

SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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CAUSE CÉLÈBRE

A Play

TERENCE RATTIGAN

SAMUEL



FRENCH

LONDON

NEW YORK TORONTO SYDNEY HOLLYWOOD

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CAUSE CÉLÈBRE

First presented by John Gale at Her Majesty's Theatre, London, on Monday July 4th, 1977, with the following cast of characters:

Alma Rattenbury	Glynis Johns
Francis Rattenbury	Anthony Pedley
Christopher	Matthew Ryan <i>or</i> Douglas Melbourne
Irene Riggs	Sheila Grant
George Wood	Neil Daglish
Edith Davenport	Helen Lindsay
John Davenport	Jeremy Hawk
Tony Davenport	Adam Richardson
Stella Morrison	Angela Brown
Randolph Browne	Kevin Hart
Judge	Patrick Barr
O'Connor	Kenneth Griffith
Croom-Johnson	Bernard Archard
Casswell	Darryl Forbes-Dawson
Montagu	Philip Bowen
Clerk of the Court	David Glover
Joan Webster	Peggy Aitchison
Sergeant Bagwell	Anthony Pedley
Porter	Anthony Howard
Warder	David Masterman
Coroner	David Glover

The play directed by Robin Midgley
Setting by Adrian Vaux

The action of the play takes place in Bournemouth and London in 1934 and 1935

This play was inspired by the facts of a well-known case, but the characters attributed to the individuals represented are based on the author's imagination, and are not necessarily factual

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ACT I

The setting is a composite one, the areas of which are used to represent different scenes during the action. In general, the central area is furnished as a sitting-room and used for both the Rattenbury villa in Bournemouth and the Davenport flat in Kensington. In the present Act the area down R represents a robing-room in the Old Bailey; the small area up C represents the prison. These limits, however, are not strictly observed, and the action moves across them as necessary, changes being indicated by lighting. (See plan on p. 66)

When the CURTAIN rises the stage is in darkness except for spots pinpointing Alma Rattenbury, Mrs Davenport and the Clerk of the Court

Clerk of the Court Alma Victoria Rattenbury, you are charged with the murder of Francis Mawson Rattenbury on March the twenty-eighth, nineteen hundred and thirty-five. Are you guilty or not guilty?

Alma (*almost inaudibly*) Not guilty.

Clerk of the Court Edith Amelia Davenport, take the book in your right hand and read what is on this card.

The spot on the Clerk of the Court slowly fades out

Mrs Davenport I do solemnly swear by Almighty God that I will well and truly try the issues joined between our Sovereign Lord the King and the prisoner at the bar, and will give a true verdict according to the evidence.

The spots fade on Alma and Mrs Davenport

The Lights come up on the sitting-room of a flat in Kensington. Stella and Mrs Davenport are present, Mrs Davenport having just come in with an official letter. Stella is Mrs Davenport's sister, a year or two younger

Stella A jury summons—my dear, how too frightful! Let's see.

Mrs Davenport gives her the letter

(*Reading*) “. . . present yourself at the . . . jury service . . . for fifteen days . . . and fail not at your peril”—indeed!

Mrs Davenport (*smiling*) Yes, rather scaring, that. Peril of what, d'you think? Hard labour, or the stocks, or just a ducking?

Stella Whopping great fine, I should think. Might almost be worth paying it—I'll get Henry to cough up the necessary, if you like.

Mrs Davenport (*taking back the letter*) Certainly not. I'm quite looking forward to it, as it happens.

Stella What, a whole fortnight?

Mrs Davenport Well, I've got the time these days, and who knows, I

might do a bit of good for some old soul who's snatched a pair of silk stockings from Barker's.

Stella More likely to be indecent exposure.

Mrs Davenport Oh, they wouldn't have women on those juries, would they?

Stella My dear, they have women on everything these days.

Mrs Davenport Well, if it is that, I'll just have to face it like—well, like a man, I suppose. But I'm not going on that date—I'm not going to mess up Tony's Christmas hols. I'll ask for a postponement to May. That should be safe.

Stella Is he enjoying himself in Cannes?

Mrs Davenport Tony? He says so in his postcards, but I expect they're written under John's supervision. Thank heavens it's the last time.

Stella You're still determined on the divorce?

Mrs Davenport Yes. Quite.

Stella Well, you know what I think.

Mrs Davenport A separation doesn't give me custody.

Stella You won't get *complete* custody.

Mrs Davenport Oh yes, I will. John won't defend it. He's too scared of his Under-Secretary. It'll all be fixed out of court. If he does defend it, I'll win.

Stella There was only that one woman, wasn't there?

Mrs Davenport Oh no. In the five years before we separated I've found out there were at least two others. And now there's this dreadful woman.

Stella Still, four in five years? That doesn't really make him Bluebeard, you know. In fact, for most husbands with unwilling wives I'd say it was about par for the course.

Mrs Davenport Are you trying to make it my fault again?

Stella Well, he was only about forty, wasn't he, when you started having headaches? That *is* a bit young, darling, for the husband to find himself in the spare room.

Mrs Davenport I couldn't go on, Stella, I told you. I never did care much for that side of things, as you know, and as he got older he got more and more demanding.

Stella That's one thing I could never say about Henry . . .

Mrs Davenport He used to say that my reluctance made him want it more. Now you can't say that's normal, Stella.

Stella I suppose not—I just wonder if it would work with Henry. How does Tony feel about it all? He always seemed to be quite fond of his father.

Mrs Davenport Well, he was. Of course, now that I've told him the truth—not all of it, of course—just enough—he's beginning to see things my way. Unless he's been led astray these last two weeks. I wouldn't put anything past that man. I really hate him.

The Lights cross-fade to the L side of the stage

Davenport enters with Tony, and a Porter carrying two suitcases

Davenport There should be a car waiting to pick me up. The name's Davenport—would you put that one down there and come back for the other.

Porter Very good, sir.

The Porter exits

Davenport Well, Tony, I'm afraid this is good-bye. You had better take the airport bus to Victoria Air Terminus, and get a taxi to Kensington from there. I'm going straight to the Home Office, so . . .

Tony (*quickly*) I understand. (*Pause*) Dad, I will be seeing you again, won't I?

Davenport Well, certainly in court.

Tony I meant after that?

Davenport I'm afraid that depends on your mother.

Tony I see. Can I ask one thing?

Davenport Yes.

Tony Mum always talks to me—well, sometimes talks to me—about *that* woman, et cetera, et cetera!

Davenport Yes.

Tony Well, there isn't any *that* woman, is there? I mean, I've been with you two weeks, and I'm not half-witted . . .

Davenport No, you're not.

Tony You still love Mum, don't you?

Davenport Yes, I do.

Tony Dad—is there any *that* woman?

There is a pause

The Porter enters

Porter I've found your car, sir. Do you want the other one in the boot?
(*He picks up a case*)

Davenport No, my son is travelling by the bus, so . . .

Porter Yes, sir. I'll get him a place.

The Porter exits

Tony Thank you.

Davenport I'll do the V.I.P. Well, good-bye, Tony.

Tony Thank you for a marvellous time.

Davenport A bit dull, I'm afraid.

Tony Not Cannes. That was smashing.

Davenport You didn't like Paris?

Tony Well, don't think me ungrateful, Dad, but you did promise to take me to a—to a—you know—that "House of all Nations" . . .

Davenport Tony, I did remember that. It's just that—well, you have to take a passport, you see.

Tony A passport to a brothel?

Davenport They're very strict about under age.

Tony (*despairingly*) Oh Dad! Even in France? I'll have to try Turkey or somewhere.

Davenport (*laughing*) Why Turkey? Why not here—Jermyn Street?

Tony I'd thought of that, only I'm a bit—well . . .

Davenport I'm not serious. At least, not yet. I should give it another year or two, I think, old chap, don't you?

Tony But Dad, I'm seventeen!

Davenport Yes, but that's still a bit young, don't you think? My first wasn't till I was twenty. But still, when you do go, for God's sake take precautions, won't you.

Tony What . . . ?

The Porter enters

Porter I've got your place, sir.

Davenport Thank you. (*He gives him half-a-crown*)

Porter Thank you, sir.

The Porter goes with the other case

Davenport Well . . .

Tony Dad, what shall I tell Mum—about *that* woman?

Davenport Tell her you didn't meet her, but I was always talking to her on the telephone. It's a question of her pride. Off you go, Tony.

Davenport and Tony exit separately

The Lights cross-fade to the sitting-room, outside which Wood stands, taking off his bicycle clips. Irene Riggs, maid and companion to Alma—dressed more as companion than maid—enters to him.

Irene Yes? What is it?

Wood I've come about the advert.

Irene You're too old.

Wood It says fourteen to eighteen.

Irene I know what it says. I wrote it myself. You're too old.

Wood I'm seventeen.

Irene You're still not what we're wanting. Sorry.

Alma (*calling off, from upstairs*) Who is it, Irene?

Irene (*calling back*) A boy about the advert. He's wrong.

Alma (*off*) Why?

Irene (*calling*) He's too old.

Wood (*making his voice heard aloft*) I'm not. I'm only seventeen.

Irene (*calling*) But he looks much older.

Alma (*off, after a pause*) I'll come down.

Irene (*calling*) I was sending him away.

Alma (*off, decisively*) Keep him.

Irene (*to Wood, annoyed*) You'd better come in. (*Clicking her tongue*)
You're not the type at all.

Alma (*off*) I'll just slip into something. I won't be a mo'.

Wood waits uncertainly, twisting his cap

Tell him to go into the lounge, Irene, and make himself comfortable.

Irene (*to Wood, nodding her head towards the sitting-room*) You heard her.

Wood (*on his way in*) You the maid?

Irene (*following*) Companion.

Wood You don't like me, do you?

Irene I've nothing against you. You're just not the type, that's all.

Wood That'll be for her to say, won't it? (*He nods upstairs*)

Irene regards him coldly

Irene (*at length*) Yes, it will.

Irene goes

Wood wanders round, then opens the gramophone. Inside are some sheets of music. He examines one

Alma enters upstairs and comes down. She wears day pyjamas of fairly hectic design and colour, and slippers, and carries her handbag

Wood starts guiltily away from the gramophone

Wood Sorry.

Alma (*laughing*) That's quite all right. I don't mind anyone reading my music.

Wood Oh, I don't read music. Did you say *your* music?

Alma Look at the front.

Wood (*awed*) That's a picture of you.

Alma Taken a long time ago, I'm afraid. It's twelve years old, that photograph.

Wood "Dark-Haired Marie" by Lozanne. Is that you—Miss Lozanne?

Alma Oh no—that's just my pen-name. (*Seeing Wood's bewilderment*) It's just the name I put on my songs. My real name's Alma. What's yours?

Wood Wood.

Alma Christian name?

Wood Perce. Percy really. My Dad calls me Perce—so Perce.

Alma What does your dad do for a living?

Wood He's a builder, laid off. I work for him when he's got work—but there's not much of that about these days.

Alma Oh, I know. It's terrible—this slump. I can't sell a song these days—for love nor money.

Wood Do you do this for a living, miss?

Alma Oh no. I don't have to, thank heavens, or I'd be on the dole. Mind you, they do get done sometimes. That song, for instance, that was done only a year ago, on the B.B.C. A baritone sang it. (*She takes the song and replaces it*)

Wood (*eagerly*) The Whispering Baritone?

Alma No. Just a baritone. Let me take your cap.

Wood Thank you, miss.

Alma (*taking his cap and placing it on the gramophone*) By the way, its Mrs. Mrs three times over, as it happens . . .

Wood Cor. Divorced?

Alma (*gaily*) Yes, once. The other one died—and now seven years gone with old Ratz—Mr Rattenbury, my present one. I'm giving things away,

aren't I? I started very young. I've a boy of thirteen. Almost as old as you. (*She laughs*)

Wood smiles politely

Yes, well—I suppose it's working on building sites that's made you so—developed.

Wood I bike a lot, too.

Alma Yes. That does do wonders for the physique. You look quite what I would call—full-grown.

There is a pause. Wood at last dimly realizes the nature of his future mistress's interest in him

Wood Your—Irene—thought I was too full-grown.

Alma Yes. Well, you see, we concocted that advertisement together, and what *she* had in mind was—well—a rather smaller kind of boy. You'd be under her, really, not me . . . Well, I'd better tell you what the wages are. It's one of the reasons we wanted a little boy. I'm afraid my husband will only go to a pound a week.

Wood Living in?

Alma No, I'm afraid not. We haven't room, really. There's only one other room besides Irene's, you see, and my two boys—I've another little one, only six—well, they're in there, during school holidays that is. Of course, if you'd been a little boy like I meant in the advert, you *could* have slept in with them—I mean, if you'd been a really *little* boy—but being as you are, and me and Irene slipping about upstairs with next to nothing on—well it would be rather awkward, wouldn't it? (*Rather breathlessly*) No, I'm afraid living in's quite out of the question.

Wood I was only asking. Where does old Ratz sleep?

Alma Oh, you mustn't call him Ratz. You must call him Mr Rattenbury, like Irene.

Wood Yes. Where does he sleep?

There is a pause

Alma Inquisitive, aren't you? That's all right. I like an enquiring nature. Mr Rattenbury sleeps through there. (*She points off, at ground level*) He can't do the stairs any more.

Pause

Wood I see.

Alma (*after another pause; lightly*) Well, is it a go, or isn't it?

Wood A quid isn't much.

Alma Well, I could slip you a few bob on the side—expenses, you know. Only Ratz—Mr Rattenbury mustn't know. He's a little strict about money. Do you live close?

Wood Other side of Bournemouth. About half-hour on my bike. You wouldn't like to say how many bob?

Alma (*patting his arm*) You must ask when you need it.

Wood O.K.

Alma Well, I'm glad that's settled. Why don't we have a little drinkie on it?

Wood I'm afraid I don't drink.

Alma I expect that's just what you tell all your employers. Gin and it?

Wood I don't know what that is.

Alma Fancy anyone not knowing what a "gin and it" is! (*She pours herself a drink at the cabinet*) Won't you just try a sip, just to seal our little arrangement?

Wood If you insist.

Alma Oh, I don't *insist*. I never insist. But just this once. There has to be a first time for everything, doesn't there?

Wood Yes.

Alma (*pouring another drink*) Little of what you fancy's my motto, and a very good one, too. This is a lovely world we're in, and we were put into it to enjoy it. Don't you agree? (*She hands him the drink*)

Wood I might. I don't think my dad would. He's religious.

Alma Well, our dear Lord didn't say we mustn't have fun, did He? He turned water into wine, not wine into water. Just tell that to your dad next time he gets narky. And He said we must love each other, and I think we should. (*Raising her glass*) Well, Perce—no, I can't call you Perce. Or Percy. Have you got a middle name?

Wood George.

Alma That's nice. I'm going to call you that. (*Raising her glass again*) George.

Wood (*raising his glass*) Mrs Rattenbury.

Alma Alma. Not just now—always.

Wood Alma.

Alma George!

They drink. Wood makes a face. Alma laughs and takes the glass away from him

I'm not letting you have any more. I'm not having anyone say I'm leading you astray. (*She drinks Wood's glass in a single gulp*) Just like water to me. Do you know what Alma means in Latin? A professor told me once. It means life-giving, bountiful. In olden times they used it about goddesses, like Venus. (*Sipping her drink*) Well, I'm not Venus, God knows—but apparently it also means kind and comforting, and that I am, George, though I say it who shouldn't . . .

Rattenbury enters and moves towards the sitting-room

Here's Ratz. I'd better warn you. You have to shout.

Rattenbury comes into the sitting-room, and immediately glances at Wood. Deaf he may be, but certainly not blind. Alma kisses him

(*Loudly*) Had a nice walkie?

Rattenbury There was an east wind. You should have told me.

Alma Poor thing. Did you get chilled?

Rattenbury Blasted to buggery. (*Paying no attention to Wood, he sits in what is evidently his usual armchair—significantly one that has its back to*

a pair of french windows. He puts his stick and hat on the table beside him)
Get me a whisky, would you?

Alma It's a bit early for your whisky, isn't it? *(She begins to get him a drink)*

Rattenbury It's a bit early for your gin.

Alma I only meant you don't usually have whisky in the mornings.

Rattenbury I don't usually get blasted to buggery in the morning. *(Showing a paper)* Shares are down again.

Alma Oh dear. You're probably wondering who the stranger is.

Rattenbury No, I wasn't, but who is he?

Alma His name is George Wood and he's the new help. *(She gives him his drink)*

Rattenbury *(after a moody sip)* Irene said a boy.

Alma Well, he *is* a boy. He's only seventeen.

Rattenbury H'm. *(He stares at Wood without much interest)* Has he any references?

Wood No, sir. I've never done this kind of work before.

Rattenbury What?

Alma *(putting her hand on his shoulder)* Don't worry, dear. We had a nice long interview. I'll vouch for him.

Rattenbury looks up at her. He grunts acquiescence and hands her his glass. Wood picks up his cap

That one went down pretty fast. *(She goes to refill it)*

Rattenbury Not as fast as my shares. *(As Alma passes Wood)* Does he drive?

Wood *(loudly)* Yes, sir. I've got a licence.

Alma *(coming back with the refilled glass)* Well, isn't that marvellous! *(To Rattenbury, loudly)* Isn't that handy, dear. We've got ourselves a chauffeur.

Rattenbury No uniform.

Alma *(loudly)* No, of course not. *(To Wood, quietly)* Well, perhaps a cap and a smart mackintosh. You'd look nice in a cap.

Rattenbury What are you saying?

Alma I was explaining no uniform, dear. *(To Wood)* Better go now. *(Loudly)* I'm just showing the new help to the front door. *(To Wood)* Come on. *(To Rattenbury)* Back in a jiffy. *(She picks up her bag from the drinks cabinet)*

Alma and Wood move out of the sitting-room area

Well, that's settled, thank goodness. It's lovely about your driving.

Go and buy yourself a cap. *(She fishes in her handbag)* Here's fifteen shillings. Will that be enough?

Wood Should be.

Christopher comes in, wearing his scout's uniform

Christopher Mummy, there's a smashing bike outside, with low handle-bars. *(Seeing Wood)* Oh, is it yours, sir?

Wood Yes. A Raleigh.

Christopher I was going to ask if I could ride it.

Wood Afraid I'm just going.

Alma But he's coming back tomorrow—and every day afterwards. He's going to be one of the family.

Christopher Oh, good.

Alma I'm sure if you ask him nicely he'll let you ride it.

Wood You bet.

Christopher Oh, thanks awfully, sir. Mummy, when's lunch?

Alma Quite soon, darling.

Christopher (*calling and running off*) Irene!

Christopher runs off

Alma Sweet, isn't he? (*Sincerely*) I really am very blessed with my children.

Wood (*in awe*) He called me sir.

Alma What? (*Misunderstanding*) Oh, they teach him that at his school.

Don't worry. He'll soon be calling you George.

Wood I'd rather he went on calling me sir.

Alma I'll see that he does, then.

Irene appears from the shadows

(*To Wood, hastily*) Good-bye, then, I'll see you tomorrow.

Wood What time?

Alma What time, Irene?

There is a pause

Irene (*at length, gloomily*) Seven. Not a second later.

Alma Can you manage seven?

Wood Easy. Be seeing you.

Wood goes out

Alma, left alone with Irene, is uneasy under her steady stare

Irene (*at length*) You'll have my notice at the end of the week.

Alma laughs and embraces her fondly

Alma Yes, darling, I'm sure I will.

Irene I'm serious.

Alma You always are. He can drive, Irene, which is more than any of your little teenies could have done.

Irene Yes. There's something else he can do that my little teenies couldn't.

Alma Irene . . .

Irene Anyway, you owe me four weeks' wages.

Alma Six pounds? (*She looks in her bag*) Oh dear. And there's Christopher's new cricket bat. (*Nodding towards the sitting-room*) He's in a bad mood—still, he's got a couple of whiskies inside him. Think of something for me . . .

Irene I don't know.

Alma Pray for me.

Irene Yes.

Irene exits

Alma goes into the sitting-room

Alma (*to Rattenbury, brightly*) Well, Ratz darling. Let me get you another little drinkie. There's time for one before lunch. (*She takes his now empty glass to refill it. Loudly*) I've been showing George the car.

Rattenbury Who's George?

Alma Our new chauffeur, darling. (*She brings the drink to him*) He says it's in spanking condition, except just for one little thing—(*she sits down, smiling lovingly*)—it needs a new carburettor. He says if we don't have one the car might seize up altogether, and that would mean a new car, darling.

Rattenbury Well, we'll have to walk then, won't we?

Alma (*laughing merrily*) Oh you are a scream . . .

Rattenbury (*choking on his drink*) This is too strong.

Alma (*taking the glass and putting more water in it*) Now, after lunch we'll get your cheque-book out and write out a cheque.

Rattenbury I won't sign it.

Alma (*coming back with the drink and laying her hand lovingly on his head*) Oh yes you will, dear. You're far too kind and loving a husband not to. (*She kisses the top of his head*) Oh, I do love my darling Ratz.

The Lights fade, then come up again on the Davenport flat. Mrs Davenport is in the sitting-room. She has her handbag with her. Tony enters with a newspaper

Tony Mum! Listen to this—did you know Mrs Rattenbury and Wood battered old Rattenbury on the head so hard they completely smashed his skull?

Mrs Davenport What? Oh, you're reading about that awful murder. A few years ago, a case like that wouldn't even have been mentioned in *The Times*. Be a darling . . . (*She takes the paper*)

Tony That's what makes it so funny it happening in Bournemouth.

Mrs Davenport I don't see that that's funny. (*She puts the paper in the waste-paper basket*)

Tony On Aunt Stella's doorstep. And ours, when we get that house. I wonder what their defence will be. Wood's statement says that he was doped on cocaine, and the police say Mrs Rattenbury was as drunk as a fly.

Mrs Davenport Tony, I don't want you to talk about it. And you shouldn't be reading it. Haven't you your homework to do?

Tony Finished. Mum, could I ask you a question?

Mrs Davenport Of course.

Tony If you'd found out before you started the divorce that there wasn't another woman at all with Dad, would it have made any difference?

There is a pause

Mrs Davenport But there is another woman.

Tony No, there isn't. I'm sure there isn't. And I honestly think he'd come back, if you asked him.

Mrs Davenport On his terms . . .

Tony I don't know what they are.

Mrs Davenport I can't explain it to you, darling. You're far too young to understand . . .

Tony (*with unexpected vehemence*) That isn't true! Please believe me—I understand much more than you know.

There is a pause

Mrs Davenport Is Randolph coming here, or are you going to him?

Tony He's coming here.

Mrs Davenport (*taking a note from her handbag*) Is ten shillings enough?

Tony Oh, plenty.

Mrs Davenport And for the cinema too?

Tony It's only the Kensington.

Mrs Davenport (*sharply*) What's the film?

Tony I don't remember the title. It's got Irene Dunne . . .

Mrs Davenport (*relieved*) That should be very nice. You haven't told me yet how you like my new dress.

Tony Spiffing. Who are you out to impress?

Mrs Davenport Stella's coming to take me to have dinner with General and Lady Whitworth.

Tony Oh yes. And they're important because of the new house, or something.

Mrs Davenport He's Chairman of the Bournemouth Country Club, which owns the whole estate. He's a terrible old snob, according to Stella, so I expect it'll be an excruciating evening. A lot of small talk about gout and cricket, and trouble with the under-gardeners.

Tony Is it worth it?

Mrs Davenport Oh yes, darling, it's a lovely little house—quite perfect for just the two of us, so I'll have to be a good girl and say all the right things. They're determined only to let in "a certain class of person"!

Tony Not Mrs Rattenbury? (*He laughs*) Ooops, sorry.

Mrs Davenport smiles

You don't have to worry, Mum. I'm sure you'll manage your grapefruit perfectly.

Mrs Davenport And not eat peas with a knife?

Tony Or tell any of those filthy stories of yours. (*He laughs*)

Mrs Davenport (*embracing him*) You're a naughty boy. Your hair needs cutting.

Tony Tomorrow.

There is a ring at the front door

Mrs Davenport Just stay and say hullo, and then leave us alone for a moment, will you?

Mrs Davenport goes out

Tony fishes out the discarded copy of the Evening News, folds it up, and puts it in his breast pocket

(Off, greeting Stella) Hello, Stella, did you come by car?

Stella comes in, also wearing evening dress but, because she is rich, probably a real Chanel rather than a fake Molyneux. Mrs Davenport follows her

Stella *(as she enters)* No, I sent the Rolls on ahead and had Phillips pick me up off the train. It wasn't the Belle, of course, but it had a perfectly good Pullman—hullo, Tony.

Tony Hullo, Aunt Stella.

He allows himself to be kissed

Stella You get handsomer every time I see you. *(To Mrs Davenport)* Any girls in his life yet?

Mrs Davenport Oh yes. Happily they all live in Hollywood.

Stella *(to Tony)* Wouldn't nearer be better?

Mrs Davenport *(sharply)* He's too young for girls.

Stella Darling, I wasn't being serious. My dear, what about this murder case!

Tony Did you ever meet her, Aunt Stella?

Stella Mrs Rattenbury? Oh no. But the awful thing is I suppose one could have. Your Uncle Henry, of course, is going around boasting he *did* meet her—at a cocktail party somewhere—and she sang one of her songs. But you know what a liar he is. By next week he'll have had an affair with her . . .

Tony Which wasn't too difficult, I gather.

Stella Difficult for Henry—even with Mrs Rattenbury. I said to him—you'd better be careful, dear. You don't know what the gardener's boy and I get up to when you're up at the Stock Exchange. We might swing a mallet on you any time . . .

Tony *(excitedly)* Do you think they both swung together, or took it in turns? I mean, did Wood hit the old boy first and then she finished him off—or . . .

Stella Oh, they both swung together, of course—like two Etonians. *(Singing)* "And we'll both swing together, and swear by the best of . . ." what? Not "schools"—"pools" would do. I gather from the Commissioner there was a pool of blood all over the floor—*inches deep*—and she was dancing the black bottom in it.

Tony No, really?

Stella Stark naked, my dear, and trying to kiss all the policemen—and shouting out, "I did it—I bumped him off!"

Mrs Davenport *(violently)* Will you please stop!

Stella looks at her uneasily. She knows her sister's temperament

Tony Mum's very shocked by it all.

Stella Well, of course she is. Of course we all are. (*To her sister*) But with a thing as appalling as this—and in the heart of Bournemouth, too—the only thing one can do is to make a joke of it. If one starts trying to think of it seriously, one would go mad. I mean, it being with a servant! To me, that's the real horror.

Mrs Davenport Tony, go to your room.

Tony Yes, Mum. (*He kisses Stella*) Good-bye, Aunt Stella.

Mrs Davenport Good night, darling.

Tony kisses his mother

I'll try not to disgrace you with the General.

Tony You'll be a smashing success, I know.

Tony goes out

Mrs Davenport To me the real horror is the boy's age—exactly the same age as Tony . . .

Stella When he met her, perhaps. Now he's a year older. Eighteen. Old enough to hang.

Mrs Davenport Oh God! The law's unjust. It's the woman who should hang.

Stella Oh, she will. No doubt of that, thank heavens. But after all, the boy did kill his employer. He really shouldn't get away with that.

Mrs Davenport (*violently*) I don't know. I only know *she* ought to be lynched!

Stella Well, she might be. You should hear what they're saying about her in Bournemouth . . .

Mrs Davenport I suppose I'm being silly, but whenever I think about that horrible case I think about Tony.

Stella Yes. I'm afraid you are being rather silly, darling. I doubt if Tony's going to commit murder for a middle-aged nympho-dipso-song-writer. There can't be many in Bournemouth.

Mrs Davenport (*darkly*) There was a married woman at Dieppe last Christmas, well over thirty, who had an eye on him. French, too.

Stella Was Tony interested?

Mrs Davenport I didn't give him a chance to be. I changed hotels.

Stella Yes. You would. There are worse ways for a boy to start than with a married woman who knows how to take the right precautions—coupled with a bit of French *élan*.

There is a ring at the front door

Just a moment.

Mrs Davenport goes out

(*Off*) Oh, hullo, Randolph.

Browne (*off*) Hullo, Mrs Davenport.

Mrs Davenport (*off*) Tony's in his bedroom. You know where that is.

Browne (*off*) Yes. Thank you.

Mrs Davenport enters

Mrs Davenport Tony's best pal at Westminster. Randolph Browne. A bishop's son—and a very good friend for him.

Stella Well, shall we go?

Mrs Davenport There's something I want to ask you. Should I mention tonight about John and . . . ?

Stella Not the bed part . . .

Mrs Davenport Really! As if I would!

Stella Well, don't mention the word divorce tonight. Leave it to me. When's the decree absolute?

Mrs Davenport Not for another couple of months.

Stella Well, I hope it's not in the *Bournemouth Echo*.

Mrs Davenport Stella—after all, I am the innocent party.

Stella My dear, in Bournemouth *nobody* in a divorce is ever the innocent party.

Mrs Davenport Well, let them see me as a glamorous divorcée then.

Stella (*as she goes*) Frankly, darling, I don't think that's very likely, either.

Mrs Davenport (*calling*) It's all clear, Tony.

Tony (*off*) Thank you. Good-bye.

Mrs Davenport and Stella go

The Lights fade. When they come up again, Randolph Browne, be-spectacled and studious, sits, deep in the Evening Standard. Beside him sits Tony, deep in his rescued Evening News. There is a pause

Browne (*at length*) Have you got to the orgy in the Royal Palace Hotel?

Tony I wonder how many times they did it together.

Browne From the time he went to live in the house—which was—it's here somewhere—yes. "Congress first took place a month after he was employed . . ."

Tony Congress?

Browne Legal for "it".

Tony What about the Congress of Anglican Bishops? (*As he makes his calculation*) Assuming twice a night for . . .

Browne Why only twice a night? He wasn't in training for anything.

Tony You mean *you* could have made it more?

Browne Double—easily.

Tony Bollocks. Here it is. At twice a night until the murder, three hundred and fourteen times!

Browne You know, when they open that trap-door he'll probably float upwards, not drop downwards.

Tony I'm not being funny, Browne. I really do almost envy him.

Browne Mind you, three hundred and fourteen times. That's nothing in a lifetime, and for him it will be a lifetime, poor sod. I hope to put up a million before I die.

Tony Not a hope. You'll never get enough girls.

Browne You only need one.

Tony When you're eighty it'll probably still be Jones minor.

Browne You're out of date.

Tony Who is it now?

Browne Shuttleworth.

Tony I don't know him.

Browne He's in the choir.

Tony God, you are disgusting! Randy by name, and randy by nature.

Browne That's right. Anyway, a chap's got to do something, hasn't he?
Or else he'd go raving mad.

There is a pause

Tony It's hell, isn't it?

Browne Oh, I don't know. It'll do till something better comes along.

Tony But when will that be? God, it's frustrating. To be seventeen is hell—I mean, seventeen and English and upper-class and living in this century is hell. It wasn't always like that. Romeo was only seventeen, Juliet only thirteen.

Browne And a ripe mess they made of things.

Tony But no-one in Shakespeare's time thought they were too *young*, did they? A boy of seventeen and a girl of thirteen? How too utterly disgusting, my dear!

Browne Your mother?

Tony nods

Not a good imitation. (*Doing his own imitation evidently of his father*)
My dear Randolph, should you be troubled with impure thoughts, you will find a cold tub and a brisk trot will work wonders . . .

Tony The bishop?

Browne Verbatim.

Tony I wonder what our parents think we *do* between thirteen and twenty-one.

Browne Solo, I should think, or else have cold tubs and brisk trots.

Tony It's such damn humbug. Of course they know we're safe—apart from Shuttleworths, which they don't like to think about. You should have heard my mother on this Mrs Rattenbury. The murder apart, my mother seems to think she's the monster of Glamis, just because she's twenty years older than Wood. And why not? Look at her. (*He slaps the paper*) She's damned attractive.

Browne Not bad at all.

Tony (*muttering*) Three hundred and fourteen times. My God, I've a good mind to—and with Mum out . . . How much money have you got? (*He rises*)

Browne Good mind to what?

Tony Try it. Tonight.

Browne With Mrs Rattenbury?

Tony No, idiot. "It."

Browne (*rising*) Oh. (*Counting*) Seventeen and threepence.

Tony And I've got ten bob. What do you suppose we could get for one pound seven and threepence?

Browne Both of us?

Tony Don't you want to?

Browne Not for—thirteen and sevenpence halfpenny, thank you.

Tony Will you lend it to me then?

Browne Are you serious?

Tony Yes.

Browne I know nothing about it. (*He hands Tony fifteen shillings*)

Tony Why? What can happen to me? She can only say no. (*He starts to go, then stops nervously*) You won't come with me?

Browne Davenport, you are speaking to the son of a bishop. When I do it, it'll be Jermyn Street, and a fiver. I think I should warn you, my dear child, that it's not going to be Romeo and Juliet—or even Wood and Mrs Rattenbury . . .

The Lights begin to fade

Tony (*calling back as he goes*) Be out when Mum gets back.

Browne I'm not staying here!

The Lights cross-fade to illuminate a small cell, the area on the rostrum up C. At the moment it is empty, then there is the sound of a metal door being unlocked

Joan (*off*) In there.

Alma comes on. As a remand prisoner she is allowed to wear her own clothes, and she has on a simple but smart dress. She is followed by a wardress (Joan) a gruff-voiced, rather forbidding woman, younger than Alma

Wait. (She steps outside again)

Another unseen door is heard to open, there is a murmur of voices. Alma sits. Joan returns

I didn't say you could sit.

Alma Sorry, dear. (*She gets up*)

Joan If the lawyers allow you to sit, that is their business. I have to obey prison regulations.

Alma Yes, of course. What's your name, dear?

Joan Wardress Webster.

Alma I mean your Christian name.

Joan We are not allowed to use first names.

Alma Phyllis did. And she used to call me Alma.

Joan Who is Phyllis?

Alma The other one. The one that's gone on leave.

Joan Oh, Mrs Stringer. Well, she should not have.

Alma Oh I'm sure it was quite wrong. But she was an awful dear, all the same. (*She laughs*) She used to tell me about her little son, same age as my youngest—my little John. Poor little John . . . Oh well, he doesn't know yet. Christopher—that's my eldest—he does of course. But in his letters he's quite cheerful.

There is no response from Joan

Of course he doesn't quite understand . . . (*Her voice trails off*) How long do you think my trial will last?

Joan I could not say, I'm sure.

Alma Mr Montagu—such a dear, Mr Montagu, and so good-looking, too—he says it'll last five days. What will I be allowed to wear?

Joan It will be your privilege to dress exactly as you please.

Alma Could I wear pyjamas?

Joan I would think what you are currently wearing would be more suitable.

Alma Oh, I wasn't serious. Phyllis would have seen the joke. No, I mean that's what they always write about. "The female prisoner, wearing a fetching blue ensemble . . ." Well, they did at the Magistrates' Court, anyway. I just can't go on wearing a fetching blue ensemble five days running. I mean, on the fifth day it'll stop fetching and start carrying . . .

Alma laughs gaily. Joan does not crack a smile

(*After a pause*) What made you become a wardress, dear? Did you think you were cut out for it?

Joan We are not allowed to answer personal questions.

Alma Aren't you? Phyllis always told me . . .

Joan Mrs Stringer may have had other ideas. I prefer to abide by the rules.

Alma Yes . . .

There is the sound of a metal door closing

O'Connor (*off*) Thank you, Chief.

Joan (*rapping out the order*) Prisoner Rattenbury, on your feet.

Alma (*a shade plaintively*) I am on my feet.

O'Connor and Montagu come in. Joan exits and returns with a third small chair

O'Connor (*as they enter*) I don't know—quite frankly, we'll have our work cut out whoever we get. If we come up at the end of May it'll probably be Humphreys. Just so long as it isn't Goddard! All right, Wardress, you may leave us.

Joan Sir!

Joan marches out

O'Connor (*to Alma*) Good morning.

Alma Good morning.

O'Connor Sit down, please, Mrs Rattenbury.

Alma Oh, thank you. (*She sits*)

O'Connor and Montagu sit facing her across the table. O'Connor busily arranges papers in front of him. Montagu, a young man, opens a packet of cigarettes and offers it to her

Montagu Mrs Rattenbury . . .

Alma (*taking one*) Players—my favourites. Oh Mr Montagu, you are a duck.

Montagu (*handing her the packet*) Will those keep you for a time?

Alma Oh yes.

Montagu Is there anything else I can get you that you need?

Alma Well, not really things that a man would know about. Kirbygrips and things. Irene will see to those.

Montagu She's still coming to see you?

Alma Oh yes. You can't keep her away.

O'Connor Mrs Rattenbury, do you persist in saying that your various statements to the police regarding the murder are true?

Alma Well, I *can't* go back on them, can I?

O'Connor You can very easily go back on them. In fact, Mrs Rattenbury, to save your life—I repeat that—to save your life, you must.

Alma Mr O'Connor, I'd like to say the things you want me to say, I really would. But I can't.

O'Connor Very well. Let me read to you some of the official statements you made to the police. Late on the night of the murder, after the body had been removed to hospital, you say to Inspector Mills, "I was playing cards with my husband when he dared me to kill him as he wanted to die. I picked up a mallet and he said, 'You have not the guts to do it.' I then hit him with the mallet." Did you say that? (*He waits*) Mrs Rattenbury, please pay attention.

Alma Yes, I'm sorry. What?

O'Connor Did you say that to Inspector Mills?

Alma Yes.

O'Connor You remember saying every word?

Alma Yes.

O'Connor In spite of having consumed the best part of a bottle of whisky?

Alma My mind was perfectly clear.

O'Connor Perfectly clear? Half-an-hour before you signed that you were playing the gramophone full blast, dancing about the room half-dressed, and trying to kiss several of the policemen . . .

Alma Oh dear! Was I really? They didn't say that at the Magistrates' Court.

O'Connor No, because it didn't suit their case. But they'll say it at the trial because it'll suit mine.

Alma Oh—must you? Dancing about half naked and . . . (*She covers her face and shoulders*) Oh dear! How could I have!

O'Connor You mean you don't remember doing that?

Alma No. Nothing like that at all. Just a lot of noise and people there, and me trying to forget and—oh how awful! Oh, I couldn't have . . .

O'Connor This has come to you as a complete surprise.

Alma Oh yes . . .

O'Connor And yet you remember *clearly every word* of a statement you made only half-an-hour later, when according to the police you had had even more to drink? Mrs Rattenbury!

Alma looks at him, realizing she is caught

Alma (*at length*) My mind must have cleared.

O'Connor And you'll say that in court?

Alma I certainly will.

O'Connor Right. Where did you find this mallet?

Alma (*after a pause*) Lying about.

O'Connor In the sitting-room?

Alma No. It couldn't have been, could it? It must have been in the hall.

O'Connor Did you know that Wood had borrowed it from his father earlier that evening?

Alma No.

O'Connor What did you do with the mallet afterwards?

Alma I hid it.

O'Connor Why?

Alma hesitates

If you were going to confess, why did you hide it?

Alma It looked so horrible.

O'Connor More horrible than the body of your husband with his head caved in?

Alma (*with a half-scream*) Don't . . .

O'Connor I must. *Where* did you hide it, Mrs Rattenbury?

Alma I can't remember, even now.

O'Connor Why should Wood know where the mallet was, and not you?

Alma He didn't know.

O'Connor He did. On his arrest, two days after yours, he described to the police exactly where he had hidden it in the garden. And exactly there they found it—with his fingerprints all over it.

Alma Well, they would be. He'd carried it all the way from his father's.

O'Connor And why weren't yours on it?

There is a pause

Alma I wore gloves.

O'Connor Where did you find the gloves?

Alma Oh, I have them upstairs. Lots of pairs.

O'Connor (*after a pause*) Your story then is this. Your husband asks you to kill him. You agree. You go out into the hall to find a suitable implement, and find a gardener's mallet, borrowed that evening by Wood. You leave it there, go upstairs and choose a pair of gloves. You come downstairs, pick up the mallet in your gloved hands and hit your husband three times on the back of the head—the *back* of the head, Mrs Rattenbury, not the front—

Alma Don't—don't . . .

O'Connor —and kill him. You then hide the mallet somewhere in the garden, but you can't remember where, and presumably you put the gloves back in a drawer in your bedroom. You then ring up the police, to whom you give a full confession.

Alma is silent. She is trapped and knows it

Mrs Rattenbury, if I told that story in court, the jury's laughter would drown my voice.

Alma (*indifferently*) Well, if they don't believe it, that's that.

O'Connor No, it isn't quite that, Mrs Rattenbury. If I tell that story in court, do you know what the jury will believe? They will believe that it was Wood who killed your husband, with a mallet specially acquired for precisely that purpose, and that he did so with your knowledge and your consent, certainly under your influence, and very probably at your urging. That will make you both equally guilty of murder, and your efforts to shield Wood will have the effect of putting a noose around his neck just as surely as around your own.

Alma You're just trying to scare me. If I say I did it alone, how can they find *him* guilty?

O'Connor They can and they will. Mrs Rattenbury, would you like to tell us the truth?

Alma, struggling to keep her composure, finds it hard to reply; but when she does so her voice is firm and unwavering

Alma I've already told you. I killed Ratz alone and George had nothing to do with it.

There is a pause. O'Connor stares at her steadily, then begins to put his papers together

O'Connor Montagu—it seems there is nothing more.

Montagu Mr O'Connor, might I . . . ?

O'Connor By all means. (*He continues to gather his papers*)

Montagu (*leaning forward with a smile*) Mrs Rattenbury, we've come to know each other quite well in the last few weeks, haven't we?

Alma Oh yes, very well.

Montagu During our talks, one of those things I've found out about you is that you're a very affectionate person. I mean, for instance, you told me how much you liked that wardress . . .

Alma Phyllis? Oh yes. She's a dear.

Montagu And Irene Riggs.

Alma I love Irene.

Montagu Then you've told me often how fond you were of your husband.

Alma Old Ratz? (*Sincerely*) Yes. He was a funny old thing in his way, but I was fond of him. Very fond of him, really.

Montagu (*gently*) Mrs Rattenbury, how can you possibly expect *me*—to believe that you deliberately hit him with a garden mallet with such force that his blood gushed out on the carpet—

Alma Stop . . .

Montagu —at the first stroke, that you shattered his skull with the second—

Alma (*jumping up*) Stop it, stop it!

Montagu —opening up his head so that his brains were exposed—

Alma (*screaming*) No, no, no! Stop it! (*She puts her hands over her ears*)

Montagu (*continuing inexorably*) —that you changed the grip on the mallet and hit him on the right side of his head, opening up a gash just

over the eye from which the blood spurted half across the room, and would have blinded him helplessly if he'd stayed alive—

Alma, hands to her ears, is now sobbing helplessly

—and that you coldly left him there in that chair to die suffocating in his own blood—while you calmly hid the mallet in the garden, and the gloves upstairs.

Helpless with sobs, she tries to get away from him as far as she can but he comes up to her

How can you expect me to believe that you, of all people, did that to him?

Moaning, she makes no reply. With a brusque gesture Montagu pulls her hands from her ears

Above all, how can you go on loving and shielding the man who did?

Alma falls into her chair, sobbing. Montagu puts his hand gently on her shoulder, then joins O'Connor, who has been watching the scene dispassionately except for a faint annoyance that it was his Junior and not himself who achieved the breakthrough. O'Connor rings a small bell on the table

O'Connor (in what he plainly thinks is an inaudible murmur) Yes. That was quite good work, Montagu.

Joan comes in.

Montagu We're going, Wardress.

Joan Yes, sir. On your feet, Rattenbury.

Montagu No, no. Let her sit for a moment.

Joan (understanding the reason) Yes, sir.

Montagu Please try and save your life, Mrs Rattenbury, believe me, I think it's worth saving.

Joan goes off with Montagu and O'Connor

O'Connor (as they go) But it's just a matter of timing, you see. A breakthrough of that kind is of little moment unless one can follow it up at once. And that, of course—after you, my dear fellow—you were quite unable to do.

A door clangs, then Joan comes back

Alma's tears have nearly stopped, but it is plain that her small handkerchief has become a soggy ball. Joan watches her for a moment in silence then reaches for the "soggy ball" and substitutes for it a massive but serviceable handkerchief of her own

Alma (seated) Ta. (She wipes her eyes and face, then offers the handkerchief back to Joan)

Joan Keep it.

Alma Thank you, love. Thank you, Wardress Webster. (*She stuffs the vast napkin into her bag and stands up*)

Joan pushes her roughly back again. Then, after a lot of fumbling, she produces a packet of cigarettes and proffers it

Joan (*at length*) What is it?

Alma Nothing. They're trying to get me to say something and I won't, that's all.

Joan They usually know best.

Alma Not in this case. In this case I know best. You see, Wardress Webster . . .

Joan Joan.

Alma Well, you see, Joan, they both seemed to think just now that I didn't want to save my life—as if anyone in the world doesn't want to save their life—me above all others. I love life—I always have.

Joan nods sympathetically

It's just the cost, you see . . . (*She could be speaking about the price of a length of crêpe-de-chine*)

Joan nods sympathetically, however, as if she understands

The Lights cross-fade to the sitting-room. Stella and Mrs Davenport are sitting, Tony moving nervously around

Stella Is anything the matter, Tony?

Tony No, nothing!

Stella (*to Mrs Davenport*) Nervous?

Mrs Davenport Petrified.

Stella I heard on the wireless. There's an enormous crowd already, and they're getting out mounted police for tomorrow. "Fears for the female prisoner's safety" or something. I suppose you're sure you'll be in Court Number One?

Mrs Davenport Yes. 'Fraid so.

Stella Have you got your speech ready?

Mrs Davenport I know what I'm going to say. I can't judge this woman fairly and no power on earth can make me.

Stella Are you sure you wouldn't like a coffee?

Mrs Davenport Oh, all right, yes.

Stella It's very sweet of you to have these qualms, but if I were you I'd go in there, play noughts and crosses for four or five days, and then vote guilty with the eleven others.

Stella goes

Mrs Davenport Tony, what's the matter with you?

Tony Nothing.

There is a pause

Mrs Davenport I know what it is.

Tony (*startled*) What?

Mrs Davenport You've written to Irene Dunne, and she hasn't answered.

Tony does not reply. Mrs Davenport gets up and moves to go

Tony Mum—I want to see Dad.

Mrs Davenport You can't—without my permission.

Tony I want your permission.

There is a pause

Mrs Davenport When?

Tony Now. Tonight.

Mrs Davenport Certainly not.

Tony I have to see him. I have to. It's a matter of life and death.

Mrs Davenport Don't be absurd.

Tony I meant that literally, Mum. Life and death. What's more, whether I get your permission or not, I'm going to see him—now, if he's in. If he's not, I'll wait until he is.

There is a pause

Mrs Davenport What happened?

Tony I can't tell you.

There is a pause

Mrs Davenport There's nothing you can't tell me. Whatever it is, Tony, you've got to tell me.

Tony I'd sooner die.

Mrs Davenport (*trying to make light of it*) And I suppose you mean *that* literally, too?

Tony Yes! I'm sorry, Mum, but it's something that can only be talked about between men.

There is a pause

Mrs Davenport When did you become a man?

Tony Do you remember the evening I was reading about Mrs Rattenbury, and you took the paper away from me?

There is a pause

Mrs Davenport Yes. Very clearly. It was the evening you went to the Kensington with Randolph.

Tony Yes. Only I didn't go to the cinema. I went—somewhere else—on my own. Don't blame Randy. He warned me—he didn't want me to go . . .

Mrs Davenport is silent and unmoving

I'm sorry, but that's all I can tell you.

Mrs Davenport No, it isn't. A boy should be able to tell his mother *everything*.

Tony I'm not a boy any longer, Mum. I'm grown up. A pretty horrible way to grow up, I know—but it's happened, and there it is. I went to a doctor and I know what I've got to face now.

Mrs Davenport Who is this doctor?

Tony Oh, anonymous. I'm anonymous, too. Someone at St George's Hospital. There's a notice up in lavatories in tube stations telling you where to go. I didn't have the courage until today.

Mrs Davenport You should have seen Dr Macintyre . . .

Tony And have him tell you?

Mrs Davenport *You've told me.*

Tony Not the lot. Not the sordid details. Not the things I've got to do in the bathroom twice a day. But not in *this* bathroom—I'm determined on that.

Mrs Davenport (*bravely*) Why *not* this bathroom?

Tony smiles and shakes his head

I won't say a word about it, I promise you. If it's not serious, if it's just something you'll get over with treatment . . .

Tony Mum—twice a day for maybe six weeks, maybe longer, I'll have to lock myself in there—(*he points off*)—and you'll hear a tap running. Do you honestly think I can hope to come out of there without knowing what you're saying to yourself: "My son has committed a filthy, disgusting act, and he's been punished for it with a filthy, disgusting disease and a filthy, disgusting treatment . . ."

Mrs Davenport (*roused*) Well, isn't it true?

Tony No. What I did that night was silly, if you like, but the act was as natural as breathing—and a good deal more pleasant. Good night, Mum.

Mrs Davenport Tony, don't you realize what I've got to go through tomorrow? You're not going to him now. I won't allow it.

Tony What will you do? Get out a warrant? And have me tell the judge about my adventure in Paddington? I'm sorry, Mum. I *am* terribly sorry. (*Starting to go*) Don't wait up. If he'll have me, I'll stay the night.

Tony goes out

Mrs Davenport is motionless for a moment—then suddenly she shudders—quite violently, as if she were ill

Stella enters

Stella Where's Tony?

Mrs Davenport (*incoherently muttering*) That—that—woman.

The Lights fade. In the darkness cries of "Kill her!" "Hang her!" are heard, together with odd screams of "Hanging's too good for her! Give her the Cat, too!" These are interspersed with barked orders from the police, and over all the sound of an incensed woman (Joan) as she roars abuse at the crowd

Joan (*off*) Out of the way, you old bitch, or I'll fetch you one in the crutch . . . You, you bastard, call yourself a man? Bash 'em, officer!

What's your baton for? Hit that old cow on the conk—that's more like it! Push, push! Run, dear, run.

The Lights come up dimly on the low rostrum

A woman, seemingly a wardress, runs in and cowers in a corner. We do not see her face

(*Off*) Get that door closed, officer!

A door clangs and there is comparative silence

(*Off*) Bloody morons—the lot of 'em!

Joan enters

The Lights brighten. It becomes apparent that Joan has made a gallant attempt to dress as Mrs Rattenbury might be expected to—with pretty femininity and a decorative hat. What now spoils the effect is that the hat is over one eye, her dress is torn nearly off her, and she has an incipient black eye

(*Cheerfully*) Well dear, that worked a treat, didn't it?

The huddled figure in wardress uniform reveals herself to be a very scared and bewildered Alma

There's no better weapon than a lady's handbag, I always say. (*She drops it on to the table where it emits a sharp sound*) Come on now. Get out of that uniform. Your dress is here. (*She takes a dress from the bag*)

Alma They were shouting "Kill her"!

Joan You mustn't take any notice, dear. There are a lot of ill people in the world. Far more than anyone knows. Have a cup of coffee. (*She produces a thermos from the bag—which also contains a brick*)

Alma Joan . . .

Joan Yes, dear?

Alma Why?

Joan God knows. I've seen it often before. Never as bad as this, I grant, but . . . Envy, that's what I think it is—plain envy.

Alma How can they envy me now?

Joan Well, you in the Old Bailey, centre of attention . . . But of course, now it's hate—mob hate, which is the nastiest, illest, ugliest thing in the whole world. Mind you, I'm not the Pope. Let's get changed, dear. I don't want the lawyers to catch us like this.

Alma (*putting her hands to her face*) Hatred is awful!

Joan Forget them! It's a compliment to be hated by them. (*Spreading out the dress*) There's the dress you wanted. You're going to look a picture in court. I know it . . .

The Lights cross-fade to the opposite side of the stage, now representing the lawyers' robing-room. Casswell is finishing robing himself as O'Connor comes in and robes himself during the following

O'Connor Ah, Casswell, just the man I want to see. Is the enemy about?

Casswell Croom-Johnson? He's just left to muster his witnesses.

O'Connor And quite a crowd he's got, I gather. Was he looking cocky?

Casswell (*gloomily*) He's every reason to, hasn't he?

O'Connor We'll see. How's your lad?

Casswell Wood? I haven't seen him today.

O'Connor Very spirited disposition, I hear.

Casswell That's one word for it. I call it cheeky. Cheeky and stubborn.

O'Connor A bad combination. How far are you involving us in the borrowing of the mallet?

Casswell Wood's father is going to say he assumed the boy was borrowing it with your client's knowledge and consent!

O'Connor Assumption is nothing. I can tear that apart. What exactly did he tell the father he was borrowing it for?

Casswell To put up a sun-shelter. In the garden.

O'Connor A sun-shelter? In mid-March, and on one of the coldest days of the year?

Casswell Was it?

O'Connor Yes.

Casswell Should I have known that? Is it important?

O'Connor It is to me.

Casswell Why?

O'Connor Trade secret, dear boy. If I thought it would help you I'd tell you—but it won't.

Casswell (*suspiciously*) You look cheerful.

O'Connor I always look cheerful. It's half the battle. You'd better do something about yourself. Try a little rouge or something.

Casswell I didn't sleep at all last night.

O'Connor That's a mistake. I had a large dinner at the Garrick, got away from the bloody actors and slept two hours in the smoking-room. After that—home and bed. Now listen, Casswell, I don't want to bully, but any suggestion that we wielded that mallet and I shall not hesitate to remind the jury that while we are a poor weak woman who couldn't drive an iron peg into soft peat in under forty whacks, you are a hulking great muscular brute of an ex-builder who can easily knock a man's head off in three.

Casswell (*with a resigned sigh*) Yes. And did.

O'Connor That's right. And did. You're not disputing your statement of confession to the police on the day of your arrest?

Casswell How can I?

O'Connor I don't know. I only know I'm disputing every one of mine. After half-an-hour in there with the Bournemouth Constabulary those seven separate confessions will be floating down past Croom-Johnson's nose like confetti. I suppose while you were knocking the old man's block in, we were winding up the gramophone and cheering and egging you on . . . ?

Casswell Of course. I'm sorry, O'Connor, but it's my only chance.

O'Connor Of what?

Casswell Of getting a manslaughter.

O'Connor chuckles

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