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SF PERUSALS

THE LONG MIRROR

A Play in Three Acts

by

J. B. PRIESTLEY

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THE LONG MIRROR

First produced in Oxford, 1940, with the following cast of characters:

Mrs. Tenbury	*Barbara Everest.*
Thomas Williams	*Julian D'Albie.*
Branwen Elder	*Jean Forbes Robertson.*
Michael Camber	*Bernard Lee.*
Valerie Camber	*Rosemary Scott.*

The Play produced by André van Gyseghem.

The action, which is continuous, takes place in the sitting-room of a small private hotel in North Wales.

The Publishers are indebted to Mr. Michael MacOwan for the use of his prompt copy in preparing this edition.



To face page 5—"The Long Mirror"]

THE LONG MIRROR

ACT I

The SCENE *is a sitting-room of a small private hotel, once a country house, on the shore of a lake in the mountains of North Wales. The room suggests a private house rather than a hotel.*

It is pleasantly furnished, but not in a modern style.

(See the Ground Plan and Photograph.)

Up C., *is a door to the hotel entrance. To the* L. *of this, a small window, with window-seat, recessed. To the* L. *of this window are french windows opening on to a path with lawn and trees beyond. It must be possible for an actor to stand outside these windows and be clearly seen by the audience.*

The door C. *and these windows are above stage level, and a rostrum two or three steps high runs from down* L. *to up* R.C., *for this purpose. In the* R. *wall, somewhat up stage, is an archway, leading to the dining-room. Below this is a Welsh dresser.*

The fireplace is presumed to be in the "fourth wall."

Down L. *is a small table, with a vase of flowers, and above it (between this and the french windows) is a long mirror attached to the wall.*

The principal furniture consists of a comfortable armchair at R.C., *a settee* L., *with its back to the windows, and a long low firestool down* C. *There is a small folding tea-table against the wall above the dresser,* R. *A small writing-desk and lamp standard up* R., *between the arch and the banisters. There is a small pedestal cabinet above the french windows. A basket of logs is on the floor down* L.

The time is just after four on an October afternoon. The light, not too bright and warm, is coming through the french windows. MRS. TENBURY, *a woman in her sixties, pleasant and shrewd, is sitting in the armchair with a book, ready for tea.*

THOMAS WILLIAMS, *in his fifties, a friendly little Welshman, who acts as waiter in the hotel, but looks more like a parlourman in a private house, enters* R., *with a tray of tea things. He is wearing a striped jacket and dark trousers. His manner is freer than that of the usual hotel waiter.*

He brings the tea-tray down R., *to the dresser. He then takes up the small tea-table from above the dresser and crosses to* L. *of* MRS. TENBURY, *and places the table by her chair.*

MRS. TENBURY (*after the above business*). Thomas, if your

respected employer, Mrs. Saxon, were here, do you know what she'd say ?

Thomas. Oh—I don't know where she'd start or where she'd finish, but I can imagine some of the things she'd say in between. But it's the first time she's left me an' Mrs. Williams to look after the hotel all by ourselves, so I don't think we're doing so bad, are we ? (*He goes to the dresser for the folded table-cloth on the tea-tray.*)

Mrs. Tenbury. No, you're not. But what she'd tell you this minute is that that coat absolutely *reeks* of tobacco.

Thomas. Ah—I dare say she would, now. (*Crossing to* c., *behind* Mrs. Tenbury, *with the cloth.*) It's a great fault of mine, I know. I'll tell you the truth of the matter now. (*Putting the cloth on the table.*) You see, of an afternoon, which is the only time I get my bit of rest, as you might say, I go into that little back place of mine to have a look at the paper and smoke my pipe. And then out I come, I dare say, smelling terrible.

Mrs. Tenbury. What you ought to do is at least change your coat. (Thomas *crosses to the dresser for the tray—then back to the table.*) I don't know why you men don't do that any more. I remember my father always kept a special coat for smoking. It was blue velvet with black frogs or facings, or whatever they are. When I was a little girl I used to think it a wonderful coat.

Thomas. And your father a very grand gentleman, I'll be bound.

Mrs. Tenbury. Yes. And in some ways he was.

(Thomas *has now finished laying the small table.*)

You'd better wait for Miss Elder. She said she'd be back for tea.

Thomas. I'll wait till she's in before I make the tea. Unless you're in a great hurry for yours.

Mrs. Tenbury. No, no ! Please wait, I've only been dozing and dreaming, and I can doze and dream a little longer.

Thomas. I'm a great one for dreaming myself. Only this afternoon, after I'd washed up the lunch things and made everything tidy, I hadn't been sat down ten minutes with my paper before I was away altogether. Everything here clean gone.

Mrs. Tenbury (*amused*). Where were you ?

Thomas. Back in the army—Royal Welch—and in India, up on one of the hill stations, playing crown and anchor again, with the sun outside as hot and bright as ever, and all the noises I haven't heard for thirty years. Then it all gave a sort of shiver, as you might say, and there I am—back in the pantry. India, and back, in half a second ! That's magic for you ! (*He goes down* r. *for a small chair and places it* l. *of the table.*)

Mrs. Tenbury. I often dream of places I've never seen before, and they seem quite real and sensible. I don't see how I could invent them. So much convincing detail, too. I don't believe

I'm as clever as all that. And all the people, too, where do *they* come from ?

THOMAS (*confidentially, still holding the small chair*). The wife now—Mrs. Williams—is a wonderful dreamer. Has she told you ?

MRS. TENBURY. No, she hasn't.

THOMAS (*impressively*). Oh—well, she can dream of trouble coming. It's always the same dream. She's wandering about in a great wood—miles and miles of ash and beech, as you might say, and there she is, all by herself, and the wood is thicker and darker and darker, until she's lost . . . and crying, maybe. Lost and crying in this thick dark wood.

MRS. TENBURY. Horrid ! And that means trouble ?

THOMAS. Always some trouble is on the way. She'll say to me, " Thomas," she'll say, " I was lost in the wood again last night. There's trouble coming for somebody here," she'll say. And she's always right.

MRS. TENBURY. Dear me ! I hope she hasn't dreamed about her wood since I've been here.

THOMAS (*solemnly*). Not till last night.

MRS. TENBURY (*half amused, half worried*). Oh dear ! Oh dear ! Not that I mind, because I don't really believe in such things, but I know you do.

THOMAS. I don't want to, but I can't help it. There it is.

MRS. TENBURY. Oh, I'd better look out, eh ?

THOMAS (*very confidentially*). No, not you, Mrs. Tenbury. My wife was sure of that. " Not Mrs. Tenbury," she said, (*crossing* R. *to the arch*) when we were talking about it this morning. (*Dropping his voice still lower and moving in, to* R. *of the armchair.*) Might I ask a question ?

MRS. TENBURY. Not like that, please, Thomas. Terrifying !

THOMAS (*apologetically*). Oh, no . . . I just wanted to ask a question, that's all. But I didn't want you to think I was being —well—nosy.

MRS. TENBURY (*laughing at him*). I know very well you're nosy—as you call it—Thomas. But go on. Ask your question.

THOMAS (*very confidentially*). Do you happen to know why Miss Elder is staying here ?

MRS. TENBURY (*not much liking this*). I must say I think that's a very *odd* question.

THOMAS. I know. That's why, you see, I was—well, I hesitated. And indeed I wouldn't have asked at all if my wife hadn't been so troubled, as you might say.

MRS. TENBURY. About Miss Elder ?

THOMAS. I think this dream of the wood, you see, upset her. And then I'd noticed Miss Elder—well, not looking very happy, as if she was on a holiday, but worried in her mind, I should say she is, and—and—waiting—yes, waiting . .

MRS. TENBURY (*serious now*). I know what you mean, Thomas. She does rather give one that impression, but it's probably just her rather taut, strained manner. (*A slight pause.*) I imagine she's a highly strung girl—and an artist, too—and that she came down here to be quiet.

THOMAS (*hastily*). Yes, yes, indeed. It was my wife who was asking. (*Crossing* R. *to the dresser for the tea-cosy.*) I said to her, " Woman," I said, " it's no business of ours," I said, straight out —" no business of ours." But mind you, she meant no harm at all. It was because of the dream and something she said she saw in Miss Elder's face. . . .

(*He breaks off as a woman's voice is heard off stage.*)

THE VOICE. Thomas has taken the tea in, Miss Elder.

(*A noise is heard outside the door up* C. THOMAS *moves away from* MRS. TENBURY *a little, then waits.* BRANWEN ELDER *enters up* C. *She is a quick, sensitive woman, twenty-eight to thirty-two, and should be wearing clothes that suggest she has been walking. She looks rather pale and drawn. She does not come in at first, but stands just inside the door.*)

MRS. TENBURY. Just in time for tea, Miss Elder. What's the matter ? You look as if you'd seen a ghost !

BRANWEN. I have seen a ghost. (*She comes down to the upstage end of the settee.*) I just saw her on the drive again.

THOMAS. Would that be the little old woman in grey ?

BRANWEN. Yes.

MRS. TENBURY (*after a slight pause*). What is all this ?

BRANWEN. Several times I've seen an angry little old woman in grey. She flits about the drive, staring and muttering. (*Taking off her gloves.*) I told Thomas yesterday. And he knew about her.

MRS. TENBURY (*turning to* THOMAS). What—have you seen her too ?

THOMAS. No, ma'am, I never saw a ghost in my life. Not to know he *was* a ghost. But my wife's sister from Ffestiniog came here and saw her—a little old woman in grey, she said, just the same as Miss Elder. I'll bring you the tea, now.

(*He exits* R. *through the archway.*)

MRS. TENBURY (*after a pause—slowly*). That's very curious.

BRANWEN. This is the kind of place one does see them in. (*She moves down* C. *to the firestool*). I've seen others here too, just dimly. The little old woman in grey is the clearest. Perhaps because she's so miserably angry. Like a rebellious prisoner. (*She drops her gloves on to the firestool.*)

MRS. TENBURY. I think they were angry and rebellious prisoners, many of the women in houses like this, in the old days.

BRANWEN. Their lives were often narrow but—deep. (*Taking off her mackintosh.*) If a lover or husband, a favourite son or daughter, went away and was lost to them, there was nothing but—grief or a jealous anger left them. That's why they can so often still be seen. I mean—the intensity of their feeling explains it. (*She puts her mackintosh down on the stool.*)

MRS. TENBURY. But it's such a horrible idea!

BRANWEN. What is? (*Turning to the lower end of the settee, then facing* MRS. TENBURY.)

MRS. TENBURY. The idea of these earth-bound spirits. . . . Poor creatures . . . who go on haunting the places they once lived in . . . who can't get clear of their miserable lives in this world. It's horrible. I simply don't want to believe it.

BRANWEN. But why should you? I don't. (*She sits on the arm of the settee.*)

MRS. TENBURY (*surprised*). But—you—you *see* these people—this little old woman here, for instance . . .

BRANWEN. No, the people themselves aren't there. It's only an impression they've left on their old surroundings, like footprints in sand, or the marks of one's finger on a glass. That's why I said the intensity of their feeling explains it. They make a deeper impression. So those are the ones you see the clearest . . . except now and again . . . when . . .

MRS. TENBURY. When what?

BRANWEN (*slowly*). When you see—or you experience—I don't know what to call it—somebody who's wonderfully happy, a flash of somebody's ecstasy, nearly as quick as lightning . . . and as terrible.

MRS. TENBURY. Is it the Past you're seeing?

BRANWEN. No, that's something different. It doesn't happen often—at least, it doesn't to me. But these impressions that people have left behind on their houses and gardens and walks, these hollow ghosts, they're quite frequent, and I believe everybody has some sense of them, even if it only seems a kind of uneasiness. (*Moving towards* MRS. TENBURY.) But when you go into the Past, there's nothing—well, spectral about it—nothing thin and ghostly—it all seems solid and real, at least it does for the few moments you're there.

MRS. TENBURY (*regarding her curiously*). You're a most unusual kind of girl, Miss Elder.

BRANWEN (*turning, rather embarrassed and moving below the settee to* L.). No—not really.

MRS. TENBURY. And are not *trying* to be, as so many young women are these days.

(THOMAS *enters* R., *with teapot and hot-water jug.*)

THOMAS (*crossing to the table*). There you are, ladies. And

there ought to be everything there you want. (*He puts the teapot and jug on the table.*)

(BRANWEN *moves up* L. *of the settee, to above it.*)

MRS. TENBURY. And more than is good for us, thank you, Thomas.

(THOMAS *turns to go.*)

By the way, I meant to ask you before—have you heard from Mrs. Saxon ?

THOMAS. Yes, ma'am, this morning. She wrote to say we must expect another visitor—perhaps two—this evening.

(BRANWEN *sits on the upper arm of the settee, facing somewhat up stage.* THOMAS *exits up* C.)

MRS. TENBURY (*quietly, staring at* BRANWEN). Is there anything wrong, Miss Elder ?

BRANWEN (*rising, and trying to hide her agitation*). No—nothing.

MRS. TENBURY. I thought for a moment you were ill.

BRANWEN (*confused*). No. (*She moves up stage to lean on the window-seat up* L.) As I told you, when I came here I was rather—tired—run down . . . although I oughtn't to have been, after the voyage from Cape Town.

(MRS. TENBURY *pours out a cup of tea in silence. Then :*)

MRS. TENBURY. Perhaps it was the change of climate.

BRANWEN. Yes. And everything seems so—so heavy here now, after two years of South Africa.

MRS. TENBURY (*after a slight pause*). I've often meant to go, but never have gone.

BRANWEN (*crossing down to the french windows*). There, it's light and clear. The air is thin. You see mountains a hundred miles away. No wonder they find diamonds there. The country itself is like a diamond.

MRS. TENBURY. And you liked that ?

BRANWEN. At first I loved it. And being a painter, I was excited by the new strange quality of light in the crystal-clear air. (*She pauses. Then, as she continues, she comes down to the small chair, sits, and takes a cup of tea.*) There seemed to be nothing between you and the sun. I don't mean merely no clouds or haziness, but no history, none of that thickness of atmosphere which you get when people, hordes and hordes of people, have lived a long time in a place. The air had no weight of memory. And I liked that too, at first . . .

MRS. TENBURY. I went to Australia once. (*She cuts the cake. Then :*) You have it all there, too. I didn't like it. Too empty. The country seemed unfriendly—not the people, but the country

itself. It had done without people for so long it didn't want to start bothering with them now. Did you find that afterwards in South Africa ?

BRANWEN. Yes, to some extent. I wasn't sorry to leave. Suddenly I felt quite homesick. I felt I wanted a cosy country again. But this afternoon it seemed so melancholy here, with everything decaying in a little closed valley, and no light and space.

MRS. TENBURY. It's beautiful near the lake.

BRANWEN. It wasn't, somehow, this afternoon. There was mist everywhere. The woods didn't begin or end. They just hung there, half smothered in cotton-wool. Yet there were some lovely little things to see . . . ghostly silver birches ; a tree all alive with starlings, enormous beaded spiders' webs and crimson fungus, all out of the fairy-tale world. But it was a dying world.

(*A moment's silence while they continue eating and drinking. Then:*)

MRS. TENBURY (*very seriously*). I can never make out what this cake of Mrs. Williams's is supposed to taste *of*. Reminds me of a medicine cupboard.

BRANWEN (*idly*). I know. Something I was given as a child for the early stages of toothache.

MRS. TENBURY. Another cup of tea ?

BRANWEN. No, thank you. I think I'll have a cigarette, if you don't mind.

MRS. TENBURY. No, why should I ? I can't smoke myself because of my wretched throat, but it doesn't worry me if other people smoke. Is that why you haven't smoked here for the last two days—because I told you about my throat ?

BRANWEN. Well . . . I thought . . . perhaps . . .

MRS. TENBURY. Very thoughtful of you, my dear, and a very nice change to find somebody so thoughtful. But it doesn't matter in the least. Smoke away. It may soothe your nerves, and I believe they need soothing—'m ?

BRANWEN. I'm sorry. (*She takes out a cigarette and lights it.*)

MRS. TENBURY. Sorry ! Why ?

BRANWEN. I'm sure you've found my restlessness a nuisance.

MRS. TENBURY. Oh—no ! Shall we ring so that Thomas can clear these things ? (*She half-rises in her chair.*)

BRANWEN (*rising*). I'll ring. (*She crosses to the bell above the archway, and rings, then moves down* R. *of the armchair to the firestool.*)

MRS. TENBURY (*easily—not pointedly*). You haven't done any painting here yet, have you ?

BRANWEN (*as she reaches the firestool*). No. I tell myself it's because I must get used to the different lights. (*As she crosses* L. *to between the settee and the windows.*) But really I think it's because I'm lazy.

MRS. TENBURY. No, you're not lazy. I'm certain of that.

BRANWEN (*turning, and smiling*). Are you ? Why ?

MRS. TENBURY. Because I am lazy, and always was. We born lazy-bones can always recognize one another. And you're not one of us. No, if you're not working, it's for some other reason.

(*She looks rather hard and inquiringly as and after she says this.* BRANWEN *meets her look for a moment, then looks away. She goes up on the rostrum to the french windows. During the following speeches she moves to the little window-seat, and sits.* THOMAS *enters up* C., *and comes down to the table.*)

THOMAS. Oh—have you finished ?

MRS. TENBURY. Yes.

THOMAS (*looking at the table*). It's a terrible poor tea you both make.

MRS. TENBURY. I haven't been out, so I don't deserve any at all.

THOMAS. Oh—don't start talking like that, ma'am, because if it's a case of only getting what we deserve, the Lord help us all ! (*He gathers the things together and is about to move to the archway.*)

BRANWEN (*who has not been at ease—at the upper window, suddenly*). Thomas !

THOMAS (*stopping*). Yes, miss ? (*He moves back above the table.*)

BRANWEN (*after an effort*). Did you say—somebody was coming here this evening ?

THOMAS (*rather importantly*). Yes, miss. We have to expect another visitor—and perhaps two. That was the message I had this morning. (*He waits, as if expecting a further question.*)

BRANWEN (*after a further effort*). Did you—I mean, were you told—who it was ?

THOMAS. No. No names were given to me.

(*He still waits, looking at her curiously. There is a feeling of tension.*)

BRANWEN (*after a pause*). That's all, Thomas, thank you.

THOMAS. I'm sorry I can't tell you any more, Miss Elder.

(*He turns, and exits through the archway* R. *After he goes out, there is a moment's silence.* MRS. TENBURY *has been watching* BRANWEN *steadily and curiously. We still feel the tension.*)

MRS. TENBURY (*after the pause*). I might as well tell you that you've aroused the curiosity of Thomas and his wife. He was asking me about you, just before you came in for tea. (*She pauses slightly.*) Quite nicely, you know.

BRANWEN (*nervously*). Yes, of course. I like Thomas.

MRS. TENBURY. I couldn't satisfy his curiosity. And hinted

that I didn't think it quite necessary. What I *didn't* add was that I'm equally curious—and puzzled—myself.

BRANWEN (*smiling slightly*). I'm sorry. I—don't fancy myself as a mysterious figure, you know. (*She comes down to above the table.*)

MRS. TENBURY. I know that. And—well, I feel that during the few days we've shared this hotel together we've become something rather better than hotel acquaintances—um ?

BRANWEN. Yes. (*Moving to behind the centre of the settee.*) I feel we're friends.

MRS. TENBURY. I'm glad you do. Well . . .

(*There is some mutual embarrassment here. Both women give a short laugh.*)

BRANWEN (*still smiling*). Well ?

MRS. TENBURY (*rising and crossing to the settee : plunging in*). My dear, call me an inquisitive old woman, if you like, but I'll confess—frankly—that I'm curious. *And*—rather worried.

BRANWEN. About me ?

MRS. TENBURY. Worried about you. And, of course, curious (*She sits in the centre of the settee.*)

BRANWEN. Why ?

MRS. TENBURY (*smiling up at her*). You're a suspicious character.

BRANWEN. What—just because I came straight here the moment I returned from South Africa !

MRS. TENBURY. Well, I think that's odd, after all. To come straight here—to this out-of-the-way place. And you didn't come to work, because you're not working. Nor to rest, because you're obviously not resting.

BRANWEN (*lightly, as she moves round above the settee to the small chair*). It's those detective stories you read. You win ! (*She folds the table.*)

MRS. TENBURY (*more seriously*). Now, my dear, admit it—you're nervous, restless, on edge. If you weren't, this curiosity of mine would be inexcusable. But as it is, and being a much older woman who's had all kinds of troubles of her own, I can't help wondering—

(BRANWEN *takes the small chair down* R.C.)

whether—perhaps I couldn't help.

BRANWEN (*earnestly*). I wish you could. (*She checks down stage, holding the chair.*)

MRS. TENBURY. Well then—tell me, and I'll do my best.

(BRANWEN *leaves the chair and moves to the firestool and kneels.*)

BRANWEN (*hastily*). No, I don't mean that. I mean that I

don't really need any help. There's no way in which you could help me. There's never been any way in which anybody could help me. That's what has always made it so difficult. Even to talk about it—has been impossible. I can't. (*She breaks off sharply, and sits on the firestool.*)

MRS. TENBURY (*after waiting a moment*). Yes ?

BRANWEN. No, that's all. I was just rambling on. Stupid of me. What I really wanted to say was—that if I were in any difficulty in which I thought you could help me, I wouldn't hesitate to explain it to you. I'm not really a secretive sort of person. And I know you'd be friendly—sensible—wise. But, you see, it isn't like that.

MRS. TENBURY (*after a short pause*). Shall I tell you what I believe ?

BRANWEN (*looking at her, gravely*). Yes, please do.

MRS. TENBURY (*carefully*). I believe you expected to meet somebody here—and yet were afraid of that meeting.

BRANWEN (*surprised*). I didn't know I'd given myself away so completely.

MRS. TENBURY. Then it's true ?

BRANWEN. Yes, it's true.

MRS. TENBURY. Well, it's happened to most of us in our time. Only, of course, instead of being kept waiting minutes or hours, you've been waiting two or three days, which must be a tremendous strain.

BRANWEN. Yes, it has been. Still is.

MRS. TENBURY. And I'll confess that I've been wondering—in spite of what you told me when we first met—whether you're not married after all and are really waiting to meet a husband from whom you've been separated. (*Hastily, with relief.*) There ! That's out.

BRANWEN (*smiling a little*). I'm afraid it's out to no purpose, Mrs. Tenbury. I was telling the truth when I said I wasn't married.

MRS. TENBURY (*taken aback*). Oh dear !

BRANWEN (*firmly*). I'm not married. (*She rises, moves up* L.C., *and turns.*) I've never been married. And as far as I know there isn't the remotest chance that I ever shall be married. (*She moves slightly to* C.) And there !—that's out.

MRS. TENBURY (*looking at her sympathetically*). But it was—or is—a man you were expecting to meet here ?

BRANWEN. Yes. (*Moving a little nearer the table.*)

MRS. TENBURY. It always is, of course. And *he's* married.

BRANWEN (*moving to* C., *above the table*). Yes, this man is married.

MRS. TENBURY (*sighing a little*). I'm sorry, my dear. I wondered whether that was it. Please don't feel that you need say any more.

BRANWEN. But now I think I'd better say a little more. (*She turns to face* MRS. TENBURY.) You see, to begin with, I've never exchanged a word with this man in my life.

MRS. TENBURY (*astonished*). Oh—but I assumed——

BRANWEN. I know you did. But it's not like that at all. This man isn't coming here to meet *me*. I don't think he's even aware of my existence.

MRS. TENBURY (*bewildered*). You don't know him ?

BRANWEN (*gravely*). No, I can't say that.

MRS. TENBURY. But you just said . . .

BRANWEN (*cutting in*). That I didn't think he's even aware of my existence. But—I know him. I know him better than I know anybody else in the world. I think I know more about him than anybody else does. (*Seeing that* MRS. TENBURY *is bewildered.*) It's quite all right, Mrs. Tenbury. I'm quite real. I'm also quite sane.

MRS. TENBURY. But are you *serious* ? (*She rises and looks at* BRANWEN.)

BRANWEN (*very quietly, sitting in the armchair*). I'm desperately serious. This is the most serious thing that's ever happened to me or ever will happen to me. I'm certain of that.

MRS. TENBURY. Did this man *tell* you he was coming here ? But no, you said you'd never exchanged a word with him. But he could have written, of course . . .

BRANWEN. No, he didn't. I told you. He's not even aware of my existence. At least, I don't think so.

MRS. TENBURY. But you learned somehow that he intended to come and stay here ?

BRANWEN. Yes. Just as I was reaching England. And I knew he was unhappy, unable to work or even to think properly. And I felt . . . (*She breaks off.*)

MRS. TENBURY (*after a pause*). I can't pretend to understand. (*She sits at the lower end of the settee.*) But—tell me—you say he's married. Where does his wife come into all this ?

BRANWEN (*rising and taking the small chair from down* R.C. *to near* MRS. TENBURY). They weren't happy together. They'd separated—how or when I don't know. (*She sits.*) But I gathered they were both coming here—probably to see if they could make it up ! And they felt if they were away from people for a few days, in some quiet, remote place, they might come to some understanding. I believe the people all round them all the time have helped to make the barrier between them. He has to be in constant touch with a lot of people. He can't help that because of his work.

MRS. TENBURY. This isn't mere curiosity, but just common sense ; seeing that *somebody* is apparently arriving here, quite soon, according to Thomas. I mean, hadn't you better tell who this man is ?

BRANWEN. Yes, I see what you mean. Well, his name is Michael Camber. He's a composer.

MRS. TENBURY (*slowly*). Yes, I know his name, though I don't seem to have heard it much lately.

BRANWEN. No. He's been in America.

MRS. TENBURY. I think I've heard one or two things of his, though I don't pretend to know very much about modern music. Rather nervous, strident sort of things they were, I seem to remember.

BRANWEN (*eagerly*). Yes, nearly all his work is. Technically it's very brilliant, as everybody admits, but the trouble is that none of his work yet, except perhaps one or two tiny things, really represents him. Only half of him—and the worried, rebellious, despairing half—gets through in the bigger things. He's like a man who wants to speak quietly and tenderly to somebody he loves but somehow can never find the occasion and the right words. He's a difficult, complicated person who's always quarrelling with other people and with life itself, often when he doesn't want to, but simply because he becomes dominated by terrible, bitter, black moods. Over and over again I've seen . . . (*She breaks off.*)

MRS. TENBURY (*quietly, after waiting a moment*). Yes ?

BRANWEN (*with an effort*). I'm sorry. I oughtn't to have gone on like that.

MRS. TENBURY (*wonderingly, after another slight pause*). And yet this is the man who probably doesn't know you exist, the man you've never exchanged a word with. . . . I'm—well—I'm completely bewildered, you know.

BRANWEN. I realize that. I've told you more than I intended.

MRS. TENBURY. But not enough to make me understand.

BRANWEN. I know. And I don't feel I can tell you any more, certainly not now.

MRS. TENBURY. You're a very strange young woman. I knew that from the first.

BRANWEN (*smiling a little*). Not really. I'm old enough now to feel that I'm not very different from other people and to be glad of it. What is really strange, so much stranger, so infinitely more complicated than people imagine now, is our life. We pretend that it's so much simpler than it really is.

MRS. TENBURY. I agree. But on the whole, I think that's one of our better pretences.

(BRANWEN *moves restlessly in her chair.*)

What's the matter ?

BRANWEN (*very quietly but urgently*). He's here. I know he is.

MRS. TENBURY. What—your Michael Camber ?

BRANWEN (*as if stifled*). Yes, I know he's here. (*She is now sitting with her head bent, turned away from the windows.*)

MRS. TENBURY (*after a moment*). I'll see.

(*She rises, and goes out up* C. MICHAEL CAMBER, *a dark figure against the light behind him, now appears outside the french windows, and after staring about him for a moment, begins to peer through the windows. His shadow comes into the room.* MRS. TENBURY *re-enters up* C.)

(*Standing in the doorway.*) There's nobody there.

(*She now see sthe figure of* CAMBER *and gives a little cry.* BRANWEN *turns now slowly and also sees him, and gives a short checked scream, and then turns her head away again, as if overcome by deep emotion.*

CAMBER *now enters through the french windows. He is a virile, masterful, but highly nervous man in his late thirties or early forties, with much more personal charm than his actual speeches might suggest. His manner is quick, abrupt, his speech staccato, but he should also suggest, between speeches and movements, a deeply brooding quality.*)

MICHAEL (*as he opens the french windows*). Valerie ! You here already ? I didn't expect . . . (*He turns, shuts the windows and comes down to the upper end of the settee.*)

(*He checks there, because* BRANWEN *has turned her head so that he sees her face clearly.*)

I beg your pardon ! I thought you were my wife.

(*He stares in bewilderment at her. Taut ; she looks searchingly at him. He frowns in his bewilderment.* BRANWEN *rises and retreats two steps towards* C. MICHAEL *moves a little farther into the room.*)

You must think me very stupid . . . staring at you like this . . . but . . . we've met before somewhere, haven't we ?

BRANWEN (*shaking her head*). No.

(*She turns and hurries from the room through the archway. He watches her go, still amazed. When she has gone, he looks at* MRS. TENBURY, *who is looking at him with a little smile on her face.* MRS. TENBURY *comes down the steps to* MICHAEL.)

MRS. TENBURY. Mr. Michael Camber ?

MICHAEL (*still puzzled*). Yes.

MRS. TENBURY. I'm Mrs. Tenbury. (*She moves to the armchair* R.C.)

MICHAEL (*his mind still elsewhere*). Oh—yes. Most extraordinary thing ! (*Now giving her his attention.*) What's the name of that girl ?

Mrs. Tenbury (*rather deliberately*). Miss Elder. Branwen Elder.

Michael (*chewing it over*). Branwen Elder . . . No, I'd have remembered that. Perhaps I met her somewhere without catching her name. Often happens, doesn't it ?

Mrs. Tenbury. You—er—feel you know her, um ?

Michael (*after a slight pause, almost irritably*). No, I can't say that exactly. When I was standing out there——

Mrs. Tenbury (*with a hint of reproach*). Frightening us.

Michael. Did I ? Sorry ! Though I can't imagine why it should have frightened you. The fact is, I've just arrived. Never been to this place before, only heard of it from a friend. And it looked so completely unlike an hotel that I began prowling round to try to make head or tail of it. Also, I thought if there was a crowd here, I wouldn't stay. Want to be quiet, you see.

Mrs. Tenbury. You'll find it very quiet here. But you were saying—when you were outside——?

Michael. I'm hoping to meet my wife here. She's been staying with friends, and I've just come back from Paris. And I could have sworn that was Valerie—my wife. Then there didn't seem any resemblance. And then I felt I recognized her. But I don't know her. Sorry to go blathering on like this, but these little things can be so disturbing. (*He moves down* R. *of the settee to the firestool.*) I suppose the fact is I've met her at some crush or other, perhaps years ago, and can't remember.

Mrs. Tenbury (*calmly*). No, I don't think so. You haven't met her before.

Michael. How do you know ? (*He turns up to the settee.*)

Mrs. Tenbury. Because she told me you'd never met. And I'm quite sure she was telling me the truth.

Michael (*astonished*). She told you ? (*Moving up to the table.*) When ?

Mrs. Tenbury. Just before you came. (*She moves to below the armchair and sits in it.*)

Michael (*grimly*). I see. (*A slight pause.*) Excuse me a moment. Where's the bell ?

Mrs. Tenbury (*indicating it*). There.

(Michael *crosses* R. *to the bell, above the arch.*)

Is there—anything wrong ?

Michael (*having pressed the bell-push*). Yes. I hate people who can't keep their word, who make a promise and then instantly break it.

Mrs. Tenbury (*surprised*). Well, so do I, but I don't quite see——

Michael (*cutting in*). No, no. (*Crossing back stage up to the window, he paces up and down on the rostrum.*) Nothing to do with you, of course. It's these confounded people here.

Mrs. Tenbury. Really, Mr. Camber, if you mean Mrs.

Saxon, who owns this hotel, or Thomas, the man here, I assure you—and I know them very well—that they're quite exceptionally nice people.

MICHAEL (*on the* C. *of the rostrum*). Then they should keep their promises.

(THOMAS *appears at the* C. *door, at the top of the steps.*)

THOMAS. Oh—you're here, sir. And you've changed your mind about having a cup of tea, eh ?

MICHAEL (*rather savagely*). No, I haven't. But I've probably changed my mind about staying here at all.

THOMAS (*shocked, coming down to the bottom of the steps*). Oh—I'm very sorry to hear that, sir. Why, is there anything——

MICHAEL (*cutting in, sharply*). There's a good deal wrong, if that's what you're asking. When I wrote to the woman who runs this place—Mrs.—Mrs.——

THOMAS. Mrs. Saxon ?

MICHAEL. Mrs. Saxon. When I wrote to Mrs. Saxon, I made it a condition of my staying here at all that she should keep my name to herself. I'm not a film star, and so may not be very important to the gutter press, but even so it's showing an unwelcome interest in my private affairs, and I wanted to come down here and be safe from any impertinent interference. She promised faithfully to keep my name to herself. Now I find that not only she passed it on to you, but that you've instantly passed it on to these ladies who are staying here. Now what do you say to that ? (*He comes down from the rostrum to* THOMAS.)

MRS. TENBURY. Mr. Camber, I . . .

MICHAEL (*cutting in sharply*). Please. This is between me and these people. (*To* THOMAS.) Now what do you say ?

THOMAS (*blankly*). Sir—all I can say is—I haven't the smallest notion of what you might be talking about.

MICHAEL (*flaring up*). Now that's just damned impudence !

MRS. TENBURY (*rising, then moving up stage with great authority*). Mr. Camber !

MICHAEL. Well ?

MRS. TENBURY. You're making a great mistake and behaving very foolishly. Thomas, Mrs. Saxon told you that another guest —and perhaps two—might be staying here this evening, but she didn't mention any names to you, did she ?

THOMAS. No, she didn't. (*Coming down to the table.*) I was just going to ask this gentleman his name, for he didn't register when he came a few minutes' since, and so indeed I hadn't a name for him.

MICHAEL (*to* MRS. TENBURY, *moving down to the upstage end of the settee*). But he told you I was coming here ?

MRS. TENBURY. He didn't. He merely said *somebody* was coming, that's all.

THOMAS (*to* MICHAEL, *gravely*). Mrs. Saxon is a good employer, and this is a nice place, but even to please her and to stay working here, I can't allow anybody to call me to my face a liar. (*He looks steadily at* MICHAEL.)

MRS. TENBURY (*soothing him as she sits in the armchair*). All right, Thomas.

MICHAEL. I didn't call you a liar. Apparently it's all a misunderstanding, and though I don't pretend to know what's happened, obviously it's nothing to do with you. Forget I spoke. (*He turns away to the settee and sits at the downstage end.*)

THOMAS (*with dignity*). Very well, sir. And now, if you don't wish to register just now but you are staying here—— (*He comes down to the small chair and faces* MICHAEL.)

MICHAEL. Yes, I'm staying, though I don't know for how long.

THOMAS. Then what is your name, sir, please ?

MICHAEL. Well, seeing that everybody else here seems to know it, you might as well know it too. It's Camber, Michael Camber.

THOMAS. Very good, Mr. Camber. (*He moves the chair to down* R.) I've taken your luggage to your room. It's number six. (*Pointing to the arch.*) Through there, along the corridor. (*He crosses towards up* C.) Thank you, sir.

(*He exits up* C. *with dignity. There is a moment's silence.*)

MRS. TENBURY (*with a hint of reproach*). Thomas is not quite the ordinary hotel servant, just as this isn't quite the ordinary country hotel.

MICHAEL (*not unpleasantly*). In other words, stop shouting at him and making a nuisance of yourself—eh ? You won't believe it, but it was really my modesty that was at the back of that mistake I made.

MRS. TENBURY. Your modesty ? I'm afraid I don't follow.

MICHAEL. And don't believe a word of it (*clasping his right leg on the settee*). But look at it from my point of view. I'm a composer, a composer of serious modern music. How many people in this film-and-football-ridden country take the least glimmer of interest in serious modern music ? Naturally, I don't expect to be the subject of discussion in an hotel sitting-room only a few minutes before I arrive there. Unless, of course, you knew I was coming. And now, it seems, you didn't.

MRS. TENBURY (*calmly*). But we did.

MICHAEL. But—but you said——

MRS. TENBURY. That Thomas didn't know. Quite so. But you see, Miss Elder knew. She expected you.

MICHAEL. How could she ? Ah, but wait a minute. (*He puts his leg down.*) It's Valerie—my wife. That's what it is, of course.

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