more fervour than she hates me for inheriting this place. (*Resuming normal tones*) If you'll take my advice, keep well clear of Marcia Vale *and* her obnoxious daughter.
Father C In that case I'd better be off. I'm meeting Miss Jones around half eleven.
Austin I should take the terrace route. (*Indicating it*) We're not open to visitors today, so there's less chance of being accosted.

Father C makes for the terrace, followed by Austin. Harold moves uneasily and unobtrusively down L

And Charles?

Father C halts and looks at him

I'd appreciate it if you'd let me know what her valuation is? Just out of curiosity.
Father C (*doubtfully*) I'm not sure I —— (*Reconsidering*) Yes. Of course. I know I can rely on your discretion.

He goes on to the terrace. Marcia's voice is heard, off L

Marcia (*off*) I will not be treated like a visitor in what should rightfully be my *own* residence
Austin (*to Father C, urgently*) Down the steps and keep to the right.

Father C hurries off R *and vanishes*

Brenda (*off*) I've already told you. He's busy.

Marcia Vale marches angrily into the room, followed by her daughter, Iona, and Brenda. Marcia is in her 70s and a veritable Grand Dame in the Lady Bracknell mould who firmly believes that even royalty are on

a far lower social scale than herself. She appears very well preserved, is impeccably made-up and coiffured, and is dressed in a style that removes years from her actual age. She can produce fake charm when it is required, but has a viperish tongue most of the time. She carries a handbag containing a small bottle of pills, etc. Iona is in her 40s, and a younger version of her mother, but charm has no place in her life. She is attractive, but her face is a porcelain mask concealing repressed anger

They do not see Harold as they move towards Austin. Brenda remains by the doors

Austin (*turning to them*) Marcia. Iona.
Marcia (*frostily*) I was *told* you were in a *meeting*.
Austin Which is perfectly true. And one that may last for the rest of the day. (*To Brenda with a smile*) It's all right, Brenda. They won't kill me in front of a witness.

Brenda glowers and exits

Marcia (*sharply*) Witness?
Austin (*indicating Harold*) My new advisor from London. Mr Crossley.

Harold looks surprised as the two women turn sharply to see him

(*To Harold*) Marcia Vale, and her charming daughter, Iona.

Iona gives Harold a speculative look

Harold (*to them, uncertainly*) Pleased to meet you.
Marcia (*ignoring him and turning back to Austin*) An advisor? Then I take it you *have* heard? And, we, of course, are the last to be informed.
Austin Informed about what? (*He turns away and moves down* R)
Marcia (*tight-lipped*) You know perfectly well, Austin. The attempted theft of our most valuable family asset by the Roman Catholic Church.
Austin (*looking puzzled*) Theft?
Iona (*sharply*) Of course it's theft. What else could it be? The Monstrance belongs to us.
Austin (*pretending to realize*) Ahhh. The *Monstrance*.
Marcia (*fuming*) And you can wipe that innocent look off your face, Austin. Did you think we wouldn't find out? That we'd sat back all those years and forgotten about it? (*Scornfully*) How little you know your ancestors. I may be weak in heart, but there's nothing wrong with

my mind. (*She moves down to the easy chair*) Our family has prayed for this day for the past two hundred years, and now it's here, we refuse to be cheated of our rightful inheritance. (*Pointedly*) You have, I hope, reminded them of the agreement? (*She sits*)

Austin (*blankly*) Agreement?

Iona moves to position herself behind the sofa

Marcia (*irritated*) The one between Sir Martin and that ... *place*.

Austin (*mildly*) I'm afraid I'm at a disadvantage, Marcia. I haven't a *clue* what you're talking about. And I am in the middle of a meeting.

Marcia (*snapping*) The importance of protecting our inheritance may well be a matter of little concern to your side of the family, Austin, but it certainly isn't to mine. If you are prepared to be robbed, then that is your decision. We, however, intend using every means possible to ensure our rights are not brushed aside. (*To Iona*) Come, Iona. (*She rises to leave*)

Austin (*hastily*) Just a minute. You still haven't explained this agreement. Agreement to what?

Marcia (*icily*) The return of the Monstrance when that — *place* — was finally closed down.

Austin (*amusedly*) It's the first I've heard of it. Where did that fairy tale come from?

Iona (*acidly*) The fairy tale, as you call it, comes straight from the horse's mouth. I have it in Sir Martin's own hand, and not even *you* can dispute that kind of evidence.

Austin (*dryly*) I'd be interested in seeing it. Even his own descendants have never been certain he donated the Monstrance to St Gudrun's. It's nothing but a family legend.

Marcia (*scornfully*) To you, perhaps. But the Reeves side of the family have always known the truth. (*Balefully*) With very good reason.

Austin So what does it say? This letter. I presume it is a letter?

Marcia (*nodding*) Sent to his brother, Edmund, shortly after his return from Italy, and explaining exactly why he'd done what he'd felt he had to do.

Austin Which was?

Marcia (*flatly*) To make up for fathering Jessamine Mercer's child.

Austin Jessamine Mercer?

Marcia (*coldly triumphant*) His wife's sister. He was *not*, apparently, the paragon everyone made him out to be. (*Scornfully*) Just another wealthy old man with an eye for any Catholic *slut* he happened to take a fancy to.

Austin (*snapping back*) As opposed to the Protestant sluts his *brother* preferred, I suppose?

Marcia (*outraged*) How *dare* you?

Austin (*unmoved*) Spare me the indignation, Marcia. Edmund Reeves fathered more illegitimate offspring than the parson preached about, and you know it. Half the county could claim direct lineage if they felt so inclined. Now stop posturing, get off your high horse, and tell me about this letter you're claiming to have.

Marcia Iona. (*She sits again*)

Iona (*moving down* R *of the sofa with a superior look on her face*) I don't know how much you *know* about the Reeves family history ——

Austin (*sharply*) Far more than you, I'd imagine.

Iona (*snapping*) Then you'd be wrong. As a qualified historian, I've been researching their antecedents for the past few years ... (*Smugly*) ... and discovered a number of *very* interesting facts.

Austin (*witheringly*) I can't tell you how thrilled I am. (*Impatiently*) Now why not cut the cackle, and get on with it?

Marcia (*offended*) If civility is beyond your limited comprehension, Austin, then I fear there's no need to continue. We'll deal with the matter ourselves. (*She begins to rise again*)

Harold (*hastily*) No. Please. (*He looks at Austin*) As Mr Reeves' advisor, I think the more we know about what you've discovered, the better.

Austin (*sharply*) When I want your advice, I'll *ask* for it.

Marcia (*to him*) I thought you were already doing that, Austin. Obviously I was mistaken.

Austin (*testily*) All *right*. But for God's sake give me the shortened version. I haven't time for a lecture on my own family's history.

He moves to the fireplace and glowers

Harold (*soothingly*) Miss Vale?

Iona looks at her mother, who hesitates, nods, and re-seats herself on the sofa

Iona (*to Austin's back*) You may not *want* a lecture, but without knowing the facts, we could lose the Monstrance and find ourselves unable to do a thing about it.

There is no reaction from Austin

(*As though lecturing*) As you know, Sir Martin Reeves inherited his estate from his father, the Earl of ——

Austin (*interrupting*) Yes, yes. And he married Queen Anne's niece who died childless, twelve years later, and if he hadn't married again, his younger brother would have inherited. All ancient history. Now tell me about this letter.

Iona (*glowering*) I'm about to come to it. (*To Harold*) According to documents in *our* family archives ——

Austin (*bluntly*) Which are probably as biased as hell.

Iona (*sweeping on*) In seventeen forty-two, Lord and Lady Mercer ... well known heretics, clinging to the old Catholic religion ... learned that their eldest daughter, Jessamine, had developed tuberculosis ... or consumption, as it was then known ... and was sent to Italy in the hope that the warmer air would effect a cure.

Austin (*turning to her*) Then what's this rubbish about Sir Martin fathering her child? She entered St Gudrun's the following year to give thanks for her cure, and remained there till the day she died.

Iona (*icily*) Have you ever known a case of tuberculosis being cured in less than a year?

Marcia (*smirking*) Especially in that day and age. (*Shaking her head*) No, no, Austin. When she left Farringfield Manor for Italy, Jessamine Mercer was no more consumptive than I am. She was *pregnant*.

Austin (*scornfully*) And that's in the letter, is it?

Marcia Of course not. But it's as plain as the nose on your face. When the child was born, it was left over there and she returned to England to enter the convent because her own family would have nothing more to do with her.

Harold (*puzzled*) But where does Sir Martin come into it?

Marcia (*sharply*) He was the father, of course.

Austin (*amused*) Aren't you forgetting something, Marcia? In seventeen forty-two, Sir Martin was in America. Visiting his plantations. He couldn't possibly have fathered this fictitious child you mentioned. Your precious letter's a forgery.

Iona (*firmly*) I don't agree. I've brought along a photocopy. (*She produces a folded sheet of white paper and opens it. Reading*) "My dearest Edmund ——"

Austin (*caustically*) I *can* read.

Iona (*continuing*) I deeply regret that my marriage to Catherine has caused this breach between us, but since the discovery that her sister Jessamine was secretly delivered of a child of our line before entering the convent those many years ago, my only option was to try and make amends.

Austin snatches the paper from her and looks at it

Austin (*reading aloud*) "Not only to her, but to Lord and Lady Mercer themselves who remain in sad circumstances through no fault of their own, save religious beliefs. To allay the shadow cast upon our own family, and considering we had contributed to their disgrace in no small way ——"

Marcia (*cutting in triumphantly*) You see?

Austin (*still reading aloud*) "I was driven by conscience to offer them an annual sum for the upkeep of Farringfield. And as for my presentation to the nuns of St Gudrun, what matters a few hundred pounds, if one considers the plundering of their holy places since the Reformation? As you well know, most of our estates were once in Catholic hands, and were only gained by us at the cost of their misfortune. In any case, if the rumour does prove true, and the convent is forced to close, I am assured by the Mother Superior that the piece will be returned in secret before the royal commissioners arrive to confiscate its assets and you, in that case, shall share in the profit of its eventual sale. I remain your loving brother, Martin." (*He lowers the photocopy and looks at Marcia*) Is this it? Is this your precious confession? (*Scornfully*) A lawyer would rip it to shreds in minutes. Not once does he admit paternity of Jessamine Mercer's child or donating the Monstrance to St Gudrun's.

Iona (*haughtily*) His gift ——

Austin (*cutting her off*) Could have been anything worth a few hundred pounds. And until the Reformation, the entire Redland estate belonged to the Mercers. No wonder he felt embarrassed at their situation and decided to help them financially.

Marcia (*coldly*) As my late husband often remarked, there are none so blind as those who won't see.

Austin (*snapping*) And as I often say, the devil can quote scripture, if it suits his purpose. (*Dismissively*) Now if this is all you came for, I'll have Treasure see you out. As I said when you arrived, I'm rather busy and haven't time to indulge in other people's fantasies.

Marcia (*seething*) Then our business is concluded. But rest assured, Austin, the Borzoletti Monstrance will never go to auction. And *that* I can guarantee. (*Rising*) We'll see ourselves out.

Austin (*dismissively*) As you wish. Good-morning.

Austin turns and exits DR

Marcia glares after him, then turns to the doors L

Marcia (*imperiously*) Iona.

Iona (*looking at Harold*) Give me a moment, Mother. Mr Crossley and I have to speak.

Harold (*surprised*) We do?
Iona (*pointedly*) As Austin's advisor, there's a few other things you need to know. Shall we discuss them on the terrace?

Without waiting, Iona goes on to the terrace. Harold glances at Marcia in bewilderment, then receiving no response, follows Iona out

They vanish from sight R

Marcia opens her handbag and takes out a bottle of pills. With shaking hands, she opens the bottle, takes two of the pills, then replaces the bottle in her bag and closes it

David enters through the doors L. *He is now dressed in casual wear*

David (*as he enters*) Sorry to have been so long, but ... (*He sees Marcia*) Aunt *Marcie*. When did you arrive? (*He moves to her and dutifully pecks her on the cheek*)
Marcia (*stiffly*) There's no need for that, David.
David (*lightly*) I know. But I like living dangerously. (*He glances round*) Is Io with you?
Marcia (*heavily*) Her name is Iona.
David (*unconcerned*) A rose by any other name ...
Marcia My daughter is not a rose.
David (*remembering*) No. (*Under his breath*) More like a Venus fly-trap. (*Brightening again*) But I'm glad you've dropped by. You can meet my flatmate. From London. I'm taking him on the grand tour, and treating him to lunch at The Dog and Duck. Providing he's got enough cash on him. I'm flat broke, myself. (*Hopefully*) I don't suppose you'd ...?

Marcia stares at him

No. No. I didn't think you would. (*He glances round again*) You've not seen him, have you? He was here ten minutes ago. Crossley's the name. Good-looking chap in his thirties.
Marcia (*disapprovingly*) You're living with your father's advisor?
David (*blankly*) What? (*Amused*) No, no. He's not an advisor. He's a goldsmith. With Steadman and Waterfield in Hatton Garden.
Marcia (*icily*) Indeed.
David Hang on a second and I'll find him. He can't have gone far.

He goes on to the terrace and peers over the edge of the balustrade before coming back into the room

Not out there. Must have nipped upstairs for something. Won't be a mo.

He exits L

Marcia (*furiously*) So. Another of Austin's lies. (*Bitterly*) I *told* her we couldn't trust him. I *told* her.

Iona appears on the terrace and steps into the room

Iona (*briskly*) Mother. (*She heads for the doors* L)
Marcia (*savagely*) He was lying to us, Iona. He's known about the Monstrance all along.

Iona halts and turns to her

Iona Of course he has. It doesn't surprise me in the least. (*Smugly*) But he doesn't know everything, Mother. I've still a surprise or two up my sleeve. The next few days are going to be interesting. (*She gives a satisfied smile*) *Very* interesting.

Iona exits. After a moment, Marcia follows

As she moves, the Lights fade slowly to end the scene

Scene 2

The same. Early afternoon

The room has been tidied, but otherwise nothing has changed. On the terrace, Jean, now in a light summer frock and wearing sunglasses, is perched on the balustrade top, L *of* C, *gazing* R. *On the table is a tray holding a plate of dainty sandwiches and a glass of wine. Both are untouched*

After a moment, Brenda enters down R, *closing the door behind her and glancing at Jean briefly, crosses towards the doors* L. *About to exit, she pauses, then turns back and moves to the open window*

Brenda Jeanie?

There is no reaction from Jean. Brenda hesitates, then steps on to the terrace

Is everything all right? You haven't *touched* your lunch.

Jean (*dully*) I'm not hungry.
Brenda (*uncertainly*) Do you want me to take it away?

Austin charges into the room L, *carrying a slim document file*

Austin (*calling*) Treasure? (*He crosses briskly towards the door* DR) Treasure.

Brenda turns hastily and re-enters the room as Austin opens the door to exit

Brenda (*calling*) I'm here, Austin. (*She moves down towards him*)
Austin (*turning to her, annoyed*) You won't believe this, but those idiots in the Planning Department only want me to —— (*He stops and frowns*) What's wrong? You look worried.
Brenda (*amused*) No I don't.
Austin Yes, you do. I know that look. I've lived with it for the past fifty years. Now come on. Spit it out. Who's upset you?
Brenda No one. I'm fine. (*She hesitates*) But if you *must* know ... I'm concerned about Jean.
Austin Why? (*He sees Jean on the terrace*) What's she been saying?
Brenda (*heavily*) She's not saying anything. That's the problem. She's hardly said a word since this morning, and her lunch is just as I left it. I think it's this convent business.
Austin (*frowning*) What?
Brenda (*sighing*) Don't play the innocent, Austin. You know *exactly* what I'm referring to.
Austin (*reluctantly*) Well ... maybe I do. But it shouldn't concern her. (*Firmly*) It's not as though *we*'re Catholics. If they have to sell the Monstrance, then let them get on with it. I'm annoyed, of course. And have every right to be. But Sir Martin gave it to them, so they can please themselves what they do with it. Their fight'll be with Marcia. Not me.
Brenda (*dryly*) So you wouldn't be interested in a million pounds or so, if the law decides in her favour?
Austin I wouldn't turn it down. Even a million would come in useful, these days. But it's not going to happen, Treas. I promise you. If the Vales *do* go to Court, it'll cost them more in legal fees than ever they'd get out of it ... especially without my backing. Now let's forget about it and concentrate on more important issues. (*Displaying the document file*) This planning application ——
Brenda (*interrupting*) You don't think she'll do something stupid?

Austin stares at her

The way she did when her mother died?

Austin (*frowning*) That was ten years ago. She was only a child.

Brenda She was fifteen, Austin. And it could have been serious.

Austin (*dismissively*) Oh come on, Treasure. She only ran away. I did it myself, once. And we were both back in our own beds before nightfall. (*Frowning*) But maybe you're right. I don't want her mixed up with what's going on at St Gudrun's — if that's what the problem is. Leave it with me, and I'll have a word.

Brenda nods, then turns and exits L

Austin glances at Jean and then at the file he is holding, comes to a decision, nods to himself and exits down R*, closing the door behind him*

Jean remains unmoving. After a moment, David's voice is heard

David (*off* R, *calling*) Soft. What bird on yonder coping ... perilously sits? 'Tis Jeanie with the light brown hair, a-combing out her nits. (*Pause*) Hoy. Cloth-ears. Summon the fatted calf. We're back.

Jean does not react

A moment later, David appears R *on the terrace, followed by Harold. Both are perspiring heavily*

(*To Jean*) Hello-o. Anybody home? (*Waggling his hand in front of her eyes*)

Jean (*annoyed*) Get lost, retard. (*She brushes his hand away*) You stink like a brewery.

David (*unfazed and moving to the window*) What's with the Sphinx look? Or is it Humpty Dumpty? Don't get your hopes up if it is. There's not a King's horseman in *miles*. Just a couple of hot and sticky queens.

He enters the room, followed by an embarrassed Harold

Harold I wish you'd stop saying things like that.

David (*moving down to the sofa and collapsing on it*) Why? Worried about the image, are we? (*He yawns, then grins*) I shouldn't bother. Now she's met you, she wouldn't believe you're gay in a million

years. Me, yes. But *you*. No, no, no, no, *no*. You're her knight in shining armour.

Harold (*surprised*) What?

David (*airily*) Oh, yes. She's got designs on your body, mate. And I don't mean tattoos.

Harold (*tiredly*) Give it a rest, David. We hardly know each other. (*He moves to the easy chair*)

David She's a woman, and you're a man. What more do you need to know?

Harold (*sadly*) No wonder you fight like cat and dog. I'm surprised she's not throttled you.

David (*earnestly*) Oh, she's tried. She's definitely tried. Got a nasty streak, our Jeannie. You'd better watch out when she starts fluttering her lashes at you. She don't take rejection well.

Harold (*dryly*) And what makes you think I'd reject her?

David (*startled and sitting up*) You don't *fancy* her, do you?

Harold That's for me to know, and you to find out.

David (*grinning*) Oh, my God. You *do*. Don't you? You fancy her.

Jean gets off the wall and comes into the room

Harold (*not seeing her*) Do you mind if we change the subject? (*He sits*)

Jean (*caustically*) Well *I* certainly don't. (*She removes her sunglasses*)

They both turn their heads to see her

(*To David*) I'm not deaf, you know. And for your information, I haven't got designs on anyone's body. Least of all his. (*To Harold*) No offence, Harold. But if I'm going to have my personal life discussed, I'd prefer to be part of the conversation.

David (*grinning at Harold*) You see? A very nasty streak.

Jean (*snapping*) At least I'm not a moron.

David (*lightly*) How very true, dear heart. You haven't managed *one* husband, yet. Let alone half a dozen.

Jean (*glaring at him*) I said *moron*, pea-brain. Not mormon.

David (*with mock chagrin*) Sorry. (*Brightly*) But it is a puzzle, isn't it? Twenty-five years old and narry a suitor in sight. What do you *do* for social life, these days? Line dancing in the village hall, or bingo?

Jean (*sourly*) I don't have a social life. (*She moves* C) And in case you hadn't noticed, we're not overwhelmed with amenities in this part of the world. It's not London, you know.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

Please visit our website to buy the full script, apply for a license to perform this show (if it's available), or to explore hundreds of similar titles.

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
or, in the US www.samuelfrench.com

To be the first to know about new books, licensing releases, and enjoy other theatre-related larks, do follow us on our spangley social media channels.



Samuel French London



SamuelFrenchLtd

SF **PERUSALS**