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CALL IT A DAY

A Comedy in Three Acts

By
Dodie Smith
(C. L. Anthony)



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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CALL IT A DAY

Produced at the Globe Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.1, on
October 30th, 1935, with the following cast of characters:

(In the order of their appearance)

DOROTHY HILTON	. . . . .	<i>Fay Compton.</i>
ROGER HILTON	. . . . .	<i>Owen Nares.</i>
VERA	. . . . .	<i>Mavis Clair.</i>
ANN HILTON	. . . . .	<i>Alexis France.</i>
MARTIN HILTON	. . . . .	<i>Geoffrey Nares.</i>
CATHERINE HILTON	. . . . .	<i>Patricia Hulhard.</i>
COOK	. . . . .	<i>Muriel George.</i>
MRS. MILSOM	. . . . .	<i>Phyllis Morris.</i>
PAUL FRANCIS	. . . . .	<i>Austin Trevor.</i>
ETHEL FRANCIS	. . . . .	<i>Lois Heatherley.</i>
MURIEL WESTON	. . . . .	<i>Marie Löhr.</i>
FRANK HAINES	. . . . .	<i>George Thorpe.</i>
ELSIE LESTER	. . . . .	<i>Ann Wilton.</i>
BEATRICE GWYNNE	. . . . .	<i>Valerie Taylor.</i>
ALISTAIR BROWN	. . . . .	<i>Bryan Coleman.</i>
JOAN COLLETT	. . . . .	<i>Moira Reed.</i>

The Play Produced by BASIL DEAN.

CALL IT A DAY

Produced in New York by The Theatre Guild, Inc., in association with Lee Ephraim, at the Morosco Theatre, January 28, 1936. The play was directed by Tyrone Guthrie, the settings designed by Lee Simonson and the cast was as follows:

(in the order of their appearance)

DOROTHY HILTON	Gladys Cooper
ROGER HILTON	Philip Merivale
VERA	Valerie Cossart
ANN HILTON	Jeanne Dante
MARTIN HILTON	John Buckmaster
CATHERINE HILTON	Florence Williams
COOK	Florence Edney
MRS. MILSON	Lillian Brennard Tonge
PAUL FRANCIS	Glenn Anders
ETHEL FRANCIS	Frances Williams
MURIEL WESTON	Viola Roache
FRANK HAINES	Lawrence Grossmith
ELSIE LESTER	Esther Mitchell
BEATRICE GWYNNE	Claudia Morgan
ALISTAIR BROWN	William Packer
JOAN COLLETT	Mary Mason

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

SCENE 1.—Roger and Dorothy Hilton's bedroom in their house in St. John's Wood. 8 a.m.

SCENE 2.—The Kitchen. 8.30 a.m.

SCENE 3.—The Dining-room. 8.55 a.m.

ACT II

SCENE 1.—Paul Francis's Studio in Holland Park. 4.45 p.m.

SCENE 2.—Frank Haines's Flat in Jermyn Street. 5.15 p.m.

SCENE 3.—Roger Hilton's Office in Gray's Inn. 5.55 p.m.

ACT III

SCENE 1.—The Back Garden of the Hilton's House 6.45 p.m.

SCENE 2.—Ann and Catherine Hilton's Bedroom. 11.30 p.m.

SCENE 3.—Roger and Dorothy Hilton's Bedroom. 11.45 p.m.

The action of the play takes place between 8 a.m. and midnight of a day in early spring.

(SUGGESTIONS FOR AMATEURS)

CALL IT A DAY

THIS play, while being admirably adapted for the use of Amateur Dramatic Societies as regards subject, parts, etc., presents certain difficulties regarding settings and furniture. These difficulties may, at first sight, seem unsurmountable, but a careful study of the suggestions given here will, it is hoped, place the play within the scope of the majority. Naturally all suggestions must be altered to suit the requirements of individual societies, many of which may be fortunate enough to possess producers capable of thinking out alternative schemes or improving on the ones suggested; but they will be a helpful basis.

The play is in nine scenes and requires eight different sets. It should be possible for amateurs to play it in two simple interior sets, effecting the changes by different curtains, furniture and disguising of doors and windows (this will *not* cover the Garden Scene, which will be dealt with separately). The furniture, which presents, on first sight, a formidable problem, can be cut down by clever management to very little more than is required for one really well-furnished set, and certainly not more than is needed by the average play with two full interiors.

Positions of doors, furniture, etc., have been kept as near as possible to those in the London production, so that the movements of characters can be followed as printed. Occasionally these will have to be altered to suit the simplified sets, but very simple stage management will arrange for this.

The permanent set for Act I should be as follows:

Walls painted some pleasant neutral colour such as beige or yellow, which might be found in a bedroom, a kitchen or a dining-room of a St. John's Wood house. Door centre of right wall, another in left of back wall, another in right of back wall—a comfortable space for two beds and bedside table between these doors. A casement window in left wall (see Plan 1).

SCENE 1.—*Roger and Dorothy's Bedroom.* (See Plan 2.)

The door on right is supposed to lead to the passage, the door right of back wall to Roger's dressing-room, that on left to the bathroom. These doors should not be widely opened as it is very difficult to make the backing look convincing.

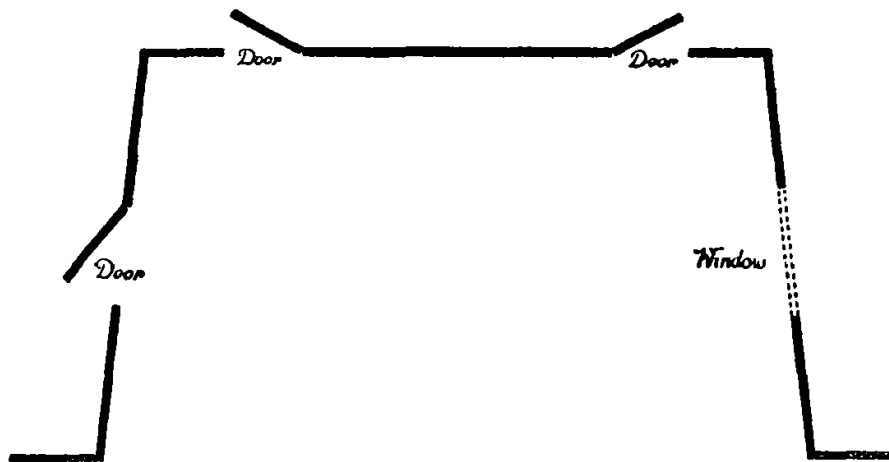
The window now has pleasant chintz curtains.

Furniture.

Twin beds in centre of back wall, with bedside table between them. Dressing-table left with small stool.

No other furniture is required by the action, but may, of course, be used if there is room and time to set it.

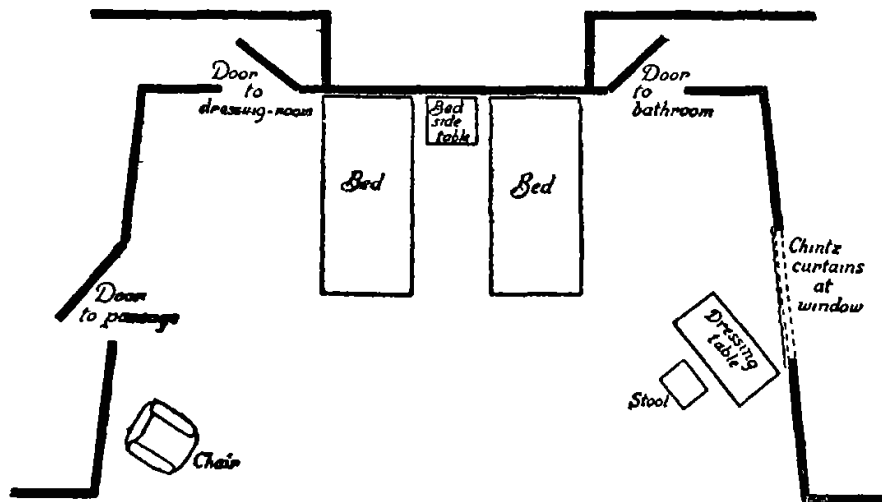
Note.—The dressing-table should be chintz covered, and it would be



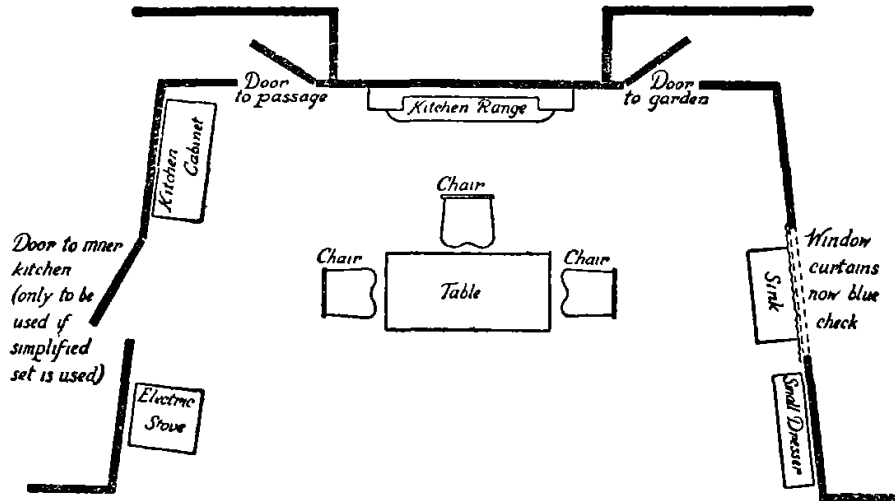
PLAN 1—Set for Act I, Scenes 1, 2 and 3, and for Act III,
Scenes 2 and 3

Set painted beige, yellow or cream

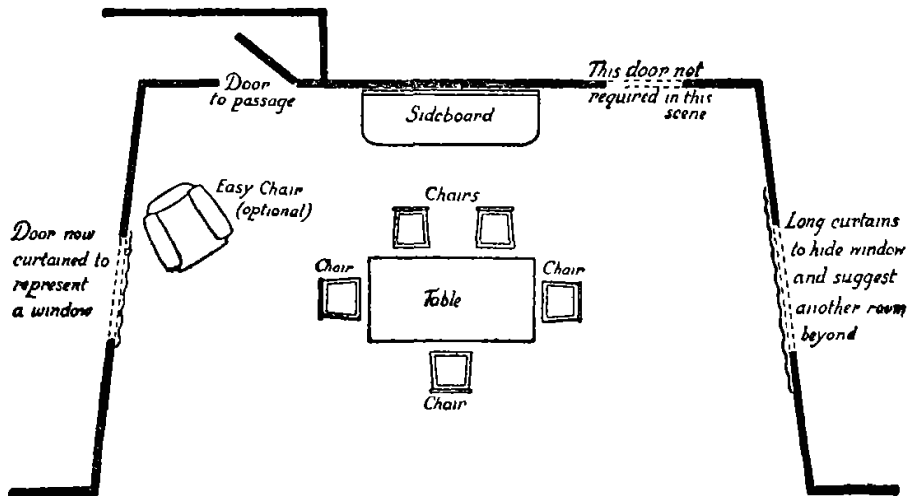
It will be found more convenient if all the doors open off



PLAN 2.—Set arranged for Act I, Scene 1, and Act III, Scene 3



PLAN 3—Set arranged for Act I, Scene 2
 For simplified arrangement the same, but without stove, dresser and range



PLAN 4.—Set arranged for Act I, Scene 3

quite practicable to use the desk which is required for Act II, Scenes 2 and 3, with a loose frilled cover of chintz over it. If so it will not be practicable to open a drawer, and Dorothy's handkerchiefs must be kept in a chintz-covered box on the dressing-table.

SCENE 2.—*The Kitchen.* (See Plan 3.)

With the exception of the Garden Scene, this is the most difficult set in the play. Two schemes are given for it. The first is, as near as possible, similar to the set used in London and, therefore, far the best, as the audience likes to see plenty of detail in this type of scene. The second scheme is a simplification, which will require some alteration of the business as at present shown.

Scheme 1.

The door on right is not required, but can be presumed to lead to a pantry or larder.

The door right of back wall leads to the rest of the house. The door left of back wall leads to the garden (again, it should never be opened wide).

The window has short blue check curtains. (All these changeable curtains should be ready on rods and simply put up on brackets when the scene is changed).

Furniture.

Kitchen table centre with three chairs, electric stove below door in right wall (electric stoves are easier to fake than gas stoves). Kitchen cabinet above this door. Kitchen range in centre of back wall. Sink in front of window, small dresser below window in left wall; this alters position of dresser from original production, but only changes Vera's movements very slightly. Dustbin below sink. Picture of cows over mantelpiece. Canisters, crockery, trays, etc., as required.

As will be seen, this is a very heavy list of heavy pieces of furniture, but certain simplifications can be made without spoiling the business. The dresser is only used when Vera gets the slop-basin from it; it can be left out—it is a most difficult piece to move with all its crockery—and Vera can have left the slop-basin on the kitchen table. The canisters in the kitchen cabinet are absolutely necessary, but they could be on a small hanging shelf or in a small light cupboard.

The kitchen range should be a stage "prop," quite light to carry on and off—the electric stove also, as a real one is very heavy.

The sink—the taps do not have to be practicable—is not a serious problem. It can be very small and on a stand, or even a box with a curtain round it, and the dustbin to one side.

Scheme 2. (Same as Plan 3 but minus range, stove and dresser.)

In this simplified plan the door in right wall should be used and presumed to lead to an inner kitchen where the cooking is done. Thus only kitchen table and chairs, small sink and some form of kitchen cabinet or cupboard are required. This will necessitate some alterations in business. Thus, Vera is off stage doing the toast and stands at the door to talk to Cook. Cook must be on stage, so she cannot be at the range at the opening of the scene; she must find some other business, such as getting the breakfast-tray ready. Later she will take the teapot *off* to make the tea

and bring the bacon back from the other kitchen. Neat timing of movements will make these small changes quite practicable. If absolutely necessary, the sink can also be banished to the inner kitchen, but this makes the business at the curtain of the play very tricky as Cook would have to break the plate off stage. It has been found that the audience do not laugh until they actually see the broken pieces (which should be in the sink in case the plate does not break). If the breakage has to occur off stage Cook must re-enter with the broken pieces in her hand, open the back-door and throw them into a dustbin just outside. This will need careful timing or the curtain laugh will be spoilt.

If this simplified scheme is used, care must be taken that the room does not look too much like a sitting-room. Touches to suggest a kitchen can be thought out to replace range and stove, etc—a long brush, perhaps a saucepan rack—anything small and easily carried on which will give atmosphere. If the range and mantelshelf is off stage there must be a table in its place for the clock, etc.

Naturally Scheme 1 is better than Scheme 2, but it presents real difficulties. Probably the best solution is a compromise between the two, such as putting the stove off stage and the range on, simplifying the kitchen cabinet and replacing the dresser by a table—or simply using the drainer of the sink. But obviously as much detail as possible should be included, as a kitchen scene is always rather a novelty and very pleasing to the audience.

SCENE 3.—*Dining-room.* (See Plan 4.)

The door, which should open outwards in right wall, is now turned into a window by the addition of long curtains. It should be filled in for a couple of feet at the bottom by a small piece of wood painted to match the walls. Some producers will no doubt find that they are able to make this change more realistic if the door in the right wall of the main set (see Plan 1) is hinged downstage.

The door right of back wall leads to the passage. The door left of back wall is not required. It can either be ignored or hidden by a bookcase and picture. The window is now completely hidden by long heavy curtains which suggest they have taken the place of double doors.

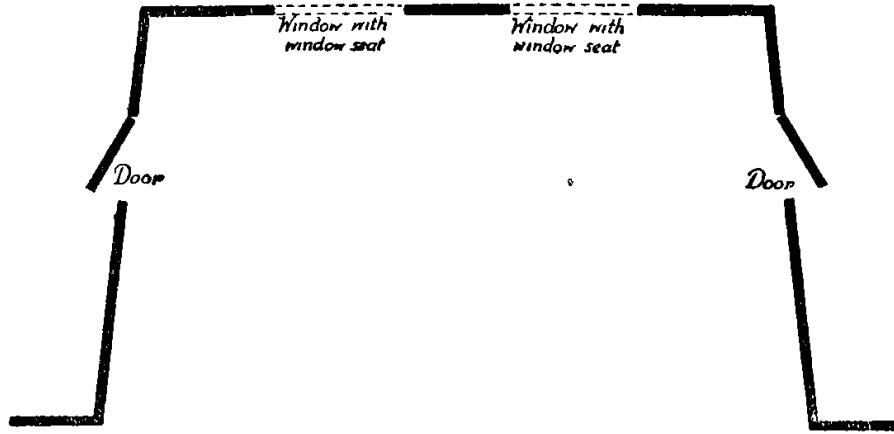
It is, of course, just as practicable to place these heavy curtains over the door right and to continue to treat the window as a window, but the method suggested will make the scene look much fresher and will enable the movements of the characters to be kept as at present.

Furniture.

All that is absolutely essential is: the dining-table and five small chairs (the kitchen table may remain on, disguised by a large and pretty breakfast-cloth). It will, however, be an advantage to have a small sideboard at the centre back and a small table for the clock—or the clock may stand on the sideboard. It is immaterial where the clock is provided it is on somewhere.

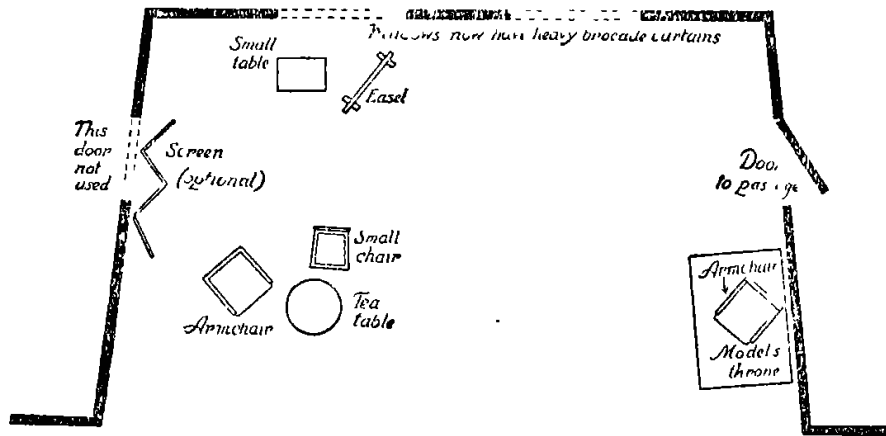
It is *not* necessary to have the fireplace and gas-stove as there is no business connected with them. Ann mentions the gas-stove in Act III, but it can be presumed to be in the fourth wall.

Vera is supposed to kneel in an armchair by the window, but she can quite well stand up to look out. But as two armchairs are required later, one of them might as well make an appearance here, in a loose cover.

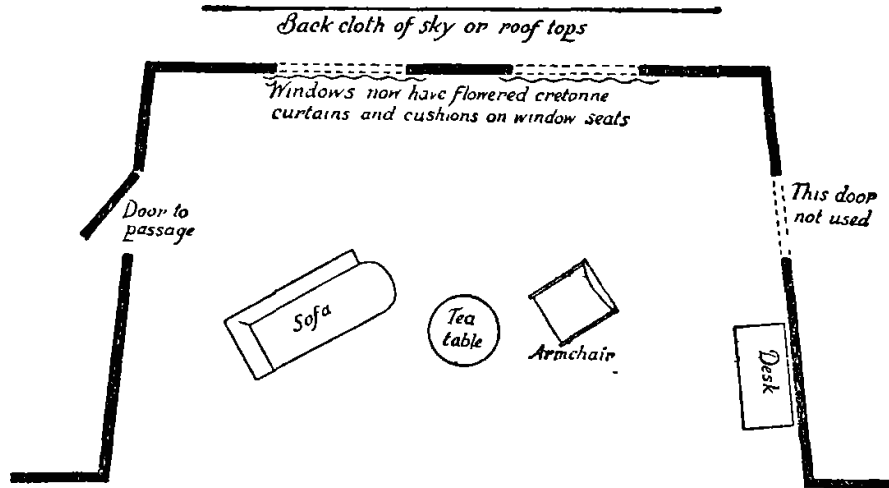


PLAN 5—Set for Act II, Scenes 1, 2 and 3
Walls painted a rather pale olive green

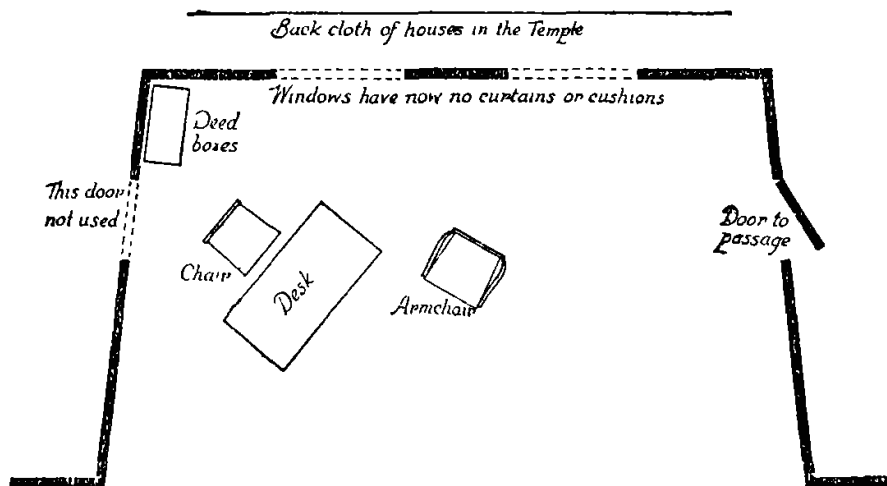
Back cloth of trees in a London Square



PLAN 6—Set arranged for Act II, Scene 1



PLAN 7.—Set arranged for Act II, Scene 2



PLAN 8.—Set arranged for Act II, Scene 3

This scene should be made to look lived-in and very pleasant, with one or two good pictures.

GENERAL NOTE ON ACT

All hangings, etc., should be chosen to make definite and contrasting colour schemes in each scene. Thus, if beige is chosen for the walls, the bedroom might have chintz or cretonne curtains of a floral design in which pink predominates; the kitchen curtains should be blue check; and the dining-room should have substantial curtains and hangings of, say, green or brown.

ACT II

Permanent set (see Plan 5).

Walls painted a rather pale but not unpleasant green, which would be suitable for all three sets.

Doors in centre of right and left walls.

Two good-sized sash windows, with window-seats and shutters, in back wall.

Note.—The action requires only one door in each set, but the presence of two will enable the entrance to be changed over in each scene, and whilst helping to change the appearance of the set, make it possible to retain most of the original movements.

SCENE 1. *Paul's Studio.* (See Plan 6.)

Door on left used for entrance.

Furniture.

Essential: Easel and small table up by right window, small armchair down right with fireside table (the same armchair as in Act I, but with different loose cover), stool or chair on model's throne left (a large flat box would pass as the throne if necessary, or it could be cut out entirely). Shelves with books, vases, etc. (on which stands the very small Rossetti sketch). Pictures, some old, some modern.

Every attempt should be made to give this scene atmosphere. The curtains should be heavy, old-fashioned brocade. There should be books and canvases stacked on the floor and the window-seats. A screen in front of the unwanted door would be a help. There should be a backcloth showing the trees in a London square.

SCENE 2.—*Frank Haines's Room in Jermyn Street.* (See Plan 7.)

Right door now used. The one on left can be ignored and presumed to lead to Frank's bedroom.

The windows should now have cretonne or rep curtains of a very conventional type. There should be a few cushions on the window-seats.

Furniture.

A sofa right centre, a small tea-table centre, an armchair left centre, a desk either between window or against left wall. (There will probably not be room for it between the windows and it will be more furnishing on the left wall.)

Note.—The sofa should be the type with only one end and a back. It would be quite practicable to use one of the beds, from Act I, with cushions and a loose cover—but if it has a head-board, it would have to be removed and then replaced for Act III.

The tea-table should be the one used in the previous Studio scene, with an afternoon teacloth (no cloth in Studio scene).

The armchair should be the one used in the Studio scene, but either with a different loose cover or, if it is leather, with no cover.

The desk should have made its appearance already as a dressing-table, with chintz cover, in Act I.

A few conventional pictures in marked contrast to those in the Studio will help this scene.

There should be a backcloth of sky or house-tops.

SCENE 3.—*Roger Hilton's Office.* (See Plan 8.)

Left door now used. The right door ignored. The windows should now be without curtains or cushions.

Furniture.

A desk right centre. Two chairs, one behind it, one facing it. A few deed-boxes, on a shelf or standing on top of each other. Other office furniture, such as a filing cabinet, may be used, but is not at all essential.

Note.—The desk should be the one used in the previous scene, when the side and front of it will have been seen. We shall now see the back and, with a house telephone and official-looking folders, etc., on it, it will look sufficiently different.

The chairs can have been used in the dining-room in Act I (preferably they should have arms).

No pictures in this scene except a framed certificate.

ACT III

Scene 1—The Garden—will be dealt with later.

Scenes 2 and 3 require the permanent set as in Act I.

SCENE 2.—*Catherine and Ann Hilton's Bedroom.* (See Plan 9.)

Preferably the door in right wall should be turned into a window (as suggested in Act I, Scene 3). The door in right of back wall should be ignored or covered by curtain, the door in left of back wall used as the entrance, and the window left should be hidden by a small wardrobe, bookshelf or curtain.

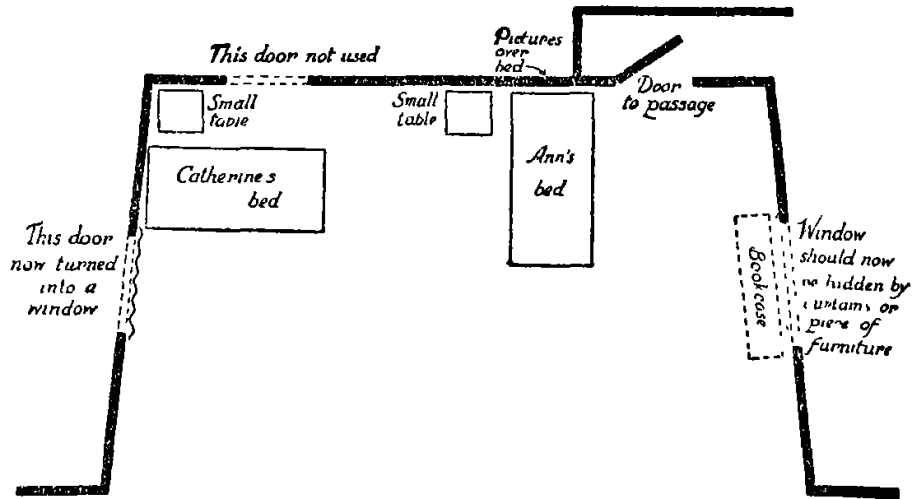
Furniture.

Bed extreme right corner of back wall, running parallel with this wall. Bed left centre running downwards from back wall. Small bookcase near this bed; two small bedside tables with lamps.

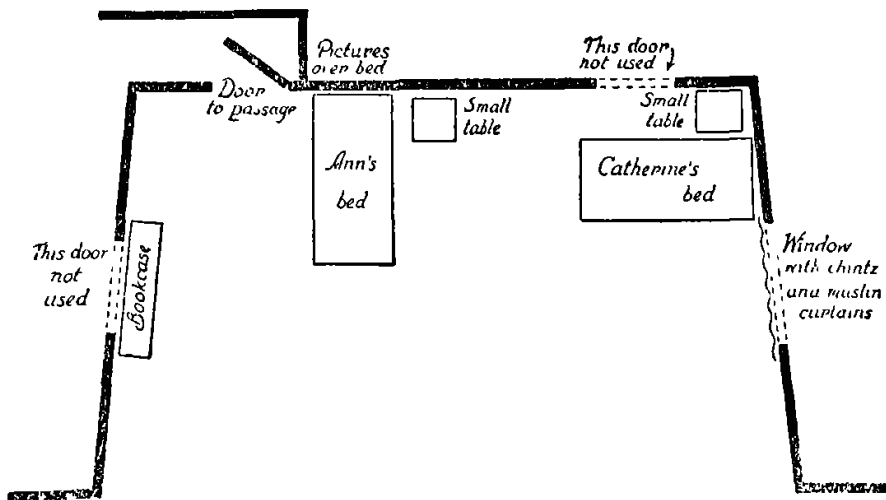
Note.—It is not absolutely essential to have these tables or lamps or to put on the light at all. It may be better to play the entire scene by moonlight as it will reveal it less to the audience.

The above arrangement will enable the actors to use the original positions and movements, but it would be quite simple to reverse them all, using left as right, in which case the original window in the left wall can be used (see Plan 10).

Note.—The same beds should be used as in the parents' bedroom, which follows immediately after, but they should have different coloured eider-downs. It will help the effect of moonlight if these are blue and the window curtains white muslin. Very little is seen of the detail in this scene, but there should be a few careful touches to differentiate it from the parents' bedroom. The pictures over Ann's bed will help. These

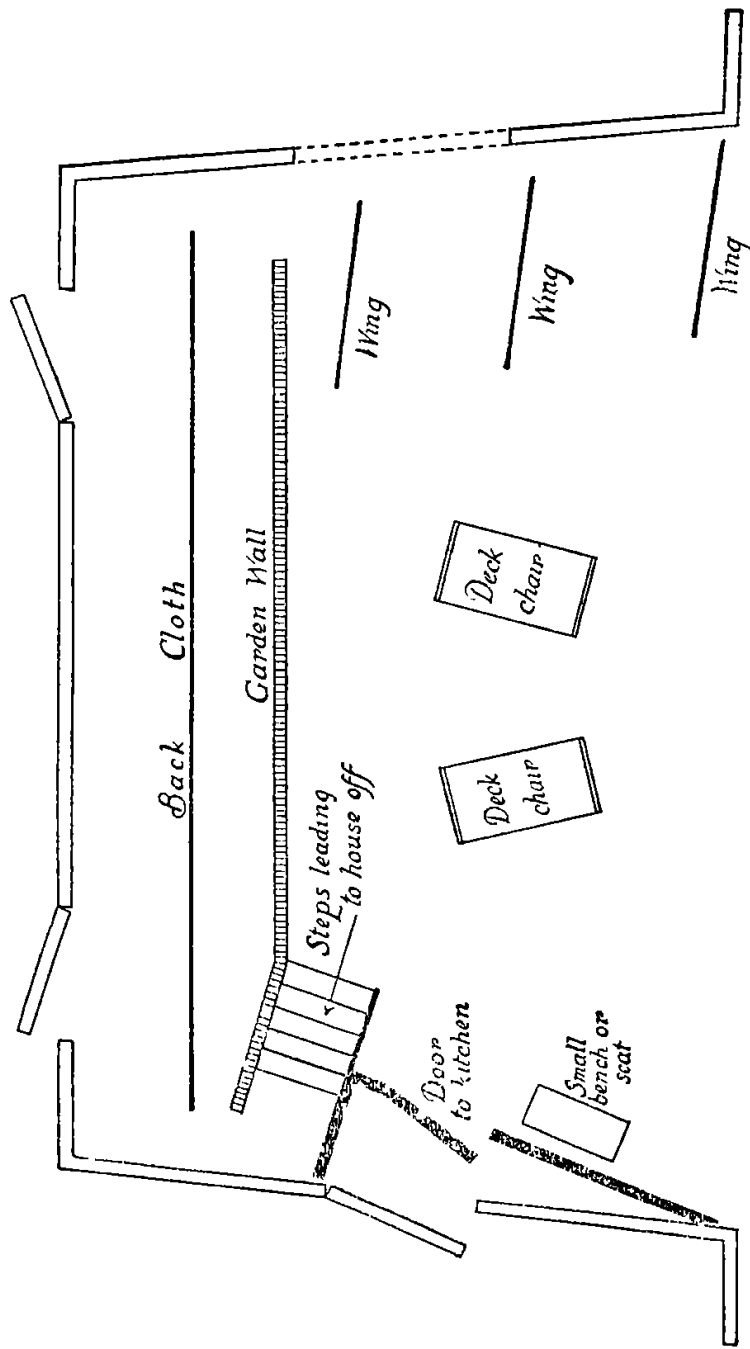


PLAN 9—Set arranged for Act III, Scene 2



PLAN 10—Alternative arrangement for Act III, Scene 2

Note—In this arrangement it might be better to use the door in the R. wall and put the bookcase across the one R. of back wall.



PLAN II.—Simplified arrangement of Garden Scene, Act III, Scene 1

This is set inside the interior set, which is thus ready for Scene 2. Interior set, ready for Scene 2, shown by spaced lines

This arrangement presumes it is possible to fly the small flat on R. If not, the R wall of interior set cannot be completely set till after the flat has been moved

Note the extreme simplification of this set. All it requires is:

Back cloth Wall (which could be built in sections) Three garden wings A few steps to lead off Very small flat with door to kitchen Two deck-chairs One bench or chair.

will be rather troublesome to hang quickly unless some clever method is thought out. They might be ready hung on a board painted to match the walls, which could be quickly placed in position—in the dim light the board would hardly show. Or they might be unframed and put up either with drawing pins or with adhesive paper.

It will be found essential that Catherine's bed should run parallel to the audience and not up and down stage, so that the two girls can be seen clearly during their scene on it.

SCENE 3.—*Roger and Dorothy's Bedroom*

As in Act I, Scene 1, but at night. The beds from previous scene will be placed in their correct positions with their original eiderdowns. The correct window curtains will be hung, dressing-table brought on and Ann's pictures and bookcase removed.

THE GARDEN SCENE. *Act III, Scene 1.*

It is necessary to deal with this scene separately, because it does not fit in with either of the two suggested sets and each society will have to invent their own method of managing it. The ideal way is as follows:

To have a separate set built, as like the original London production as possible, probably simplifying the elaborate backings with a well-painted back cloth. As the scene follows the interval there would be plenty of time to set it and, as it is the longest scene in the play, the audience will not mind a reasonable wait while it is struck and the children's bedroom is set, particularly if the other changes have been swift.

Many wealthy societies who play on a good-sized stage may be able to follow the above method, or a simplification of it. In smaller societies the following suggestions are given (see Plan 11):

During the interval, place the permanent set for Acts I and III in position, ready for the last two scenes. Then hang a painted backcloth, or even a grey curtain, inside the whole back wall. In front of this put a small property wall; if it is not practicable to sit on this wall Joan must first stand the other side of it while she talks and Martin must get her a box to climb over it so that she never has to put her weight on it. (In London she returned by climbing over near the balcony steps, which simplified her exit.)

On the left of the stage, place some wings, painted with trees and greenery.

On the right, place a flat representing the wall of the house. Naturally it is better if this can have kitchen door and steps up to the balcony, but it would be quite practicable to have *only* the kitchen door fully seen and the entrance to the house up-stage between the flat and the back cloth—in which case a few steps would help the illusion that people were going off up some stairs to a back door or balcony.

This method of arrangement presumes that it is possible to fly the small flat on the right. If not, the right wall of the interior set cannot be completely set until after the Garden Scene has been struck. The lighting of the whole scene should be very dim—which will not only cover up a multitude of evils, but help the atmosphere.

The only furniture required for this scene is two deck-chairs and a bench or chair for the Cook.

The whole scene is of the utmost importance to the play and will repay any trouble taken over it. A little illusion—ivy, a few shrubs, the sug-

gestion of the backs of houses on the backcloth—will go a long way. It is not really as difficult as it looks.

GENERAL NOTES

It has been shown that the actual amount of scenery need not be very much and that, by clever management, the furniture can be considerably cut down. It will, however, require very careful thought if the scenes are really to appear different. Hangings, curtains, loose-covers, table-cloths, etc., must be sharply differentiated, and many producers may be able to think of their own little touches to alter the appearances of sets.

One very important point is that the changes should be made speedily, and this will call for much planning and rehearsal. Here are a few suggestions that may help:

In every case, scenes possess two entrances (the set for Act I has three). Thus furniture can be taken *off* through one door and brought *on* through another, so avoiding collisions. While it is being taken on and off, one person can be hanging curtains and changing loose-covers and pictures. On small stages it is very difficult to have too many people about, and it might be practicable to give some of the cast definite jobs to do at the close of each scene. It is not advisable to worry players who are just going to appear in a scene and they should keep off stage till it is set. But the players who have *completed* their scene might easily help. As an example:

After the Studio scene (Act II, Scene 1)—

The actress playing Ethel Francis might be responsible for—

- (1) Removing the loose cover from her chair and leaving it ready for Scene 2.
- (2) Taking her tea-tray off stage.

The actor playing Paul might—

- (1) Remove his own easel.
- (2) Take down and remove his pictures.

Both going off at right door while sofa, etc., is coming on at left door.

Note.—Probably only those players who are actually on stage at the curtain of each scene should help. Unless very well rehearsed it will cause confusion if those who have made their exits run back again.

If very well planned, the changes should be extremely effective and very swift, but they must be rehearsed as carefully as the actual play.

Finally, "Call it a Day" is a play of detail—detail of story, detail of character drawing, detail of family life. Detail is responsible for much of its success. But, though it is elaborate, it is not extravagant, and should be practicable for any society who will make ingenuity take the place of elaboration. It is a play that gives particularly good scope to women—there are eleven good women's parts. It will probably be found practicable to enroll many of these ladies as helpers as regards curtains, kitchen fittings, etc. It is a play in which women can be of enormous help in every way.

CALL IT A DAY

ACT I

SCENE I

SCENE.—DOROTHY and ROGER HILTON's bedroom in their house in St. John's Wood. A day in spring. 8 a m.

The entrance from a landing is in the wall R. Up R., in the back wall, is a door leading into ROGER's dressing-room, and another door up L. leads to the bathroom. Between these doors are twin beds. The dressing-table is by the windows L. Bedside table and various small pieces of furniture as needed.

The decorations and furniture are in good taste, but it is the taste of people who have been married twenty years; the dressing-table looks like a dressing-table and carries a load of silver brushes and glass bottles. The window curtains are chintz, the electric light shades pink silk. The general colour of the room is pink and cream; on the whole a pleasant if over-pretty room. Narrow shafts of sunlight have forced their way through the drawn curtains

(See Photograph of Scene.)

When the CURTAIN rises, DOROTHY and ROGER HILTON are asleep in the twin beds, ROGER, in the right-hand bed, represented by a mound of clothes and a dishevelled lock of hair, DOROTHY lying with unruffled bedclothes and wearing a net bonnet to keep her wave in place, which is very becoming. The full light of day will reveal her as a little over forty, but the drawn curtains are kind and she has the gift of sleeping prettily—there is something a little childlike in the gentle relaxing of her features

For a moment DOROTHY and ROGER sleep in peace. A church clock strikes eight. Then there is a knock at the door R. DOROTHY stirs.

DOROTHY. Come in.

(VERA, a pleasant-looking young maid in a fresh print dress, enters with a tray of morning tea and "The Times.")

VERA *(crossing up between the beds)*. Good morning, madam.

DOROTHY Good morning, Vera.

VERA *(placing the tray on the table between the beds)*. Shall I pour it for you, madam?

DOROTHY. No, thank you. (*She yawns—but neatly—then sits up.*) Draw the curtains back, will you?

VERA (*crossing L.*). It's a lovely day, madam.

(*She draws the curtains back and the room is flooded with sunlight.*)

DOROTHY. Good gracious—it's quite dazzling.

VERA. It's the first real spring morning we've had.

DOROTHY. I expect it's pretty cold, though. (*She puts on the bedjacket*)

VERA (*taking DOROTHY'S dressing-gown from the dressing-table stool to the bed*). No, madam, the air's quite soft. I went out without my coat—to take the little dog out.

DOROTHY. Do you like dogs, Vera? (*She begins to pour out the tea*)

VERA (*L. of the bed*). Love them, madam—though I've never been with a terrier before. He was ever so frisky. It is nice up here, madam.

DOROTHY. Is this the first time you've worked in St. John's Wood?

VERA. Yes, madam. It's ever so pretty, with all the trees coming out.

DOROTHY. I hope you're going to like it.

VERA. Shall I put the bath on, madam?

DOROTHY. No, not just yet. Roger—wake up.—You'd better shake him, Vera.

VERA. Really, madam?

DOROTHY. Yes, really.

(*VERA crosses to R. of ROGER'S bed.*)

Someone always has to, and I hate getting out of bed to do it. Susan was a great shaker.

(*VERA shakes him gingerly.*)

Oh, much harder than that; you should have seen Susan.

(*Thus encouraged, VERA lets fly. ROGER gives a grunt of protest and huddles deeper into the bedclothes. VERA warms to her task. ROGER at last opens his eyes and looks at her. He is a pleasant-looking man, in the early forties.*)

ROGER (*still heavy with sleep*). Hello—who are you?

VERA. Vera, sir. I'm new.

(*ROGER gives a sleepy grunt of laughter.*)

I hope I didn't shake too hard.

ROGER. No—but you've a different technique from Susan—short and sharp instead of slow and steady.

VERA. I'll try to be steadier to-morrow, sir.

(ROGER *grunts and slips under the bedclothes again.*)

DOROTHY. He mustn't lie down again—he'll only be annoyed later.

(VERA *shakes him again.*)

ROGER. All right—all right, I'm awake.

DOROTHY. He's not really safe till he's had his tea. Put the bath on, Vera.

(VERA *crosses L. and goes into the bathroom.*)

Come on, Roger, tea's going cold. (*She hands him a cup.*)

(ROGER *runs through a distinguished repertoire of waking-up noises before taking the cup of tea. Finally, he sits stirring it, looking after VERA.*)

ROGER. I must say, Dot, I think you ought to shake me yourself.

DOROTHY. Certainly not. It gives me a headache. You always let Susan shake you.

ROGER. We'd had Susan donkey's years. It's very disconcerting to have strange females dashing at one in the early morning. And probably the girl doesn't like doing it.

(VERA *comes in from the bathroom and crosses R.*)

DOROTHY. Nonsense. You don't mind shaking the master, do you, Vera?

VERA (*stopping R. of ROGER's bed*) Not at all, madam—provided there's no ill feeling.

DOROTHY. Splendid. Thank you, Vera.

(VERA *goes off through door R.*)

Quite a nice little thing, I think.

ROGER (*gloomily*). Very bright and chatty.

DOROTHY. I like people to be bright in the morning.

ROGER. I know you do, darling. You and Vera will be singing glees together. (*He looks at the window.*) Good Lord, look at that sun.

DOROTHY. I know. Vera says it's quite warm.

ROGER (*getting out of bed, at L. side*). Now I wonder why no one has the sense to wake me up an hour earlier on a morning like this? (*He puts on his slippers, which are on the floor just L. of his bed, and crosses to the dressing-table.*) I could have had an hour's run in the Park with Terry. It would have done the little beggar good.

DOROTHY. It wouldn't have done you any harm. You're putting on weight

ROGER (*looking at himself in the glass*). This damn coat's shrunk.

DOROTHY. So have all your coats, I suppose.

ROGER. Now, look here—I can prove to you—

DOROTHY. You prove it to the bathroom scales.

ROGER. Certainly. I frequently consult the scales. (*He goes to the window and opens it with too much energy.*) Hell, there's that wretched next-door cat on our bulbs again. (*Shouting out of the window.*) Get off, you brute.

DOROTHY. Roger, do stop shouting.

ROGER. Ha—Terry's after her—good dog, fetch her out.

DOROTHY. Roger, be quiet.

ROGER. He's routed her—she's off like a streak of lightning. Good man there—worry her, lad.

DOROTHY. Roger, really! Those next-door people will think they've come to live amongst hooligans.

ROGER (*crossing R.*). I'm not going to curb a dog's natural instincts. (*He picks up his dressing-gown from the armchair down R.*)

DOROTHY. And what about the cat's natural instincts to go on our bulbs?

ROGER (*crossing to L. of DOROTHY'S bed, putting on his dressing-gown*). That cat's natural instincts can be perfectly well satisfied in its own back garden.

DOROTHY. Oh, go to your bath—and don't forget the scales.

ROGER (*L. of DOROTHY'S bed*). You know, you women with this skinny complex are laying up a wretched old age for yourselves. Stringy, that's what you'll be. Stringy and desiccated.

DOROTHY. Well, that's better than having two double chins and three double stomachs.

ROGER (*hitting his stomach*). I have no stomach whatever.

DOROTHY. How inconvenient.

ROGER. Now, look here, Dot, I'm serious. You ought to watch yourself. You're getting to an age when if a woman gets thin she stays thin.

(*He exits into the bathroom.*)

DOROTHY. Thanks.

(*With ROGER'S remarks about skinniness in her mind, DOROTHY puts down her tea-cup and picks up a hand mirror from the bedside table. She examines her neck and appears to be slightly dissatisfied with it. Then she puts on horn-rimmed spectacles and prepares to read the paper. There is a knock at the door R.*)

Yes?

(ANN HILTON *enters, in a blue Jaeger dressing-gown. She is fifteen, with a highly intelligent little face.*)

ANN (*crossing to between the beds*). I say, Mum, I do think you might speak to Cath—she's bagged the bathroom first again.

DOROTHY. That really is rather selfish of her. Good morning, darling.

(*They kiss*)

Have you asked her how long she'll be? (*She takes the spectacles off.*)

ANN. Another ten minutes, she says, but you know what that means.

DOROTHY. I wonder if she'll hear if I shout. Open the door.

(*ANN crosses to the door R. and opens it.*)

(*Calling.*) Catherine, hurry up there You'll make Ann late for school.

ANN. She's got the tap full on. (*She closes the door again and crosses to the bed.*) Oh dear, and I did want to be extra early this morning. I'm sure I've got one of the algebra questions down wrong. (*She sits on the R side of DOROTHY'S bed.*) Mum—can you think of any possible use algebra can be in one's after-life?

DOROTHY. After-life?

ANN. I mean, after school life.

DOROTHY. Well, let me see now. (*After a pause.*) Of course, it must be some use or schools wouldn't teach it.

ANN. Wouldn't they just!

DOROTHY (*at last*). It helps your powers of reasoning.

ANN. It doesn't help mine. After I've done half an hour's algebra my brain feels most peculiar—sort of floating. Are you keen on having a daughter with a floating brain?

DOROTHY. Now, Ann—I am *not* going to get you off algebra. I got you off science—

ANN. But it's only so that I can spend more time on really important things—like poetry—

DOROTHY. And what good's poetry going to be to you in your after-life? It won't help you to look after a husband and children.

ANN. I'm not going to have a husband.

DOROTHY. You certainly aren't if something isn't done about that tooth of yours. Come here. (*She takes ANN'S head in her hands.*) Now smile—close your teeth. There, I thought so I told Jordan he was taking that plate off too soon. You'll never get a husband if your teeth protrude.

ANN. I don't want a husband—and, anyhow, women with out-of-door teeth always get married. I expect it's because men are so fond of horses.

DOROTHY (*laughing*). Well, no one could like *one* out-of-door tooth. You must go to Mr. Jordan on Saturday morning.

ANN (*with a wail*). Oh, Mummy! I'm going to the Tate on Saturday morning.

DOROTHY. But you've been to the Tate lots of times.

ANN. But not since I've been reading Rossetti. Oh, Mum—he's the most lovely poet. I've been reading him since six this morning.

DOROTHY. Now, Ann—you know I don't like you working before breakfast.

ANN. But the early morning's the best time for poetry—when

everything's fresh. The words get right inside you and your mind's so clear it's like—like crystal water.

DOROTHY No wonder your brain feels as if it's floating.

ANN. Oh, Mum—don't be piggy. It's lovely to read aloud.

DOROTHY. Doesn't Cath object to your reading aloud?

ANN (*getting up off the bed and crossing to the door R*) She was out this morning, soon after six—that's why she came back and bagged my bath.

DOROTHY. Do you mean she actually went out at six for a walk? The spring does seem to have broken out.

(ROGER *is heard singing in the bathroom.*)

ANN. Hark to Father—(*hurrying across and up L.*) he seems to have broken out too! (*At the bathroom door, but not opening it*) I say, Daddy—would you like to hurry and lend me your bathroom? Would you?

(DOROTHY *says, "Now, Ann," at the same moment that an indistinct murmur is heard from ROGER.*)

But, darling, wouldn't you like to shave in your dressing-room?

ROGER (*in the bathroom*). NO.

ANN. Oh, do be a sport, Daddy. Cath's bagged the bathroom and I'm terribly late and—

ROGER (*grumblingly*). Oh, all right. I suppose I'm allowed to dry myself.

ANN. Oh, darling—you *are* a pet rabbit. (*To DOROTHY.*) He's going to let me. Whoops of joy.

DOROTHY. And what about my bath?

ANN. I'll only be a few minutes. Honest—Oh, you don't really mind, do you? (*She flings herself at her mother*) Darling Mummy face.

DOROTHY. I will not be called Mummy face. Of all the revolting—

ANN (*kneeling up on the bed*). But it's a term of endearment. Anyhow, Egyptian mummies are lovely—all queer and mysterious. (*With sudden complete self-absorption*) Mummy, do you think I'm psychic?

DOROTHY (*discouragingly*). Why?

ANN. Well, I'm always feeling as if I ought to be able to see things. I expect it's because I'm sensitive. (*She picks up DOROTHY's hand-mirror.*) I've got a sensitive mouth, haven't I, Mummy?

DOROTHY. I expect it's sensitive about the tooth inside it.

ANN. Oh, Mummy, I do think you're unromantic, just when I was talking about important things. You're always shrivelling me up. Do you know what I read in the paper yesterday? Girls of my age are like sensitive plants.

DOROTHY. Darling child, I didn't mean to shrivel you—

But there really are times when I'm afraid you're getting a bit morbid.

ANN. I wonder. I suppose a lot of great people have been morbid. Rossetti buried his poems in his wife's coffin. But then he dug them up. Mummy, if I die, I'd rather you didn't cremate me.

DOROTHY. Ann—you're not to talk like that. It's not a bit clever to be morbid.

(ANN looks pained.)

Oh, for goodness' sake don't get shrivelled again. You're not feeling ill, are you, darling?

ANN (*wistful, but resigned*). No, Mummy. Just a bit strange sometimes. I expect I've outgrown my strength.

DOROTHY. Then you couldn't have had much strength. You're only as big as tuppence-halfpenny now. Silly baby. (*She catches ANN'S hand and gives it an affectionate squeeze; then looks at it critically.*) Are you remembering to manicure your nails properly?

ANN (*snatching her hand away and rising*). No, Mum, you're not to look. To-day's their worst day.

DOROTHY (*firmly taking her hand*). Come on, now. Oh, Ann! Those cuticles haven't been done for weeks. Give me an orange stick. (*She makes a gesture towards the dressing-table.*)

ANN. No, Mummy, there isn't time—I'll be terribly late. (*She runs to the bathroom door*) Daddy. Ow-ow! (*She howls like a dog.*) Oh dear—I wonder how far Cath's got. (*She runs to the door R. and opens it*)

(ROGER comes out of the bathroom, in a large bathrobe, carrying his shaving-tackle)

ROGER. Here you are, nuisance.

ANN (*running across L, having left the door ajar*). Oh, thank you, darling. You are a pet lamb. Roger! You've got a new bath-wrap!

DOROTHY. You are not to call your father Roger.

ANN. But he likes it, don't you, darling? And it's fashionable for children to treat their parents as if they were human.

ROGER (*crossing to between the beds*). Get along with you, baggage.

(ANN, about to enter, turns back)

ANN. Mummy, can I have the weeniest squeegee of your bath salts?

DOROTHY. Well, use the ones in the big tin—not the Floris. I know your squeegees.

ANN. I'll only take one grain.

(*She goes in and shuts the door.*)

DOROTHY. Roger, do you think that child's all right?

ROGER. I should say she was bursting with health.

DOROTHY. She's getting the most extraordinary ideas—about death and poets.

ROGER. It's just a phase. You had it when we were engaged. *(He takes his watch from the bedside table.)* Good. I'll get five minutes in the garden if I sprint.

(DOROTHY has resumed her spectacles and picked up "The Times.")

What are you doing with "The Times."

DOROTHY. Reading it. Vera brought it up instead of the "Express."

ROGER. Well, for goodness' sake don't muck it about. I hate reading a paper after a woman's been at it.

(He goes into his dressing-room, up R., leaving the door open, and starts to hum.)

DOROTHY. Gertie Mills has had a baby.

ROGER *(invisible, shaving)*. What?

DOROTHY. Gertie Mills has had a boy.

ROGER. Didn't know she was married. *(He comes to the doorway, lathering his face.)*

DOROTHY. Well, I should hardly think she'd announce the baby in "The Times" if she wasn't. Of course she's married. We sent her a fish-slice.

ROGER. Damned original of us.

DOROTHY. She asked for it.

ROGER. She's the sort of woman who would slice her fish.

(He disappears again.)

DOROTHY *(after turning page after page and scanning the headlines)*. There seems to be nothing whatever in this paper.

ROGER *(coming to the doorway)*. They just bring it out so that you can line drawers with it.

DOROTHY. I wish you'd close your door. There's a ghastly draught.

(ROGER shuts the door. DOROTHY decides to fold the paper at the Woman's Page. Catastrophe overtakes "The Times," which flutters in several directions. She is about to collect the pages when she hears steps in the passage—the bedroom door is slightly open.)

Catherine—is that you?

(MARTIN HILTON enters R., a pleasant-looking boy of seventeen. He is in his dressing-gown.)

MARTIN. No, it's me, darling. *(He crosses to R. of DOROTHY'S bed.)*

DOROTHY. Oh, good morning, dear. *(She takes off her spectacles.)*

MARTIN (*kissing her*). Very fetching we're looking this morning with our head in a little string bag. Any chance of using your bathroom?

DOROTHY. Ann's in it. But Cath can't be long now.

MARTIN. Can't she just.

DOROTHY. You don't think she's fainted, do you?

MARTIN. Shouldn't be surprised. She might do anything these days. Never knew a girl so soppy. (*He sits L. on DOROTHY'S bed and picks up a page of "The Times."*) Anyhow, I don't care. I'm not really in a hurry.

DOROTHY. But you'll be late for breakfast and it's Vera's first morning. Really, one would think five people could share two baths without all this trouble. Go and bang on the door. Something really may have happened to her.

MARTIN. Oh, no, it hasn't. (*Dropping the paper.*) She told me to go to hell last time I banged (*He suddenly flings himself across his mother's feet.*)

DOROTHY. Martin—for goodness' sake! Get off, you great lump. You don't know how heavy you are.

(MARTIN *shifts slightly down the bed.*)

No—really—you'll bust the hot-water bottle

MARTIN. Hot-water bottle! (*He rises*) What pampered creatures you women are. Hot-water bottle on a day like this!

DOROTHY. It wasn't a day like this last night. It was jolly cold.

MARTIN (*lying on ROGER'S bed*). And now spring has burst on an astonished world. (*He gives a violent squirm on the bed and then sits up*) Talking of dogs, darling—is Father reconciled to my going away with Alistair at Easter?

DOROTHY. I'm afraid not, dear. I've done my best. But he doesn't really like Alistair—and when we've just got the new car—

MARTIN. And what a car. The dowagers' home of rest.

DOROTHY. Well, I like a car to be comfortable.

MARTIN. Darling, you're getting dreadfully plushy. At any moment you'll take to an ear-trumpet and eucalyptus pastilles. (*He performs more gymnastics on the bed, then springs up and crosses to the window*) I think I ought to warn you, darling, that I shall go with Alistair whatever Father says.

DOROTHY. You must settle that yourself.

MARTIN (*looking through the window ROGER left open*). Dear, dear, something very nifty has broken out in the next-door garden.

DOROTHY. Yes, she's pretty.

MARTIN. Well, well. Frisking about like a young antelope. Girls are rather tripe, really.—Well, I'm damned! There's Cath sitting at the bathroom window.

DOROTHY. What's she doing?

MARTIN. Nothing whatever. Just looking completely blah.

(*Calling.*) Hi, there! Come out of it, you batty-looking hag—
(*He breaks off and draws back*) Oh, my Lord—the vision next door thinks I mean her.

DOROTHY. Martin—really.

MARTIN My dear—she's glaring like old boots—not at all a bad-looking gawk, really. What a lark!

DOROTHY. There's Cath coming out. (*Calling.*) Cath—come here a minute.

MARTIN (*turning and facing the door R.*) I'm just going to give her a piece of my mind

(CATHERINE HILTON *enters R., wearing a dressing-gown over her under-clothes. She is just under nineteen, a really beautiful girl of unusual type, dark and intense and, at present, rather sullen.*)

CATHERINE. Yes, Mother?

MARTIN (*crossing R.C. to the foot of ROGER'S bed*). Of all the selfish, greedy—

CATHERINE (*passing below MARTIN to C.*). I'm not talking to you. (*She sits on the foot of ROGER'S bed*)

MARTIN. But I'm talking to you. What do you think the rest of us are doing while you get stuck in a trance at the bath-room window? I suppose you think you looked like that Rossetti picture Ann's got over her bed.

CATHERINE. I don't look at Ann's pictures, and I wish she'd clear the rotten things out. I'm sick of sharing a bedroom. There's no privacy anywhere in this house.

MARTIN. So you thought you'd have a little privacy in the bathroom while two of us waited?

CATHERINE (*rising and crossing to the dressing-table*). Oh, shut up! It's bad enough having you about the house without listening to you. (*Sitting on the dressing-table stool.*) One minute you're just a grubby little schoolboy and the next minute you're trying to be Noel Coward, and both ways you're equally disgusting.

MARTIN. Good morning. There, you see, Mother—loopy. (*Crossing to R. of CATHERINE*) You know what'll happen to you, my girl. They'll come for you in a van.

DOROTHY. Go and have your bath, dear.

MARTIN. Right you are. (*Still close to CATHERINE*) Dear, dear—all that time in the bath and her neck's still dirty.

(CATHERINE *turns furiously*)

(*Crossing R*) Call Father if she gets dangerous.

(*He dashes out of the door R., banging it behind him.*)

CATHERINE (*rising*). Really, Mother—he's quite unbearable. (*Crossing up to L. of DOROTHY'S bed.*) You ought to speak to him.

DOROTHY. Well, dear, I was just going to speak to you. You really must be a little more considerate.

CATHERINE. Heavens, just because I spent a few extra minutes in the bath.

DOROTHY. You took Ann's turn.

CATHERINE. My God, anyone would think we were at boarding-school.

DOROTHY. Cath, I will not have you saying "My God."

CATHERINE. But I've told you, Mother—it doesn't mean anything.

DOROTHY. Then there's no point in saying it. Oh, I know you don't mean to be blasphemous, dear, but—

CATHERINE. Look here—I'll make a bargain: if I stop saying "My God," will you let me have the spare bedroom?

DOROTHY. Now, Cath, we've gone into all this—

CATHERINE. I tell you I'll turn out if we have a visitor.

DOROTHY. But you'll always make a grievance of turning out—and leave things behind. Visitors simply hate finding grubby bits of powder-puffs in the drawers. No—I simply must keep the spare bedroom.

CATHERINE. Then I shall go on saying "My God."

DOROTHY. You've no right to make a religious question of it.

CATHERINE. I want the spare bedroom.

DOROTHY. What's wrong with your room? Is it Ann's early morning reading that upsets you?

CATHERINE. That and her early evening praying. She now says her prayers under a picture of Shelley.

DOROTHY. Do you mean she actually prays to it?

CATHERINE. Not exactly. She says that's the holiest part of the room.

DOROTHY. Shelley *would* be pleased.

CATHERINE. It isn't only Ann—it's just that I want to be alone.

DOROTHY. But why? I could understand if you were working—studying something.

CATHERINE. Well, perhaps I will take something up—if you give me the spare bedroom.

DOROTHY. No, Cath. I'm sorry, dear, but—

CATHERINE. You're not a bit sorry. You're the most un-understanding mother I've ever met. How can anyone be so beastly on a lovely day when everything—everything— Oh God, how I hate this whole rotten house! (*She rushes out R., slamming the door after her.*)

DOROTHY (*torn between wrath and concern*). Catherine, come back this instant. (*She springs out of bed, picks up her dressing-gown and goes to the door R.*) Cath—Cath dear—

(CATHERINE'S door slams. ROGER comes from the dressing-room.)

ROGER. Did you call, Dot?

DOROTHY. No, dear—not you. (*Looking after CATHERINE.*) Really, there must be something wrong with her. (*She puts on her dressing-gown.*)

ROGER. Oh, rot! I tell you it's just a phase. (*He crosses to the table between the beds and puts things in his pockets.*)

DOROTHY It's not Ann now—it's Cath I never heard such an outburst. Just because I won't give her the spare bedroom.

(*ANN enters from the bathroom.*)

Ann, have you noticed anything wrong with Cath? (*She crosses to the foot of her bed and puts on mules.*)

ANN (*after a second's pause*). No, darling. I think she's quite all right. (*She crosses to the door R*)

DOROTHY Is she sleeping well?

ANN. I—I think so. Skuse me, darling. I'm frabjously late.

(*She scuttles out.*)

DOROTHY. Roger, that child was hiding something.

ROGER. Rubbish. You fuss over them too much.

DOROTHY. But if you'd heard Cath. (*She sits on the R. side of her bed.*)

ROGER She's always had a bit of a temper. Why not let her have the spare room?

DOROTHY. And what about your mother and your sisters?

ROGER. Let 'em go to an hotel. (*He crosses to the dressing-table and starts hunting in the drawer.*)

DOROTHY. I'd like to see your face if I suggested it. What are you doing in that drawer?

ROGER. Thought perhaps some of my linen handkerchiefs had got in by mistake

DOROTHY. Of course they haven't. (*As he takes one.*) Now, Roger—that's one of the large ones I keep for my colds.

ROGER Well, you haven't got a cold now, have you, old lady? (*He grins and pockets the handkerchief, then crosses to her and kisses her*)

DOROTHY. What on earth you do with your handkerchiefs—. No, it's no use I'm sure I oughtn't to give in to her. It's not natural—this longing to be alone

ROGER. Oh, yes it is—(*crossing to the window*) everyone feels it sometimes (*He gazes out of the window for a second; then jerks back*) Well, I'm going to have five minutes' run.

DOROTHY. Now for goodness' sake don't keep breakfast waiting on Vera's first morning.

ROGER. All right—all right. I'm only going in the garden. (*He pulls his coat down in front of the mirror on the dressing-table.*)

DOROTHY. Did you try those scales?

(*ROGER hums, crossing to the door R.*)

I said, did you try those scales?

ROGER. What?—Oh, yes. The rotten things never were correct. (*He catches sight of the dishevelled "Times."*) My God, look at that paper!

DOROTHY. Oh, don't fuss. I'll put it straight.

ROGER. Like hell you will. No woman ought to be trusted alone with "The Times."

DOROTHY (*battling with the fallen sheets*). I think very few women would want to be. Oh, run along and don't be late.

ROGER. You're in a very bossy mood. Look at the weather, woman, and relax—relax.

(*He goes out R.* DOROTHY continues to wrestle with "The Times," getting it into some sort of order. MARTIN puts his head round the door R.)

MARTIN. It may interest you to know that my bath was stone cold.

DOROTHY. If anyone else mentions the word bath I shall go raving mad.

MARTIN. Sorry, lady, but facts is facts. (*He disappears, closing the door.*)

(DOROTHY crosses hurriedly to the bathroom door.)

CURTAIN.

SCENE 2

SCENE—*The Kitchen.* 8 30 a.m.

Once Victorian, it has been greatly modernized, with white painted walls, blue and white lino, check curtains and tablecloth. A highly coloured nursery picture of cows hangs over the mantelpiece.

A window and a door leading to the garden are on the left wall, a sink in front of the window. A dresser and an electric stove are on the right wall, and an old-fashioned range is centre of the back wall with a kitchen cabinet on its R. and a door on its L. A large table and chairs are C., the table laid for three and with a tray of egg-cups, etc., on it ready to go upstairs. A large number of small properties, such as kitchen canisters, crockery, etc., as required.

(*See Photograph of Scene.*)

When the CURTAIN rises, VERA is minding the toast on the stove.

COOK, a buxom, middle-aged woman, is warming a teapot from the kettle on the range.

COOK. How many pieces have you done?

VERA (*counting the toast in the racks on the electric cooker*). Eight.

COOK. Two more'll do it. Time those eggs came off. (*She lifts the saucepan from the range to one side.*)

VERA. That clock's said twenty-five past for ever so long.

COOK (*taking the clock from the mantelpiece*). Drat it, it's stopped—and no wonder. You've been and stood it the right way up.

That clock only goes on its side. (*She puts the clock on its side.*)
You'd better run up and look at the hall clock.

(*VERA gives a glance at the toast on the griller and goes off up L. COOK crosses to the sink and empties the teapot. ROGER comes in down L. from the garden.*)

ROGER (*calling into the garden*). Hi, Terry—come along there.
Breakfast.

COOK. Not on my clean floor, please, sir. He's been on the flower-beds.

ROGER. Oh, all right. I'll give it to him in the garden. (*He goes to the sink, on the drainer of which the dog's breakfast is standing*)
Weet-meet? That's right. And a little milk. (*He gets it from the tray on the table C.*)

COOK (*at the range again*). Wait and I'll give you a drop of bacon fat, sir.

ROGER (*pouring milk*). Certainly not. He's too fat already.
Where are his hard biscuits? (*He puts the milk-jug on the drainer.*)

COOK. We're out of them, sir, and he doesn't like them.

ROGER. I daresay not, but they're good for his teeth. No woman can be trusted to feed a dog properly. You get some of those biscuits in.

COOK (*filling the teapot at the range*). Very good, sir, but he won't eat them.

ROGER. He'll eat them if he's not pampered.

(*VERA returns from up L.*)

You're not to give Terry scraps in the kitchen; do you understand, Vera?

VERA. No, sir, of course not.

ROGER. Poor little chap's getting a stomach like a barrel.
(*Going through the door to the garden.*) Hi, there! Good man!

COOK (*calling after him*). Breakfast's just going up, sir. Potty about that dog he is.

VERA (*down L.*). Nice, I call that

COOK (*filling the hot-water jug at the range*). Oh, he's all right, but you got to be firm with him. She's just the opposite, you have to humour her.

VERA. I must say, she's very familiar like.

COOK. That's her way. (*Putting the hot-water jug on the tray.*)
She's not bad if you know how to manage her. What time was it?

VERA. Twenty-five to.

COOK. Lord, we're late. (*She puts the teapot on the tray.*) Where's that toast? (*She takes the eggs from the range.*)

VERA (*with a squeal*). Ow, I forgot it. (*She rushes R. to the stove and takes out two burnt pieces.*)

COOK. It'll do—with a scrape. And put it in the middle of the rack. (*Taking eggs from the saucepan and putting them into the*

egg-cups on the tray.) They don't always finish it. Which of these eggs is the master's?

VERA (*scraping toast*). Lor'—if I didn't forget to mark them.

COOK (*replacing the saucepan on the range*). You're a nice one. Told you plain as plain—five minutes for the master's or there'll be ructions. Oh, well, I'll put a cross on the two brown ones. (*She marks them with a pencil.*) If he says anything you can say they was very new laid.

VERA. I am sorry, Cook. (*She puts the toast racks on the tray.*)

COOK. Where's the sugar?

(VERA runs to the kitchen cabinet R.C. and takes canister marked "Sugar.")

No—not there. Sugar's in "Sago."

VERA (*going back to the cabinet and replacing "Sugar"*). Oh, I see. (*She takes down "Sago."*) What's sago in?

COOK. Sago's in that little old tin of Cadbury's cocoa.

(VERA pours sugar into the bowl on the tray.)

(As VERA picks up the tray.) Now have you got everything? Tea, hot water, sugar, toast, eggs—where's that milk? (*She gets it from the drainer by the window and puts it on the tray.*) Be careful, now.

(COOK opens the door up L. and VERA takes the tray out.)

(Calling after her.) Mind that top step. It's awkward like. (*She turns to the range and makes the kitchen tea*)

(MRS. MILSOM, a small bird-like charwoman, comes in from the garden entrance. Her invariably gloomy sentiments are delivered with a surprising briskness.)

MRS. MILSOM (L.). Morning, Mrs. Hawkins. Treacherous sort of day.

COOK (*filling the kitchen tea-pot*). Looks all right to me.

MRS. MILSOM (*taking the apron from the peg on the door down L. and hanging her coat up in its place*). Yes. It looks all right. That's what's wrong with it. It tempts people. They go leaving things off. There'll be some pewmonia about next week. (*She puts on the apron.*)

COOK (*at the range*). How's your husband?

MRS. MILSOM (*crossing R.*). Bad. He looks better and he says he feels better. But I know. Gone back to work, he has.

COOK (*going to the oven*). Well, that's a good job.

MRS. MILSOM. So you might think. But like as not he'll have to come home in a cab—if not something worse.

COOK (*opening the oven door and taking out a dish of bacon*). How do you mean, worse? (*She brings the bacon to the table.*)

MRS. MILSOM (*R. of the table*). I said to him before he went, "One of these days you'll come home feet first." Is that a bit of bacon?

COOK (*sitting in the chair above the table*). Yes. Want to make yourself some toast?

MRS. MILSOM. No, bread'll do. (*She sits in the chair R. of the table.*) I like a bit of bacon. Though I sometimes wonder at you eating it.

COOK. Why?

MRS. MILSOM (*buttering bread*). Blood pressure.

COOK. What do you mean, blood pressure?

MRS. MILSOM. You got it, haven't you?

COOK (*pouring out tea*). First I've heard of it.

MRS. MILSOM. You're just the right build for it. My sister-in-law's had it something shocking. Doctor told her if she touched a bit of bacon she might drop down dead.

COOK. Bacon's never done me any harm. (*She is about to help herself; then stops.*) What's the blood press on?

MRS. MILSOM (*cutting bread*). Everything. All the time. Do you get noises in your head?

COOK. No.

MRS. MILSOM. Well, you can have blood pressure without that. (*She helps herself to bacon.*) Do your legs swell?

COOK. A bit. But they always did.

MRS. MILSOM. P'raps you always had it. Lots of people never know anything about it till they has a stroke.

COOK. Well, you are a nice cup of tea. How do they cure it?

MRS. MILSOM (*eating*). Knocks you off things.

COOK. What things?

MRS. MILSOM. Most things. Gets you down to skin and bone. They got my sister-in-law down to six stone two. Completely cured, she was. She's got anæmia now. You eating that bit of bacon?

COOK. I don't know that I am. But there's Vera yet. Oh, well, she can do herself some more.

(MRS. MILSOM *helps herself.*)

My legs have been bad this last month. Do you think I ought to see a doctor?

MRS. MILSOM (*pouring tea*). Doctors can't always tell. But you might as well. If he doesn't find that he may find something else.

(VERA *returns, up L.*)

COOK. Oh, Vera, this is Mrs. Milsom.

VERA (*L. of the table*). Pleased to meet you. I say, Cook, the master went and picked the very worst bit of toast. I did feel awful. (*She crosses and puts the tray on the floor R., leaning it against the downstage end of the dresser.*)

COOK (*pouring out VERA's tea*). You'd have felt worse if the missus had picked it. They started those eggs yet?

VERA. Just as I came out.

COOK. Oh, well. Want to do yourself a bit of bacon?

VERA. No, thanks. Got any corn-flakes?

COOK. We did have some. Now, let me see—yes, on the shelf with the dog biscuits.

(*VERA discovers corn-flakes in lower cupboard of kitchen cabinet, R.C., also bringing to light a bottle of ink.*)

Well, if that isn't my bottle of ink. Put it on the dresser, will you? I like to have things in their right place. (*She is pouring herself out more tea*) I suppose tea isn't bad for blood pressure?

(*VERA puts the ink on the dresser and returns to L. of the table with a plate of flakes.*)

MRS. MILSOM. Worst thing out.

COOK (*drinking*). Well, it'll take more than blood pressure to put me off tea.

(*VERA, seated L. of the table, has settled to her breakfast. All three stir their tea. Suddenly a bell rings and the indicator over the door works.*)

If that's the eggs, there won't be any more till the boy comes.

VERA. Oh lor'.

(*She rises and goes off up L. COOK rises, bangs the indicator with a hearth brush, and returns to her chair.*)

MRS. MILSOM. What's she like?

COOK. Oh, not bad.

MRS. MILSOM. She'll make more work for you. Young ones always do. Will she help me turn the dining-room out, same as Susan?

COOK (*cutting bread*). Well, it's not really her work.

(*VERA returns.*)

Was it the eggs?

VERA. No. Slop-basin.

(*She gets it from the dresser and goes out again.*)

MRS. MILSOM (*reading the paper*). Fancy ringing for that. (*She holds out her cup.*) Hot it up a bit, will you.—Did Mrs. Hilton say it wasn't her work?

COOK (*pouring tea into MRS. MILSOM's cup*). It never was Susan's work.

MRS. MILSOM. Well, I can't do a room by myself in a morning. I'm not a steam-engine.

COOK. You'd better see if you can get round her.

(*VERA returns.*)

MRS. MILSOM. Come and sit down.

(VERA sits L. of the table again.)

They got no consideration, running you off your feet like that. Have a drop more milk?

VERA (*pouring milk on to her corn-flakes*). Thanks ever so.

MRS. MILSOM. Nice to see a bright young face about the house.

VERA. There are some bright young faces upstairs and no mistake. My word, that Catherine hasn't half got a nasty temper.

COOK. What's wrong with her?

VERA. Well, the master was going on about his egg being soft, and suddenly she says, "Oh, for God's sake"—she did really—"for God's sake, take mine. What does the beastly egg matter—what does anything matter?" And out she goes, slamming the door.

MRS. MILSOM. Well?

COOK. And did the master take the egg?

VERA. Yes.

COOK. Well, that's saved us a bit of trouble.

VERA. Fancy speaking like that!

(MRS. MILSOM, *having finished her bacon, takes marmalade.*)

COOK. If you ask me, Miss Cath's head's been getting a bit turned, having her portrait painted and what not.

VERA. Anyone can have their portrait painted.

COOK. If they pay for it. But they're doing her for nothing. This man wrote to the master and said he'd like to have the privilege of painting his daughter because she was the most beautiful English girl he'd seen for years. Susan happened to catch sight of the letter

VERA. Well, she's not my idea of beauty.

COOK. He's a famous artist. The missus says it'll probably be bought for the nation.

MRS. MILSOM. I'm surprised at Mrs. Hilton letting Miss Cath sit for an artist. I cleaned for a couple of them once. (*She takes more marmalade.*)

VERA. Was it awful?

MRS. MILSOM. Well, it was and it wasn't. I'll say this for them. They wasn't fussy about the cleaning.

COOK. I like Miss Cath, even if she has got a bit of a paddy.

MRS. MILSOM. She always was your favourite.

VERA. The master's mine. (*She helps herself to marmalade.*)

COOK (*passing the bread to VERA*). You've made up your mind quickly.

VERA. What does he do?

COOK. He's an accountant.

VERA. Is that all?

COOK. He's chartered, of course.

VERA. Oh! (*She cuts herself a slice of bread.*)

MRS. MILSOM. What is a chartered accountant.

COOK. A man who charts accounts, of course. It's sort of book-keeping.

VERA. What's Martin do?

COOK. He's studying for exams. He's going into his father's office after Easter.

VERA. Not much to look at, is he? I like dark men myself. Cook, who does that bulldog belong to?

COOK (*drinking tea*). What bulldog?

VERA. I saw one at the end of the road—when I took Terry out.

MRS. MILSOM. You keep away from it. If it once gets hold of Terry, it'll never let go. They can't.

VERA. What, never?

MRS. MILSOM. Course not. It's the way their jaws are made.

COOK. Oh, don't talk so silly. It couldn't spend the rest of its life with a dog in its mouth, could it?—It belongs to that big corner house. Why?

VERA. I just wondered.

COOK. Was there a tall dark man with it?

VERA. Yes—I believe there was.

COOK. That's their butler. Nice-looking chap.

VERA. Is he? I didn't notice.

(*Both look at her.*)

(*Suddenly getting flustered.*) I say, that's a funny sort of picture.

COOK (*looking at the picture of the cows*). You may well say so. Came out of the nursery. "Cook," she says, "this'll brighten the kitchen up." Fancy giving me a picture of cows. As if I didn't see enough of beef.

VERA. Funny sort of curtains, aren't they?

COOK. Bed ticking, if you ask me. We used to have some decent red ones. Do you remember those plush curtains, Mrs. Milsom?

MRS. MILSOM. Yes. They was curtains, they was.

COOK (*drinking*). I like a kitchen to look like a kitchen. Still, you got to humour her. (*Rising.*) We'd better get a move on. Want this bit of bacon fat?

MRS. MILSOM. No, thanks.

COOK. The dog can have it, then.

VERA (*rising*). But the master said—

COOK. Oh, he says a lot. There's a bit of marmalade, too. Terry likes marmalade. You can give it him on the step. (*She scrapes the scraps on to VERA's plate.*)

VERA. Well, I suppose it's all right.

(*She takes the plate and goes into the garden down L.*)

MRS. MILSOM. She's got her eyes open.

COOK. Bulldogs, indeed. 'Course he's a good-looking chap.

MRS. MILSOM. Look at her, frisking about on the grass with Terry. Shouldn't wonder if you didn't have trouble with her.

COOK (*crossing with plates to the sink*). I'll watch her.

(*The bell rings. VERA comes in.*)

They're ringing for you to clear.

VERA (*crossing R.*). My word, they have been quick. (*She smooths her hair and picks up the tray.*) It's ever such a lovely day.

MRS. MILSOM. You going to give me a bit of a hand with that dining-room? You could do the paint round the window. Then you could look out.

COOK. That bulldog might come along.

(*She laughs uproariously, MRS. MILSOM joining her with a hen-like cackle.*)

VERA. I don't want to see no bulldogs.

(*The bell rings again.*)

(*Crossing L.*) Gracious, what's wrong with them?

(*She goes off up L.*)

(*The bell rings again, furiously. COOK drops a plate in the sink and breaks it, then philosophically puts the broken pieces into the dustbin under the sink. She then slithers the crockery noisily into the sink, singing meanwhile "I'm for ever blowing bubbles."*)

CURTAIN.

SCENE 3

SCENE.—*The Dining-room. 8.55 a.m.*

A pleasant, rather conventional room. The door is upstage in the L. wall. The window is in the R. wall, with a sideboard above it. The fireplace is in the L. wall, below the door. The table is C.
(*See Photograph of Scene*)

When the CURTAIN rises, ROGER is seated R. of the table reading some letters; DOROTHY, seated L. of the table, has a draper's catalogue; MARTIN, in the chair L. of ROGER, has a large pile of motor catalogues. ANN is below the fireplace, ringing the bell furiously.

DOROTHY. Ann, stop at once. Ringing the bell like that! Whatever will Vera think?

ANN (*crossing R.*). Oh, why doesn't she come! Why doesn't someone do something? Oh, it must be somewhere! (*Rushing at ROGER.*) Daddy, are you sure you're not sitting on it?

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