SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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SF PERUSALS

Laburnum Grove

An Immoral Comedy in Three Acts

by J.B. Priestley

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
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TO

EDMUND GWENN

LABURNUM GROVE
is scheduled
for production on Broadway
during the 1934–35 season

"Laburnum Grove" was first produced in London by Cedric Hardwicke on November 28th, 1933, at the Duchess Theater, with the following cast:

Elsie Radfern.....	Played by	*Margery Pickard*
Mrs. (Lucy) Baxley.....	"	" *Ethel Coleridge*
Bernard Baxley.....	"	" *Melville Cooper*
George Radfern.....	"	" *Edmund Gwenn*
Harold Russ.....	"	" *Francis James*
Joe Fletten.....	"	" *James Harcourt*
Mrs. (Dorothy) Radfern.	"	" *Mary Jerrold*
Inspector Stack.....	"	" *David Hawthorne*
Sergeant Morris.....	"	" *Douglas Payne*

Scene

ACT ONE

Sunday Evening

ACT TWO

Scene 1 Early Monday Morning
Scene 2 Monday Afternoon

ACT THREE

Monday Evening

The whole action takes place in the living room of the Radferns' house, *Ferndale,* Laburnum Grove, Shooters Green, a suburb of North London.

ACT ONE

ACT ONE

The Scene is the living room in the RADFERNS' *house, "Ferndale," Laburnum Grove, Shooters Green—a suburb in North London. The time is Sunday evening in late summer, still daylight at first. On the Back wall from Right to Left are a small window, then a door that can lead directly into a greenhouse, then a larger window looking out on to a back garden. In the Right wall, Down Stage, is a door into a small hall, leading to the front door of the house and the stairs. In the Left wall is a door leading into the kitchen. Against this wall, beyond the door, is a small sideboard with whisky decanter, soda syphon, and several bottles of beer on it. In the corner, between the Left wall and the large window, is an oval or round table, on easy castors, that is laid for supper but is covered with two cloths. In the opposite corner is a small table on which is a telephone, and near it a loud-speaker and wireless set. There are one or two easy chairs and several dining-room chairs in the room, which is brightly, comfortably furnished in a suburban style. When the curtain rises* MRS. BAXLEY *and* ELSIE *are discovered seated at a small card table in the Center.* MRS. BAXLEY *is a woman in her forties, dressed in a smart-shabby style, a mixture of silliness and calculating selfishness.* ELSIE *is a pretty but rather petulant and discontented girl of twenty or so, the kind you see in the High Street of every fairly prosperous suburb.* ELSIE *is shuffling a pack of cards and when she has*

finished she cuts them into two, towards MRS. BAXLEY, *who then proceeds to put them together and deal them face downward on the table into six packs.*

MRS. BAXLEY (*as she finishes dealing the cards*)

To yourself—your home—your wish. Have you wished, Elsie?

ELSIE

Yes, auntie. Very definitely.

MRS. BAXLEY

What you do expect—what you don't expect and what's sure to come true. Mind you, I'm not always in the mood, you know. Sometimes I can't see things at all, and then at other times, it's all as clear as anything, and everything I tell people comes true. It's a gift, you know. One can't control it.

ELSIE (*with signs of excitement*)

Well, you must be in the mood to-night, Aunt Lucy.

MRS. BAXLEY

Why? What's exciting you to-night? I know there's something.

ELSIE

I'll tell you afterwards. It would spoil it if I told you now. You must tell me things first.

MRS. BAXLEY

All right, but I hope your mother won't come back in the middle of it, because she doesn't like me to read the cards for you—she told me so, the other day.

ELSIE

Mother won't be back from Mrs. Repington's until after supper. That's why she got supper all ready (*Indicating table in corner.*) before she went. So you needn't worry about her.

MRS. BAXLEY

All right then. [*Picks up first lot of cards and examines them, and does the same with succeeding lots throughout the speeches that follow. She assumes the usual faraway mystical air of the clairvoyant, which is in sharp and comic contrast to her tone and manner when making remarks not directly concerned with the fortune telling.* Um—Um— Well, the first thing I see, Elsie, is a great surprise. Yes, you're going to have a great surprise.

ELSIE

A surprise? When?

MRS. BAXLEY

Very soon.

ELSIE

How soon? Next week?

MRS. BAXLEY

Perhaps. Perhaps sooner.

ELSIE

Well, it can't be much sooner. It's Sunday night and nearly next week now.

MRS. BAXLEY

Well, it's coming very soon. And it isn't a nice surprise. I don't think you'll like it.

ELSIE (*reproachfully*)

Oh—Aunt Lucy!

MRS. BAXLEY

I can't help it. I'm only telling you what's here in the cards.

ELSIE

What's it about?

MRS. BAXLEY (*brooding over more cards*)

I think it's something to do with a medium-colored man.

ELSIE (*thinking hard*)

A medium-colored man? Is he young?

MRS. BAXLEY

No, I don't think he is. Your home comes into it.

ELSIE (*disappointed*)

Oh!

MRS. BAXLEY

Yes, I think the medium-colored man must be your father.

ELSIE

Is it—is it about an engagement?

MRS. BAXLEY

No, I don't see an engagement connected with it. I think you're simply going to get a great surprise from your father.

ELSIE (*disgusted*)

That's just like the cards. They're always like that. A great surprise—from Dad—of all people! I suppose the great surprise will be that he's grown two tomatoes in his greenhouse. Or they're going to play Handel's Largo for him on the wireless. Or he can't find his pipe or one of his silly detective stories or something. Dad!

MRS. BAXLEY

Well, it's all here—quite plain.

ELSIE

Perhaps you're not in the mood to-night, Auntie.

MRS. BAXLEY (*coldly*)

As a matter of fact, I am seeing very clearly to-night. But it was you who asked me to read the cards, Elsie, and if you don't choose to accept what I see, I'll stop.

ELSIE

No. Sorry. Go on.

MRS. BAXLEY (*examining more cards*)

Also a great surprise for two people staying in your house. And they're going to leave quite soon.

ELSIE

That must be you and Uncle Bernard. You're the only people staying in the house, besides Dad and Mother and me.

MRS. BAXLEY (*not pleased at this*)

Humph! Very queer. I can't imagine what surprise

we'll get and anyhow we hadn't thought of leaving you yet and nothing's been said about our going. Humph! Perhaps I'm not getting it right after all.

ELSIE

Go on. Tell me some more.

MRS. BAXLEY (*examining last lots of cards*)

You're going to travel. And quite soon.

ELSIE (*excitedly*)

I'm not, am I?

MRS. BAXLEY

You are. It's all here. A journey. Strange beds. Crossing water. And it'll come as a great surprise. This isn't the same surprise as the other, though. That's quite different. You're going on a long journey very soon, across water.

ELSIE

It sounds too good to be true. You're not just making this up to please me, are you?

MRS. BAXLEY (*on her dignity*)

Certainly not. I never make up anything to please anybody.

ELSIE

Then it's just the cards again. They call anything a long journey, just to make it exciting. They've had me before like that. They tell you about a journey and crossing water and a strange bed and a fair woman and a dark man until you think you're in for

something marvelously exciting, and then it turns out you're going to spend the night at Aunt Florrie's at Sydenham. I'll believe in this long journey when I see it. I'll bet it turns out to be like that great surprise from the medium-colored man—just something dull about Dad.

MRS. BAXLEY (*putting the cards together*)

Next time you'd better tell your own fortune. I've told you all I could see.

ELSIE

But you've missed the really important thing. Wasn't there anything about an engagement for me?

MRS. BAXLEY

Not a sign of one.

ELSIE (*triumphantly*)

Well, that's where they're wrong—and it just shows you—because I'm really engaged now, and I'll be properly engaged to-night.

MRS. BAXLEY

Engaged! Well, I am surprised.

ELSIE

You don't sound very pleasantly surprised, Aunt Lucy.

MRS. BAXLEY

If you must know, I'm not.

ELSIE

Why?

MRS. BAXLEY

Because I think you're too young to be engaged.

ELSIE

I'm not too young. I'm twenty.

MRS. BAXLEY

Well, what's twenty. You're not old enough to know your own mind.

ELSIE

Yes, I am. I don't see what age has got to do with knowing your own mind. I've always been old enough to know my own mind.

MRS. BAXLEY

That's what you think. Is it that young man who was here the other night?

ELSIE

Yes, Harold Russ. And I'm bringing him here to supper to-night and he's going to ask Dad.

MRS. BAXLEY

Funny time to come, isn't it, when he's had all day to do it in?

ELSIE

He couldn't help it. He's been helping a friend of his to sell second-hand cars, and he had to take a man out in one of them to-night. He wants to start in the second-hand car business for himself, when he gets some capital.

MRS. BAXLEY

Well, I can tell you one thing, Elsie. Your Dad doesn't like him much.

ELSIE

I know that. But then Dad doesn't really know him. And you know what Dad is. If Harold was as dull as ditchwater and lived here in Laburnum Grove or somewhere in Shooters Green, and went into the City in the morning and came home at night and pottered about in a greenhouse, Dad would think he was marvelous. But just because Harold's smart and wants to get on and once laughed at Laburnum Grove and Shooters Green—

[*Enter* BERNARD BAXLEY, *a rather glossy, shifty fellow in his forties, always either over-confident or uneasy.*

MRS. BAXLEY

Well, I don't see anything to laugh at.

BAXLEY

Who's laughing at what?

ELSIE

I'm talking about Harold Russ, Uncle.

BAXLEY

Oh—your boy friend who was here the other night.

ELSIE

Yes. Dad doesn't like him because he once made fun of Laburnum Grove here and Shooters Green.

MRS. BAXLEY

And I see nothing to laugh at. It's a very nice, respectable, refined neighborhood.

ELSIE

That's just it. It's all so deadly dull, all slippers and greenhouses. Nothing ever happens except that the people at Ben Machree have bought a new car or the woman at Heather Brow is going to have a baby.

MRS. BAXLEY

Well, wait until you're going to have a baby, you'll find it exciting enough.

BAXLEY

Ah—Elsie's like me. She doesn't care for this ultra-respectable, humdrum, suburban sort of existence. I don't mind paying it a visit—like this—just while I'm wondering what to do next, but I couldn't live in it. I want life. There's no life here. What is there here for a man who's been out East?

MRS. BAXLEY (*emphatically*)

I can tell you what there is for a *woman* who's been out East—three decent meals a day and a good night's sleep.

BAXLEY

Yes, but Lucy, you never got into the life out there.

MRS. BAXLEY

Well, you didn't seem sorry to get out of it.

ELSIE

Well, I agree with Uncle Bernard. And I know Harold does too. Oh—what time is it?

BAXLEY

Just after nine.

ELSIE

I promised to meet him at the Tube station in ten minutes. I must fly.

[*Hurries out.*

BAXLEY

What's on?

MRS. BAXLEY

She's got herself engaged to that chap, and she's bringing him here so that he can ask George's permission.

BAXLEY

Oh—that's it, is it?

MRS. BAXLEY

Yes, and another thing. What he's after is borrowing some money from George to set him up in the second-hand car business.

BAXLEY

How do you know?

MRS. BAXLEY

I don't know. But it's a good guess—from something that Elsie let drop. Besides, that chap wouldn't bother asking her father's permission if he wasn't after something.

BAXLEY

Well, how does that affect us?

MRS. BAXLEY

Did you see that man—?

BAXLEY

Simpson? Yes. And they won't look at me unless I can put down four hundred and fifty pounds, and they only give me until Wednesday.

MRS. BAXLEY

Then the sooner we ask for that four hundred and fifty pounds the better.

BAXLEY

Shall I do it direct through him or had you better try and work it through Dorothy?

MRS. BAXLEY

Not through Dorothy.

BAXLEY

Why not? After all, she's your sister.

MRS. BAXLEY

Yes, but I think she's getting a bit fed-up with us. We've been here nearly a fortnight this time, and it's the third time we've stayed with them during this last year. And she knows you've been borrowing pretty freely from George. How much have you had out of him now?

BAXLEY

Well, you know.

MRS. BAXLEY (*grimly*)

Oh, no, I don't. I only know about the amounts you've mentioned to me, that's all.

BAXLEY

Well, that's all there's been.

MRS. BAXLEY

And the rest!

BAXLEY

There might be—perhaps ten bob here and there—just something and nothing.

MRS. BAXLEY

Too many somethings and nothings. Dorothy may be my sister and easy-going as a rule, but I think she's had about enough. She's been rather sharp with both of us, I've noticed, these last few days. So you try George himself. He's good-natured enough for anything.

BAXLEY

So he ought to be. Nothing to worry about. Just stuck in the one business and let it keep him. Money for nothing. You've only got to look at him to see that it must be money for nothing. He doesn't know he's born.

MRS. BAXLEY

He ought to be married to you for a bit and then he would.

BAXLEY

All right, all right. The point is, are we going to try him to-night?

MRS. BAXLEY

We'd better try him now, before Elsie's darling Harold begins borrowing.

BAXLEY

Is Dorothy in?

MRS. BAXLEY

No, she's visiting a friend of hers, Mrs. Repington, and she won't be back until after supper. So now's the time.

BAXLEY

He's out there in the greenhouse, I suppose?

MRS. BAXLEY

Yes, call him in.

BAXLEY

Half a minute. I haven't worked out the tactics yet. Might be a good idea to sort of take a high hand with him. After all, I've seen the world, I've been somewhere, I've done something, and he hasn't. Now suppose I—

MRS. BAXLEY

Suppose you just call him in and get done with it. And if you won't, I will. (*She goes towards door at back and calls.*) George, George.

RADFERN (*off, at back*)

All right. Just coming.

[*He enters through the door at the back. He is a man about fifty with nothing remarkable about his appearance, though even at the first there should be a certain quiet assurance and authority visible beneath his easy manner. At this hour, he is very much the suburban householder at ease, wearing slippers and an old coat, and smoking a pipe. He is carrying two*

small tomatoes in one hand, and he displays these with an air of humorous triumph.

RADFERN (*holding out tomatoes*)

Look at these. What more do you want? All fresh.

MRS. BAXLEY

Charming. They look very nice, George. Won't you sit down?

RADFERN

Beautiful tomatoes. The Special Radfern brand. Apply Ferndale Nurseries, Laburnum Grove, Shooters Green. (*Looking round.*) But I thought supper was ready.

MRS. BAXLEY

No. I called you in, George, because we just wanted to have a word with you while we're by ourselves.

RADFERN

Oh—I see. Well?

[*A pause.*

MRS. BAXLEY (*impatiently*)

Go on, Bernard.

BAXLEY

It's like this, old man. I've just seen this chap Simpson I mentioned to you the other day. Only time I could see him, because he's out of London all the week. I think I told you the other day—it's a marvelous opportunity.

RADFERN

Doesn't sound like one to me. When there isn't much

business, I don't see that you're going to sell a lot of business supplies.

BAXLEY

You are with these things. I've worked all that out, old man. Trust me. But the point is this, they say I can have that agency—exclusive agency—if I put down four hundred and fifty pounds.

RADFERN

Put it down?

BAXLEY

Just put it down, that's all, old man. These people don't need the money, but their agent has to put down four hundred and fifty pounds.

RADFERN

But you haven't got four hundred and fifty pounds, have you, Bernard?

BAXLEY

Of course I haven't. I haven't been as lucky as you have, old man.

RADFERN

How do you know I've been lucky?

MRS. BAXLEY

He doesn't know. That's only his silly way of talking, George. We all know you've worked hard for your money.

BAXLEY

Certainly. I never suggested you hadn't. And I know you've lent me a bit already, George.

RADFERN (*good-humoredly*)

About two hundred and fifty pounds, I think, Bernard.

BAXLEY

Which you'll get back, of course.

MRS. BAXLEY

Of course.

BAXLEY

But what we feel is that if you'd simply let me have this four hundred and fifty to put down—

MRS. BAXLEY

You see, it's a wonderful chance for Bernard.

BAXLEY

And I thought I'd come straight to you instead of going to Dorothy, even if she *is* Lucy's sister.

RADFERN

Quite right. We can keep Dorothy out of this. As a matter of fact, she doesn't know you owe me two hundred and fifty already.

MRS. BAXLEY (*bitterly*)

And she's not the only one.

BAXLEY

Well, I don't like dragging women into these things. And I know George doesn't. Well, what about it, old man?

RADFERN (*musingly*)

Four hundred and fifty. You know, it's quite a bit of money, Bernard. I'll have to think about it.

BAXLEY

There isn't much time, and I don't want to lose the chance.

RADFERN

I quite understand that, old man, but four hundred and fifty on top of the two hundred and fifty you've had already is quite a lot of money—(*Who has strolled towards the back, suddenly turning.*) Look here, ask me again after supper, and I'll give you an answer.

[*He goes out.* BAXLEY *and* MRS. BAXLEY *watch him go, then look at one another, raising their eyebrows.*

MRS. BAXLEY

What do you think?

BAXLEY

That'll be all right. After supper, over a drink or two, I'll be able to touch him.

MRS. BAXLEY

Yes, but what about this chap of Elsie's?

BAXLEY

He'll have gone then.

MRS. BAXLEY

Listen, if they want to be alone with him *before* supper, it's better for us than if they wait.

BAXLEY

That's right. Leave 'em to it, then. After all, I got in first.

MRS. BAXLEY

This sounds like them.

[*Voices heard outside. Enter* ELSIE, *looking very bright. She is followed by* HAROLD RUSS, *not bad-looking and smartly dressed, but with nothing in him. In twenty years' time he will look and behave exactly like* BAXLEY.

ELSIE (*happy and excited*)

Harold, this is my Aunt Lucy and my Uncle Bernard. But you've all met before, haven't you?

MRS. BAXLEY (*smiling very falsely*)

Yes. Last Tuesday, I think it was. What a lovely day it's been, hasn't it?

HAROLD

Yes, hasn't it? I've seen a lot of it too. Been taking a fellow round in a car, trying to sell it to him.

BAXLEY

Any luck?

HAROLD

Shouldn't be surprised.

BAXLEY

How *is* business?

HAROLD

Not too good. How are things with you?

BAXLEY

Well, just now—I'm—er—looking round.

HAROLD

Oh—yes. I remember you telling me, the other night. Been out East, haven't you?

BAXLEY

That's right. Malay States. Singapore chiefly. Wish I'd never come back. It's a man's life out there—even yet, a man's life. Isn't it, Lucy?

MRS. BAXLEY (*tartly*)

I don't know about a man's life. I know it isn't a woman's life.

BAXLEY

She wanted to get back, you see. And I thought I'd give the Old Country another chance.

ELSIE

I'd love to travel. So would you, wouldn't you, Harold?

HAROLD

Wouldn't mind. I knock up and down a bit, you know.

BAXLEY

And now you're going to pop the question to Dad, eh?

HAROLD

Hello, who's been telling you?

BAXLEY (*fatuously*)

Never mind, but we know. (*To* MRS. BAXLEY.) Don't we?

MRS. BAXLEY (*with ferocious parody of him*)

Yes, we know.

BAXLEY

And if you two want us to leave you to it, just say the word.

ELSIE

All right. Thanks. But I think we'll wait a bit.

MRS. BAXLEY (*with dignity*)

If a proper opportunity presents itself—

[RADFERN *appears in doorway at back, carrying another tomato.*

HAROLD

Good evening, Mr. Radfern.

RADFERN

Oh—good evening. And there's another one (*indicating tomatoes*), making three. Do for supper.

ELSIE (*to* MRS. BAXLEY)

You see, Auntie. That's the surprise in the fortune. What did I tell you? Dad and his three tomatoes.

RADFERN (*pointing to cards on table*)

Oh—you've been telling fortunes again, have you? Don't you know it's unlucky to read the cards on Sunday?

MRS. BAXLEY

That's just superstition.

RADFERN

Of course it is. But then it's all superstition, isn't it, and you might as well be thoroughly superstitious

while you're at it. Well, what do the cards say to-night?

MRS. BAXLEY

A great surprise for Elsie. And she's going on a long journey quite soon.

HAROLD

Oh?

ELSIE (*smiling at him*)

Well, I wouldn't mind.

RADFERN

Anywhere but Laburnum Grove and Shooters Green, eh?

ELSIE

No, not anywhere. But somewhere exciting.

BAXLEY

I know what you want. You go—

RADFERN (*chiming in hastily*)

Out East. And I said it first, Bernard.

ELSIE

Everybody's so smug and settled down and dull here, and so pleased with themselves.

RADFERN

Well, why shouldn't they be pleased with themselves? They've got nice peaceful homes—

ELSIE (*bitterly*)

Yes, and greenhouses and wireless sets.

RADFERN (*good-humoredly*)

Well, what do you want us to have—elephants and tigers and a scenic railway?

ELSIE

Yes—but it's all so—so—

HAROLD (*loftily*)

Suburban.

ELSIE

Yes—suburban.

RADFERN

That's all right to me. When your mother and I came here, we thought we'd got somewhere. That's why we were so pleased with ourselves and ready to live a nice quiet life.

BAXLEY

That's all right for you, George. You've always led that sort of life. But give me—adventure.

MRS. BAXLEY (*bitterly*)

Oh—and since when?

HAROLD

I know what he means. I'm just the same.

ELSIE

I am too.

RADFERN

Well, I'm not. You know, you don't get this sort of life handed to you on a plate.

ELSIE

What do you mean, Dad?

RADFERN

I mean this. Though *you* get all this handed to you on a plate—given, free, gratis, and for nothing—*I* don't. And (*pointing outside*) *he* doesn't and *he* doesn't.

BAXLEY (*staring fatuously*)

Who doesn't?

ELSIE

I don't see what you're driving at.

RADFERN

Now listen. Here's Shooters Green, one of North London's newest suburbs. Very clean, very respectable, bright as a new pin. Nice little shops in the High Street. "*Yes, Madam, shall I send it? Certainly, Madam.*" Tea rooms. Picture palaces. "*Good morning, Mrs. Robinson. Good evening, Mr. Johnson.*" And here's Laburnum Grove, one of its best roads, very quiet, very select, best type of semi-detached villas. "*Ben Machree. Craig Y Don. Mon Repos.*" All nations, you see. "*Heather Brow*"—though there isn't any heather for miles around. And us—"*Ferndale.*" Nice little houses. Nice people. Quiet, respectable. No scandals. No brokers' men. No screams in the night. Morris Oxfords, little greenhouses, wireless sets.

ELSIE (*rather bitterly*)

That's it. You know it all right, Dad.

HAROLD

Gosh—yes!

RADFERN (*good-humoredly*)

Yes, I know it. But you don't. You're like somebody who thinks that buns grow on trees. You don't know the world. Because all this has been handed to you on a plate, you think it's been handed to everybody else—

BAXLEY

Well, hasn't it?

RADFERN

No. There are chaps who've sweated their guts out so they could settle down here. And God knows what they've risked—some of 'em. You don't know where they've been or what they've done.

BAXLEY (*with suggestion of contempt*)

Well, George, I hope nobody shoots you to-morrow morning on your way to the City. I haven't noticed you running many risks.

RADFERN

Oh—me. Well, of course I'm different.

BAXLEY

You've been lucky.

MRS. BAXLEY

I'm sure George has always worked hard, even if he has been safe and comfortable in his own business.

ELSIE (*looking at her*)

Er—

MRS. BAXLEY (*taking the hint*)

Yes. Come on, Bernard.

BAXLEY

What for? (*As she glares at him.*) Oh—yes. Certainly.

[*They both go out.*

RADFERN (*staring after them*)

What's the matter with those two?

ELSIE

They're leaving us alone because they know we want to talk to you.

RADFERN

I see.

HAROLD

It's like this, Mr. Radfern—Elsie and I—

ELSIE

Dad, we're engaged.

HAROLD

Well, we want to be.

RADFERN

I see. (*To* ELSIE.) Have you told your mother yet?

ELSIE

No, I'll tell her when she comes in, after supper.

HAROLD

Naturally I wanted to talk to you about it.

RADFERN

Quite so.

HAROLD

We'd like to get married very soon.

RADFERN

What on?

HAROLD

Well, that's the point. Of course I'd like to get a bit more settled first.

RADFERN

Let me see, aren't you helping a friend of yours to sell second-hand cars just now?

HAROLD (*loftily*)

Yes. Of course that's just while I'm looking round.

RADFERN

Ah—you're looking round, are you? Like your Uncle Bernard, Elsie. He's great on looking round.

ELSIE (*impatiently*)

Oh, Harold, why don't you talk to him properly. The point is, Dad, we're engaged—and Harold knows of a second-hand car business he could buy if he only had some capital—

RADFERN

Not four hundred and fifty pounds, by any chance, is it?

HAROLD

Well, it could be more and it could be a bit less. I can give you the figures.

RADFERN (*stopping him*)

Not just now. I asked if it was four hundred and

fifty pounds because that seems to be the popular amount to-night.

[*Front door bell rings loudly.*

ELSIE

Oh—bother! Who can that be?

RADFERN

Probably Joe Fletten. I expected him to look in this evening.

ELSIE (*petulantly*)

Why does he want to come here at this time? He'll be coming in the middle of the night to ask about his greenhouse soon.

RADFERN

I shouldn't be surprised. Well, just let him in. (ELSIE *goes out.*) It looks as if we'll have to postpone this little talk.

HAROLD

That's all right. We could talk it over after supper perhaps.

RADFERN

Yes, perhaps we could. But it seems to me I'm going to be rather busy after supper to-night. By the way, you've never thought of becoming an agent for business supplies, have you?

HAROLD

Not my line. But I do know a car when I see one. And there's a business there just waiting to be picked up—

RADFERN

If only you can put some money down. Just put it down, eh?

HAROLD

That's all it amounts to. You see—

RADFERN (*stopping him*)

After supper.

[*Enter* ELSIE, *followed by* FLETTEN, *a rather loud, jovial, middle-aged man, somewhat lower in the social scale than anybody we have met here so far. He carries his hat.*

FLETTEN

Good evening, Mr. Radfern.

RADFERN

Good evening, Joe. Thought you might be looking in.

FLETTEN (*to* HAROLD)

Good evening. Seen you before here, haven't I?

HAROLD (*rather sulkily*)

I believe so. Good evening.

FLETTEN

Sorry to be so late, Mr. Radfern. But that greenhouse of mine's giving me a lot of trouble, and I just wanted a tip or two about—

RADFERN (*hastily*)

About your tomato plants. Come on then, I'll show you how I manage them.

[*Moves towards door at back.*

FLETTEN (*as he follows*)

Shan't keep you a minute. (*Jovially to* ELSIE *and* HAROLD.) This greenhouse business is a terrible hobby, I give you my word. Keeps you busy all the time, all the time.

[*They go out.*

HAROLD (*softly, grumbling*)

I hope that chap's not going to stay for hours.

ELSIE (*going over to him*)

No, he won't stay long. But he's an awful old nuisance, though. Comes here two or three times a week now, to look at Dad's greenhouse. Oh—Harold—I hope it'll be all right.

HAROLD

Well, it ought to be. Only—I don't think your father likes me much.

ELSIE

He will when he gets to know you better. He's just a bit stupid, that's all.

HAROLD

And I don't know that I'm very keen on *him.*

ELSIE

Oh—Dad's all right when you know him. He's dull, but he's rather nice, and he'll always do anything for me. It's Mother I'm frightened of. Dad's easy.

[*Door into house opens and* MRS. BAXLEY *peeps into the room.*

MRS. BAXLEY

Oh—all alone?

ELSIE (*not too pleased*)

Yes, you can come in. (*As she comes in, leaving the door open behind her.*) Mr. Fletten called and Dad's gone back into the greenhouse with him.

MRS. BAXLEY

Can't imagine what your Dad sees in that man. Common, I call him.

HAROLD

Yes, looks like a bookie's clerk.

MRS. BAXLEY (*with dignity*)

I've never seen a bookie's clerk. (BAXLEY *looks in.*) All right, Bernard, you needn't stand there looking so silly. You can come in. (*He does.*) I wonder if we could get ready for supper now.

BAXLEY

That's a good idea!

ELSIE

Yes, why not?

MRS. BAXLEY

I was only thinking that if supper was here, all ready, your father might take it into his head to ask that Mr. Fletten to stay, and we don't want that, do we?

ELSIE

Good Lord, no!

HAROLD

No, don't let's have anybody else, if we can help it.

BAXLEY

Hear, hear!

ELSIE

But he won't stay, he never does. We can risk it.

MRS. BAXLEY

Come on then, Bernard. Don't just sit there.

[*He,* MRS. BAXLEY *and* ELSIE *move the table forward, removing the small table with the cards on it, and take off the cloths.* ELSIE *can go into the kitchen for something, and* BAXLEY *can be putting the beer or whisky from the sideboard on to the table.* HAROLD *should stand up looking on in a rather lofty fashion.*

Why your Dad won't have a servant in the house, I can't imagine. He can well afford it.

BAXLEY

Two or three, I should think.

ELSIE

It's one of his little fads. Mother doesn't mind. She and the char. do it easily—with my help.

MRS. BAXLEY (*sarcastically*)

I'm glad you said—*with your help.*

ELSIE

It's not my fault I'm kept at home, pretending to help Mother, instead of going out to work. I'd much rather go out to work.

BAXLEY

They're coming in.

[*Enter* RADFERN *and* FLETTEN. *The supper table, now in the center of the room, is being laid for five people. The meal consists of slices of ham and tongue, cold potatoes, a salad, stewed fruit and custard,*

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