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SF PERUSALS

RELATIVE VALUES

A Light Comedy

by Noël Coward

SAMUEL FRENCH

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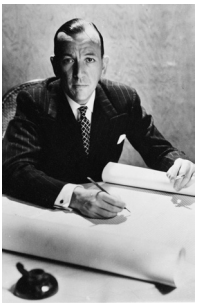
ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Noël Peirce Coward was born in 1899 and made his professional stage debut as Prince Mussel in *The Goldfish* at the age of twelve, leading to many child actor appearances over the next few years. His breakthrough in playwriting was the controversial *The Vortex* (1924), which featured themes of drugs and adultery and made his name as both actor and playwright in the West End and on Broadway. During the frenzied 1920s and the more sedate 1930s, Coward wrote a string of successful plays, musicals and intimate revues, including *Fallen Angels* (1925), *Hay Fever* (1925), *Easy Virtue* (1926), *This Year of Grace* (1928) and *Bitter Sweet* (1929). His professional partnership with childhood friend Gertrude Lawrence started with *Private Lives* (1931), and continued with *Tonight at 8.30* (1936).

During World War II, he remained a successful playwright, screenwriter and director, as well as entertaining the troops and even acting as an unofficial spy for the Foreign Office. His plays during these years included *Blithe Spirit*, which ran for 1,997 performances, outlasting the war (a West End record until *The Mousetrap* overtook it), *This Happy Breed* and *Present Laughter* (both 1943). His two wartime screenplays, *In Which We Serve,* which he co-directed with the young David Lean, and *Brief Encounter*, quickly became classics of British cinema.

However, the post-war years were more difficult. Austerity Britain – the London critics determined – was out of tune with the brittle Coward wit. In response, Coward re-invented himself as a cabaret and TV star, particularly in America, and in 1955 he played a sell-out season in Las Vegas featuring many of his most famous songs, including *Mad About the Boy*, *I'll See You Again* and *Mad Dogs and Englishmen*. In the mid-1950s he settled in

Jamaica and Switzerland, and enjoyed a renaissance in the early 1960s, becoming the first living playwright to be performed by the National Theatre, when he directed *Hay Fever* there. Late in his career he was lauded for his roles in a number of films, including *Our Man In Havana* (1959) and his role as the iconic Mr Bridger alongside Michael Caine in *The Italian Job* (1968).

Writer, actor, director, film producer, painter, songwriter, cabaret artist as well as an author of a novel, verse, essays and autobiographies, he was called by close friends 'The Master'. His final West End appearance was *Song at Twilight* in 1966, which he wrote and starred in. He was knighted in 1970 and died peacefully in 1973 in his beloved Jamaica.

For further information on Noël Coward's life and work, visit www.noelcoward.com and to join the Noël Coward Society, visit www.noelcoward.net.

RELATIVE VALUES

Presented by H. M. Tennent Ltd and John C. Wilson at the Savoy Theatre, London, on 28th November 1951, with the following cast of characters:

(in the order of their appearance)

CRESTWELL, the butler	Richard Leech
ALICE, the housemaid	Renee Hill
MRS DORA MOXTON (Moxie)	Angela Baddeley
FELICITY, Countess of Marshwood	Gladys Cooper
LADY CYNTHIA HAYLING	Dorothy Batley
THE HONOURABLE PETER INGLETON, Felicity's nephew	Simon Lack
ADMIRAL SIR JOHN HAYLING	Charles Cullum
NIGEL, Earl of Marshwood	Ralph Michael
MIRANDA FRAYLE	Judy Campbell
DON LUCAS	Hugh McDermott

The play was directed by the Author

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play passes in the library of Marshwood House, East Kent, during early July 1951.

ACT I
Scene One Saturday afternoon
Scene Two Two hours later

ACT II
Scene One Before dinner
Scene Two After dinner

ACT III
The following morning

ACT I

Scene One

The library of Marshwood House, East Kent. A Saturday afternoon early in July 1951.

The most important feature of the library of Marshwood House is that it is not a library. It may have been in the past and it may be in the future, but now it is quite definitely the family living-room. There are double doors up right opening into the hall. A door down right leads to the study. The fireplace is centre of the wall right. There is a pillared alcove left with French windows leading on to a paved terrace with the garden beyond, which, like most Kentish gardens, is inwardly sure of itself but outwardly rather confused. There are wooded hills in the distance and the sea is not far away. The room is furnished comfortably and charmingly but without any particular design. The chintz covers are old and a little faded and all the furniture, which is of mixed periods, gives the impression that it has drifted into the room at one time or another, taken a liking to it, and decided to settle down. Below the door down right there is an ornate games table. Above the door there is a comfortable deep red plush tub chair. The fireplace has a heavy, ornate overmantel with a built-in picture. A heavy fire-side elbow chair stands above the fireplace. A quarter-circular, well-filled bookcase, built into the wall, reaches from left of the double doors to the upstage pillar of the alcove left. An oval table stands left of the hall alcove. There is a desk and desk chair up left centre. The upstage wall of the alcove left has a long curved-top

window without curtains. Under the window there is a small table. There is a table down left set out with drinks. An elbow chair stands below the downstage pillar of the alcove. A comfortable sofa stands at an angle centre, with small tables right, left and above it. There is a telephone on the table above the sofa. The whole room is heavily carpeted and richly decorated with heavy, gilt, original paintings. There are electric wall brackets right and left of the fireplace, and table-lamps on the oval table up centre, the desk and the table down left. There is a bell-lever at the fireplace.

When the curtain rises, it is about two-thirty. **CRESTWELL**, *the butler, is standing at the desk. He is a good-looking man in the middle fifties. He carries a tray.* **ALICE**, *a young housemaid, is aged about eighteen. She is standing down right, emptying ashtrays into a dustpan.* **CRESTWELL** *collects two dirty cocktail glasses from the desk and puts them on his tray.*

ALICE ...and just at the end of the film, he realizes that she is the one he's loved all along and they walk up a hill together hand in hand and the music gets louder and louder...

CRESTWELL *(collecting the dirty glass from the table left of the sofa)* Thanks, Alice. I shan't have to see her now, shall I?

ALICE She's lovely, Mr Crestwell. Really she is.

CRESTWELL She'd better be.

ALICE Don't you like her, Mr Crestwell?

CRESTWELL How do I know? I've never clapped eyes on her.

ALICE But you must have seen her in something.

CRESTWELL *(crossing to the table down left and collecting a dirty glass)* I've got better things to do with my spare time than to sit in the Odeon sucking sweets and gaping at a lot of nonsense.

ALICE *Love Is My Religion* is on in Deal all this week. It's one of her early ones, but it's gorgeous. I went on Thursday afternoon. *(She moves below the table right of the sofa.)* She's this nun, you see...

CRESTWELL *(crossing and standing below the table left of the sofa)* Which nun?

ALICE The one that gets captured by the Japanese.

CRESTWELL Hurry up with those ashtrays or we shall all be captured by the Japanese. *(He moves left of the sofa to the table up centre.)*

ALICE And they do the most terrible things to her but she won't tell where he is.

CRESTWELL *(collecting a dirty glass from the table up centre)* Where who is?

ALICE Don Lucas.

CRESTWELL Get on with your work, Alice. They'll be here in a minute.

ALICE *(crossing to the table left of the sofa)* They're in love with one another in real life, her and Don Lucas. *(She empties the ashtray.)* I read about it in *Screen Romances*.

CRESTWELL *(crossing to the mantelpiece and collecting a dirty glass)* Never mind about who she's in love with and who she isn't, it's no business of yours. And don't believe what you read in those movie magazines either – it's all a pack of lies cooked up to impress silly girls like you.

MRS MOXTON, *known as* **MOXIE**, *enters from the hall. She is a pleasant-looking woman aged forty-six, and is simply dressed as befits a superior lady's maid. Her expression, however, is grim.* **ALICE** *crosses to the table down left and empties the ashtray.*

(to **MOXIE***)* What's milady lost now?

MOXIE The list for the church fête. She wants to show it to Lady Hayling. *(She looks on the table up centre for* **FELICITY***'s handbag, then moves above the right end of the sofa and looks on it.)* I put it in her bag myself this morning. *(She sees the handbag on the left end of the sofa, crosses below the sofa, picks up the handbag and looks in it.)*

ALICE *(moving down left centre)* Can Maureen come up and help with the tea tomorrow afternoon, Mr Crestwell?

MOXIE *gives* **ALICE** *a look.*

CRESTWELL Help with the tea? What on earth for?

ALICE I could lend her a cap and apron. No one would notice.

CRESTWELL Two years ago, Alice, your sister Maureen was offered the job you've got now, wasn't she?

ALICE Yes, Mr Crestwell.

CRESTWELL And she turned up her nose at it because she said domestic service was common. Isn't that so?

ALICE *(meekly)* Yes, Mr Crestwell.

CRESTWELL She is now assisting behind the bar at The Fishermen's Rest in Deal, which I presume she considers more aristocratic than Marshwood House. Isn't that so, Alice?

ALICE *(uncomfortably)* I'm sure I couldn't say, Mr Crestwell.

CRESTWELL *(moving down right)* Why then should this fastidious girl, this runner-up for the bathing beauty competition at Ramsgate, suddenly wish to don the garb of slavery?

ALICE Well – I – you see...

CRESTWELL Has she said to herself, "I know that they are short-handed at Marshwood on account of Amy having to visit her sick granny in Canterbury and May being in bed with shingles..."?

MOXIE *(putting the bag on the table left of the sofa)* Stop talking nonsense, you're keeping Alice from her work. *(She moves to the desk and looks in the desk drawers.)*

CRESTWELL Has she said to herself, "For the sake of Mr Crestwell who is rapidly going barmy, I will sacrifice my naughty pride and spring gladly into the breach"?

ALICE I'm sure I don't know, Mr...

CRESTWELL *(thunderously)* The answer, Alice, is no. The answer, Alice, is that your sister, like so many of her contemporaries, is a film-struck, good-for-nothing little fathead! And all that she wants to help with the tea for is to get a close-up view of Miss Miranda Frayle and probably ask for her autograph. And I tell you solemnly, here and now, that if she gets it, it will be over my *(He crosses below the sofa to right of* **ALICE.***)* dead body. *(He puts the tray of glasses on top of* **ALICE***'s ashpan.)*

MOXIE Run along now, Alice – you've been standing about quite long enough.

ALICE *(over her shoulder)* Yes, Mrs Moxton.

ALICE *crosses centre below* **MOXIE** *and exits to the hall.*

MOXIE What's the sense of talking to the girl like that? She doesn't understand half you say.

CRESTWELL *(crossing to the table down left)* That is a cross I have learned to bear with fortitude, Dora. No one understands half of what I say.

MOXIE Then save your breath and say less.

CRESTWELL *(picking up an ashtray from the table down left)* What's the matter with you? *(He turns and moves down left centre.)* You've been snapping everybody's head off for the last three days.

MOXIE *(taking a list from one of the drawers)* Here it is.

CRESTWELL What's up?

MOXIE *(crossing to the hall doors)* Nothing's up. I must take this through. Her ladyship's waiting for it.

CRESTWELL Ever since the news came you've been behaving like a tragedy queen. It can't matter to you all that much.

MOXIE *(turning)* It does matter to me. *(She moves down centre.)* It matters to all of us.

CRESTWELL You can't believe those movie magazines, you know.

MOXIE I don't read movie magazines.

CRESTWELL Oh yes, you do. I saw three of them in your room only last week.

MOXIE What were you doing in my room?

CRESTWELL *(with dignity)* You asked me to fetch your work basket, and with my inherent chivalry, which all the disruptive forces of social revolution have been powerless to destroy, I nipped up three flights and got it for you.

MOXIE I didn't ask you to go poking and prying about.

CRESTWELL *(patiently)* Your work basket, Dora, was on the table by your bed. Beside it were three magazines, *Screenland, Photoplay,* and *Love Stories of the Stars. (He crosses below* **MOXIE** *to right of the sofa.)* On the cover of the latter there was a full page photograph in colour of the future Countess of Marshwood in a two-piece bathing-suit, being warmly embraced by a gentleman in a one-piece bathing-suit.

MOXIE Alice must have left them there when she was doing the room.

CRESTWELL I accept your unconvincing explanation. *(He moves to the fireplace and puts the ashtray on the mantelpiece.)*

MOXIE I suppose it's only natural that I should want to see what the new mistress of the house looked like.

CRESTWELL *(moving down right)* This unwitting bit of espionage on my part took place last week, Dora, before any of us had the slightest idea that his lordship intended to marry again.

MOXIE *(crossing to left of* **CRESTWELL***; angrily)* I'm surprised at you, I am really. You've been with the family longer than I have and you don't seem to mind this – this terrible thing a bit. All you do is make jokes about it.

CRESTWELL The trouble with you is you're too conservative.

MOXIE Who did you vote for in the last election?

CRESTWELL You don't have to be conservative to vote Conservative, you just plump for the lesser of two evils.

MOXIE Why couldn't he pick someone of his own class? *(She turns to the sofa and arranges the cushions.)*

CRESTWELL Class! Oh dear, I've forgotten what the word means. Remind me to look it up in the crossword dictionary.

MOXIE *(over her shoulder)* You may have forgotten what it means, but I haven't.

CRESTWELL That, Dora, is an admission of defeat. It proves that you have wilfully deafened yourself to the clarion call of progress.

MOXIE Clarion call of fiddlesticks.

CRESTWELL What's happened to your early dreams and ambitions – what's happened to your divine discontent?

MOXIE *(moving to left of* **CRESTWELL***)* I never had any.

CRESTWELL You'll be telling me in a minute that you are perfectly happy in the state in which it has pleased God to call you.

MOXIE I wish you'd stop trying to be funny for one minute. I know you're making light of the whole business on purpose, pretending it doesn't matter, but I wish you – *(She takes her handkerchief from her pocket.)* wouldn't – not to me anyhow – I really do wish you wouldn't. *(She moves to the sofa, sits and sobs.)*

CRESTWELL *(gently)* Don't take it so hard. *(He moves to right of* **MOXIE** *and pats her shoulder.)* It may not be as bad as you think.

MOXIE *(looking up at him)* You hate it as much as I do, don't you?

CRESTWELL Well, what if I do? There's no sense in belly-aching about it. The only thing is to look at it philosophically and hope for the best.

MOXIE A common, painted hussy from Hollywood flaunting herself as the Countess of Marshwood, and you talk about hoping for the best.

CRESTWELL Well, that's what her ladyship's trying to do. She's had Lady Hayling nagging at her all through lunch. She kept on trying to change the subject but it was no use.

MOXIE Her ladyship's just as upset as we are, inside.

CRESTWELL Has she said so?

MOXIE No. But I can tell.

CRESTWELL Have you discussed it with her?

MOXIE *(snappily)* No, I have not.

CRESTWELL All right – all right. Miss Miranda Frayle may not be all that common; she's English born anyhow – it says so in *Photoplay*.

MOXIE *(rising, crossing to left centre and standing above the table left of the sofa)* I don't care if she was born in Timbuktu. I don't care if her blood's blue, black or yellow. I don't care if she's English, French, Russian or Chinese. I only know that when she walks into this house I shall walk out.

CRESTWELL *(crossing below* **MOXIE** *to the alcove table; dryly)* You'd better start packing. They'll be here at about six. *(He collects the ashtray from the alcove table.)*

MOXIE *(turning to him; grimly)* I mean it.

CRESTWELL *(standing on the alcove step)* Of course, a great deal depends on what she's like.

MOXIE He oughtn't to marry her whatever she's like.

CRESTWELL *(moving to left of* **MOXIE***)* This arbitrary point of view shocks me profoundly.

MOXIE Does it indeed?

CRESTWELL *(tapping her shoulder)* What's happened to your laissez-faire?

MOXIE I expect I lost it along with my divine discontent.

CRESTWELL *replaces the ashtray on the alcove table.* **MOXIE** *moves down left.*

FELICITY, *Countess of Marshwood,* **LADY HAYLING, ADMIRAL SIR JOHN HAYLING** *and the* **HONOURABLE PETER INGLETON** *enter from the hall.* **FELICITY** *is a well-preserved woman in the fifties. She has obviously been a beauty in her day, indeed a vestige of the maligned, foolish twenties still clings to her.* **LADY HAYLING**, *also in the fifties, is a pleasant enough woman, but inclined to be didactic. The* **ADMIRAL** *is about sixty. He is typically a naval man with blue eyes and a direct manner.* **PETER** *might be anywhere between thirty-five and fifty. He is impeccably dressed and has a quizzical gleam in his eye.* **LADY HAYLING** *moves down right. The* **ADMIRAL** *moves right and stands above* **LADY HAYLING.** **PETER** *stands above the right end of the sofa.*

FELICITY *(crossing above the sofa to left of it)* Couldn't you find it, Moxie, dear? *(She moves below the sofa.)*

MOXIE *(crossing to* **FELICITY** *and handing her the list)* Yes, Milady – here it is. *(She turns to go.)*

CRESTWELL *moves down left.*

FELICITY *(to* **MOXIE** *and* **CRESTWELL***)* Don't go, for heaven's sake, I shall need your help – yours, too, Crestwell. There's

a full-blooded crisis on about the church fête. *(She sits on the sofa at the left end.)* Everything's got to be changed round. Where's that horrid little map of the ground, Moxie?

MOXIE *(moving to the desk)* I think it's in the desk, Milady. *(She takes a small map from the desk drawer.)*

PETER *takes a cigarette from the box on the table above the sofa, and lights it.*

FELICITY *(picking up her spectacles from the table left of the sofa)* I may require you to go and murder Major Petherick, Crestwell.

CRESTWELL Very good, Milady.

FELICITY He has absolutely dug his feet in about the roundabouts. I've just been talking to him on the telephone. He was quite insufferable. *(She puts on her spectacles.)*

MOXIE *(opening the map, moving to* **FELICITY** *and handing it to her)* Here's the map, Milady. *(She moves below the chair down left.)*

PETER *moves above the left end of the sofa, leans over the back and looks at the map.*

PETER What's that space there?

LADY HAYLING *crosses and sits right of* **FELICITY** *on the sofa.* **THE ADMIRAL** *crosses and stands below the right end of the sofa.*

FELICITY Mrs Burrage's clock golf and the tea tent. We can't possibly move that, it would drive everybody mad.

PETER *(pointing at the map)* What about there, then, right at the other end? Where all those little squiggles are.

FELICITY Those little squiggles, Peter, are graves. We can't have a roundabout grinding out "Candy Kisses" all over the cemetery.

PETER *(pointing at the map)* There then.

FELICITY Get your mind away from that corner, Peter. It's still church property. We know the fête is annual hell, but it isn't the Day of Judgement.

CRESTWELL The only alternative, Milady, is to move the band.

ADMIRAL That's out of the question. The brigadier wouldn't hear of it. You can't hustle the Royal Marines about from pillar to post at the last minute.

PETER I always thought that was what marines were for.

FELICITY *(handing the list to* **MOXIE***)* Read out the list, Moxie. *(She studies the map.)* There might be something else that's movable.

MOXIE *(reading woodenly)* "Tombola – Mrs Edgecombe. Guessing the weight of the cake – Mrs Bryce. Miss Hodmarsh's Lucky Dip…"

PETER I should never have suspected her of having one.

MOXIE *looks at* **PETER**.

FELICITY Do be quiet, Peter. Go on, Moxie.

MOXIE *(reading)* "Jumble Stall – Mrs Pollet and Mrs Dint. Cooling Drinks with the Stars – Miss Miranda Frayle…" *(She breaks off.)*

FELICITY That's not official yet because we haven't asked her, but I don't see – how she can refuse, do you?

PETER I should think it would be the least she could do.

LADY HAYLING I wish it was.

FELICITY Cynthia, we really can't go on about that any more – we've been at it all through lunch. Moxie, you must tell Mr Durham to paint the sign with her name, Miss Miranda Frayle, in absolutely enormous letters.

MOXIE *(in a stifled voice)* Yes, Milady. *(She turns and moves below the chair down left.)*

FELICITY *(removing her spectacles and folding the map)* What's the matter, Moxie? *(She puts her spectacles on the table left of the sofa.)*

MOXIE Nothing, Milady. I've got a slight headache, that's all.

FELICITY Have you had your lunch?

MOXIE Yes, thank you, Milady.

FELICITY Then give me that tiresome list and go and lie down for a little. There's some aspirin in my bathroom if you haven't got any.

MOXIE *(handing the list to* **FELICITY***)* Thank you, Milady. *(She crosses above the sofa to the hall doors.)* Excuse me.

MOXIE *exits hurriedly to the hall.*

The others look after her for a moment.

FELICITY Has anything particular happened to upset Moxie, Crestwell?

CRESTWELL I think she has been feeling a bit under the weather for the last three days, Milady.

FELICITY Oh, dear. I do hope she's not sickening for anything. You don't happen to remember how May's shingles started, do you?

CRESTWELL I'm afraid not, Milady. One day she hadn't got them and the next day she had. It took us all by surprise.

FELICITY I wonder if we ought to send for Doctor Partridge?

CRESTWELL I think not, Milady. My impression is that Mrs Moxton's disorder is emotional rather than physical.

FELICITY Emotional?

CRESTWELL I believe that the unexpected news of his lordship's betrothal came as a great shock to her.

ADMIRAL It came as a great shock to all of us.

FELICITY Has she discussed it with you, Crestwell?

CRESTWELL Hardly at all, Milady, until just now before you came in.

FELICITY Without asking you to betray her confidence in any way, has she explained why she feels so very strongly about it?

CRESTWELL As far as I could gather, Milady, I believe it is the social aspect of the situation that is upsetting her more than anything else.

FELICITY You mean that she considers my son to be marrying beneath him?

CRESTWELL That is so, Milady. I tried to reason with her, to coax her into a more tolerant frame of mind, to point out to her the changing values of this changing world, but, like Major Petherick and the roundabouts, she just dug her feet in.

FELICITY Thank you, Crestwell.

PETER *picks up the newspaper from the table above the sofa, and studies the crossword puzzle.*

CRESTWELL *(moving to left of the sofa)* Will that be all, Milady?

FELICITY Except for the roundabouts, yes. *(She hands the list and map to* **CRESTWELL**.*)* You'd better take the list and the map to Mr Durham and see if he has any ideas.

CRESTWELL Very good, Milady.

FELICITY I have to see him after tea, anyhow. But he might be able to think up something in the meantime.

CRESTWELL *crosses above the sofa and exits to the hall, closing the doors behind him.*

LADY HAYLING *settles herself comfortably in the right corner of the sofa. The* **ADMIRAL** *moves to the fireplace, takes a cigarette from the box on the mantelpiece, and lights it.* **PETER** *moves to the desk and picks up a pencil.*

I don't know what I shall do without Crestwell. Do you remember how all through the war he and Moxie and I ran this house and dealt with all those brisk WAAFs, and he never turned a hair. He was an ARP warden, too. I shall miss him horribly.

LADY HAYLING Why should you do without him?

FELICITY I can't take him away from Nigel. He belongs here.

PETER *moves to the chair down left, sits and works at the crossword puzzle.*

LADY HAYLING Are you so certain that Nigel will want you to go?

FELICITY He won't say he wants me to go, but I don't approve of resident mothers-in-law. I had quite enough of that with Joan.

PETER I shouldn't think that this one would be very like Joan.

FELICITY Well, she couldn't be duller at any rate. Nobody could.

The **ADMIRAL** *moves down right of the sofa.*

LADY HAYLING Joan may have been dull, but she was at least a lady.

FELICITY *(laughing)* Really, Cynthia!

LADY HAYLING You know perfectly well what I mean.

FELICITY Yes, I know what you mean. Miss Miranda Frayle is a good actress and she has excellent legs, which means that she will probably move well, at any rate. Joan used to walk across a ballroom as though she were trudging through deep snow.

LADY HAYLING But why should he want to marry this woman? He hasn't wanted to marry any of the others.

FELICITY That's where you're wrong. He wanted to marry all the others. He has a tremendous sense of moral responsibility. Fortunately, most of them were married already.

ADMIRAL Judy Lavenham wasn't.

FELICITY Poor dear Judy was in quite a different category. By the time they met she was already practically nationalized.

LADY HAYLING *(shocked)* Felicity!

FELICITY Now, Joan had all the same instincts as Judy but neither the charm nor the courage to follow them. Happily dear Bogey Whittaker caught her on the hop before she had time to think, otherwise she'd be here now instead of in Kenya.

LADY HAYLING I cannot understand your attitude, Felicity. The fact that Nigel's first marriage was such a disaster should make you all the more anxious that his second should be a success.

FELICITY Nigel's first marriage was not a disaster, it was a triumph. To begin with it lasted only two years; it produced a son and heir, and disintegrated painlessly in the nick of time.

ADMIRAL *(stubbing out his cigarette in the ashtray on the table down right)* The nick of time?

FELICITY Certainly. I was on the verge of strangling Joan with my bare hands when away she went. I am not a deeply religious woman, but I have always regarded Bogey Whittaker as a concrete proof of the efficacy of prayer.

LADY HAYLING I am perfectly aware that nowadays all social barriers are being swept away and that everybody is as good as everybody else, and that any suggestion of class distinction is laughed at...

FELICITY If you're aware of all that, what on earth are you making such a fuss about?

LADY HAYLING Because I don't believe it, any more than you do really in your heart. You know as well as I do that if Nigel is allowed to marry this synthetic, trumped-up creature it will be just one more nail in all our coffins.

FELICITY *(laughing)* Dearest Cynthia. You really must not let righteous indignation play such hell with your syntax.

LADY HAYLING It's no good trying to discuss anything seriously with you, you're quite hopeless.

FELICITY *(rising and moving to left of the sofa)* Do take Cynthia away, John. She's getting quite hoarse from barking up the wrong trees.

LADY HAYLING I'm merely saying what I think.

FELICITY Well, don't, dear. It's so exhausting. *(She moves above the sofa to right of the table up centre.)*

LADY HAYLING John agrees with me, at any rate – don't you, John?

ADMIRAL Of course, in my opinion we ought all to put our heads together while there's still time.

PETER Like the Andrews Sisters.

ADMIRAL It's fairly obvious to me that Nigel must have been tricked into this in some way. *(He moves to the fireplace.)* After all, he's no fool.

FELICITY *(crossing to left of the* **ADMIRAL***)* John dear, he is. He's my own son and I ought to know.

PETER I agree that Nigel has always been fairly idiotic about women, but it's reasonable to suppose that there must be something nice about her for him to have fallen in love with her in the first place.

LADY HAYLING He was in love with Mrs Clifford Hargrave. I should like to know what was nice about her.

FELICITY *(moving above the right end of the sofa)* Mr Clifford Hargrave. *(She crosses above the sofa to left of it.)*

LADY HAYLING *(turning away)* Really, Felicity!

FELICITY But I mean it. He was a darling. Wasn't he, Peter?

PETER A rather dim darling.

FELICITY And he took it all so well, too.

ADMIRAL *(sarcastically)* Damned decent of him.

FELICITY And he simply adored this house. *(to* **PETER***)* We missed him dreadfully when it was all over.

PETER *rises and moves down left.*

LADY HAYLING *(rising and moving down centre)* Come along, John. *(She glances at her watch.)* It's nearly half past three and you've got old Renshaw coming at four. *(She moves to right of* **FELICITY** *and pats her arm.)* See you at dinner. *(She crosses below* **FELICITY** *to the French windows and waits for the* **ADMIRAL**.*)*

ADMIRAL *(crossing below the sofa to right of* **FELICITY***)* You know you can rely on us to back you up, Felicity, in whatever line you choose to take.

FELICITY *(affectionately)* Yes, dear John, of course I do. But I think in this instance that masterly inactivity is the best strategy. In fact we must study the chart and take our bearings before we set our course.

PETER Anchors aweigh!

LADY HAYLING Come along, John.

ADMIRAL We'll be over for dinner at about eight-thirty. Keep in good heart, my dear.

The **ADMIRAL** *pats* **FELICITY** *gently on the shoulder, crosses to the French windows and exits with* **LADY HAYLING**.

FELICITY Aye-aye! *(She crosses below the sofa to the fireplace.)* I'm afraid I was beastly to poor Cynthia. But she really maddens me at moments. *(She takes a cigarette from the box on the mantlepiece, and lights it.)*

PETER Personally I think they're both cracking bores and I always have.

FELICITY *(moving down right)* Perhaps they are, but you see they're such old friends. I've known them for so many years. Cynthia, of course, since we were at school together.

PETER I'll bet she was top of the class in algebra and captain of the lacrosse team.

FELICITY She also played Bolingbroke in *Richard the Second* and her wig fell off.

PETER She seems to have put it back.

MOXIE *enters quietly from the hall and stands in the open doorway.*

FELICITY *(turning and moving to the fireplace)* What is it, Moxie? I haven't forgotten anything important, have I?

MOXIE No, Milady. I just wanted to speak to you, that's all. I'll come back later.

PETER *(moving to the desk)* It's all right, Moxie dear. *(He puts the paper and pencil on the desk.)* I'm going to the village and you can have a clear field.

MOXIE *(in rather a choked voice)* It doesn't matter, sir – I'd rather come back later.

MOXIE *exits hurriedly to the hall, closing the door behind her.*

FELICITY *(moving down right centre)* Oh dear.

PETER *(moving down centre)* She's obviously in a state.

FELICITY I wish she wouldn't be, I really do. It's so catching. Why do you suppose she's taking it so dreadfully to heart?

PETER *(crossing below* **FELICITY** *to right)* Have you talked to her about it much?

FELICITY No. Whenever I mention it she changes the subject. She's very deeply angry I think.

PETER With Nigel?

FELICITY Yes. She adores him. She always has, ever since she first came here. You know, he was only fifteen then and they used to go to matinées together and have tea afterwards at Gunters. I think she feels that he's letting down the side.

PETER *(sitting in the chair right)* Maybe she's right.

FELICITY There is still just a hope that she's wrong.

PETER I think it's a pretty slim one.

FELICITY I don't see why. After all, it isn't the first time an English peer has married an actress. In the old days they never stopped. *(She sits on the sofa.)* Of course I expect there were always family rows and upsets, but it nearly always turned out all right in the long run. Look at dear Gloria Bainbridge, buried alive in Lincolnshire and absolutely indefatigable, and Lily Grantworth with all those muscular little boys. I think the aristocracy, what's left of it, owes a great deal to the theatrical profession.

PETER Hollywood isn't quite the same as the theatrical profession. It's more flamboyant.

FELICITY I can't see that that matters. We live in an age of publicity and we might just as well enjoy it.

PETER You know perfectly well that you hate it. You loathe being blinded by flash bulbs whenever you go to a first night and being caught by a candid camera at the Dorchester with your mouth full of asparagus.

FELICITY That was for charity. Anyhow, what about you? You're constantly being photographed seeing people off at railway stations and airports, and you revel in it.

PETER It's part of my job, and I don't revel in it, I detest it. You can't run a travel bureau without advertising.

FELICITY One of the worst aspects of modern English life, is that so many of one's friends have to work, and they're so bad at it.

PETER The Ingleton Rail-Sea-and-Air office is a byword of brisk efficiency.

FELICITY Only because of that dusty-looking girl with glasses. If she weren't there you'd never get anyone further than Folkestone.

PETER I fail to see why you should attack me just because your son's marrying a film star and your maid's upset about it.

FELICITY *(rising and moving to left of the sofa)* Oh, Peter, I'm upset too. I told you before, it's catching. *(She moves above the sofa.)* The last three days have been hell. I've had Cynthia Hayling rasping my nerves like a buzz saw, Moxie plunged in gloom, Crestwell looking sardonic and an insufferable letter from Rose Eastry telling me to stand firm. *(She crosses to the fireplace and stands gazing into it.)*

PETER What's it to do with her?

FELICITY *(turning)* Go and ask her. She's your aunt, too.

PETER Only in a roundabout way.

FELICITY If I hear that word again I shall shriek.

PETER Calm down, dear, and concentrate on the problem in hand.

FELICITY That's exactly what I'm trying to do, but everybody keeps going on and on about it so. *(She moves to left of* **PETER.***)* I've made up my mind to accept Miss Miranda Frayle without prejudice, however ghastly she turns out to be.

PETER She may not be ghastly at all. She may be absolutely enchanting. She may be simple and unaffected and fill the house all day long with her spontaneous laughter.

FELICITY That's what I dread most.

PETER Or she may be a little sad, a little weary and bruised by life, like she was in *Be Still Foolish Heart*.

FELICITY Was that the one where she got so dreadfully knocked about by Edward G. Robinson?

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