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SF PERUSALS

MYSTERY AT GREENFINGERS

A Comedy of Detection

by J. B. Priestley

SAMUEL FRENCH

samuelfrench.co.uk

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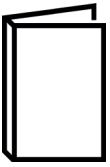
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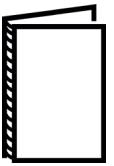
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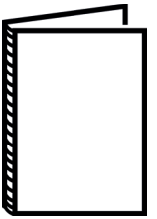
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Boynton Priestley was born on 13th September 1894 in Yorkshire. After leaving school at 16, he worked in a wool office, but was determined to become a writer, with his spare time spent buying books and writing. His first published article was "Secrets of the Rag-Time King" which appeared in *London Opinion* in 1912.

His writing success allowed him to enter the theatre world, working on *The Good Companions* and his first solo play *Dangerous Corner*. Some of his best-known plays include: *Time & The Conways, I Have Been here Before, An Inspector Calls* and *When We Are Married*.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This play was carefully devised and specially written as a test piece for amateur dramatic societies competing in the "News Chronicle" Drama Contest, 1937–38. Its single set, properties, costumes, are the simplest possible. It requires no elaborate effects. All it demands are sensible lively production and good acting. The author has put it into the form of a detective play—though it contains no murders and no police—for two reasons: firstly, because the general public likes this type of play; secondly because it is easier to produce and act a play with a certain obvious plot structure than it is to do a play of pure character. Nevertheless, this is really a comedy of character, masquerading as—and to some extent burlesquing—a mystery play. The producer should remember this, and should make his characters more authentic than the plot.

This Acting Edition has been prepared from the prompt copy used by the Bournemouth Little Theatre Club, winners of this Contest, January, 1938.

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MYSTERY AT GREENFINGERS

Produced at the Fortune Theatre, London, W.C.2, on January 18th, 1938, by the Bournemouth Little Theatre Club, winners of the "News Chronicle" Amateur Dramatic Contest, 1937–38, with the following cast of characters:

(In the order of their appearance)

ARNOLD JORDAN	James Emerson
EDNA SANDARS	Kathleen Wiseman
KEITH HENLEY	Herbert Wiseman
HELEN TENNANT	Heather Taylor
SALLY PHILIPS	Kilty Heane
CLARA PACKER	Joan Homer
ROSE HEATON	Myrtle Moss
FRED POOLE	Geoffrey Harding
ROBERT CROWTHER	Geoffrey Baverstock
MISS TRACEY	Dorothy Rowe

The Play produced by Philip Taylor.

The scene throughout is one of the staff rooms of the large Greenfingers Palace Hotel, in the Peak District.

ACT I. —An evening in March, about a fortnight before Easter
ACT II. —Next morning
ACT III. —That afternoon

CHARACTERS

MISS TRACEY (an elderly spinster, a lady of independent means from Storton-under-the-Hill, Gloucestershire. She is very lively, intelligent, downright, with a sharp staccato manner of speech. She is dressed throughout in sensible travelling tweeds)

HELEN TENNANT (about twenty-five, pretty, and with pleasant manners. She is the games and social hostess of the hotel. Dressed throughout in winter-day clothes, rather "sporting" in type. Preferably fair)

EDNA SANDARS (a bookkeeper and secretary, about twenty-seven or twenty-eight, and preferably dark and rather sleek. Sometimes wears very smart spectacles. Rather hard and sharp. Quite smartly dressed, in darkish clothes)

MRS. (ROSE) HEATON (staff manageress of the hotel. About thirty-five, rather handsome, quiet, efficient, reserved, rather bitter in manner. She is already wearing her uniform, which is a smart black outfit)

SALLY PHILIPS (one of the hotel company's more experienced maids. About twenty-seven. Rather "tough" in manner, sharp-witted, cynical. Quite nice-looking. Wears the hotel maids' uniform, which should be quite attractive)

CLARA PACKER (another maid, younger and far less sophisticated than Sally. Wears same uniform. A simple, good-hearted creature)

KEITH HENLEY (assistant manager of the hotel. About twenty-eight. Good-looking nice young man, with good social background. Keen on his job. Wears ordinary good clothes, not the black coat, etc., he will wear when hotel is open)

ARNOLD JORDAN (one of the hotel chefs. About forty-five. Preferably large and rather fat. Is half-French, and talks with faint French accent, using the French "r." Good-natured, amusing, but temperamental. Wears ordinary good clothes, but can be seen once wearing chef's cap and apron)

FRED POOLE (the cocktail barman of the hotel. About thirty. Very sleek and smart, and affects slight American style of speech above his native Cockney. Nattily dressed, but wears a white uniform jacket of cocktail barman instead of ordinary lounge coat)

ROBERT CROWTHER (the hotel company's detective. An ex-Scotland Yard officer. About fifty. Preferably tall, heavy, rather military figure. Wears ordinary clothes. Still the self-important policeman, with loud voice and heavy-handed manner)

ACT I

The scene throughout is one of the staff rooms of the large Greenfingers Palace Hotel, in the Peak District. It is a perfectly simple rectangular room, new and rather bare, in the modern manner, and impersonal, as such rooms always are.

It has no outer window at all, and is obviously artificially ventilated. But on the left wall, running all along, to the height of about seven feet, there are windows of thick opaque glass, which admit some light from the corridor outside. Up left is the door leading to the main part of the hotel. On the right wall is the door leading to the kitchen and some of the other staff quarters. The furniture consists of a fair-sized table and plenty of light chairs. (No big easy chairs) On the left wall above the small table there is a notice-board with various notices and Staff Regulations, also a letter rack with one or two odd letters in. On the right wall is another framed notice headed In Case Of Fire. The woodwork throughout the set should be painted as light as possible. Some introduction of glass, chromium plate, etc., to suggest that the hotel is very modern, would be effective. The lighting should be plain and rather bright. The floor should be covered with brown linoleum or something of that kind. The general effect of the room should be new, clean, bright, but rather bare and comfortless.

At rise of curtain we hear an operatic tenor singing at full blast. **JORDAN** *is standing in front of back wall right, apparently singing very dramatically—though actually he is only imitating an operatic singer, opening his mouth and making gestures but not singing himself.*

The table is set with remains of supper for five. **EDNA SANDARS** *is sitting above the table, nearer to* **KEITH**, *who is at the left end.* **HELEN** *is sitting below the table, slightly right centre.* **SALLY** *and* **CLARA** *are clearing the table, but have halted to watch* **JORDAN***'s performance, and stand grinning,* **SALLY** *up by the sideboard,* **CLARA** *with a full tray stopped at door right. They are all amused.* **EDNA** *and* **KEITH** *are smoking.* **JORDAN** *continues his performance until* **MRS. HEATON** *enters left. She stands and looks contemptuously at him, and when he sees her look, he suddenly stops, looking sheepish, moves away, and then we see that he has been standing in front of a radio set against the back wall right centre. He turns round, and to hide his embarrassment, begins fiddling with the set, first turning off the station that had produced the tenor.* **SALLY** *continues to clear the table;* **CLARA** *goes out right.*

MRS. HEATON *(scornfully)* I'm sorry to interrupt your performance, Mr. Jordan.

His back is eloquent, but he does not reply.

EDNA *(with irony)* You were quite right, Mrs. Heaton. We nearly had some fun then. Another minute and we'd have been laughing. One has to be careful, hasn't one?

MRS. HEATON *(calmly)* I'm here to get on with my work, Miss Sandars. And I came in to ask you to come up to the linen-room. I want you to check my figures.

ARNOLD *sits in the upstage chair right and reads the "Radio Times."*

EDNA *(grumbling)* What, at this time? Have a heart! I've been checking everybody's figures all day, and nearly died of cold.

KEITH *(protesting)* You're not going on to-night, are you, Mrs. Heaton?

CLARA *enters right with an empty tray.*

MRS. HEATON I'm sorry, Mr. Henley, but I really must.

ARNOLD, *still seated, starts to tune the wireless set.*

We're hopelessly short, and Mr. Chadwick specially asked me to let him know what I needed as soon as ever possible.

EDNA *(rising slowly and moving down left to the small table)* Oh—all right. But if I die of pneumonia here, send my body back to town, will you?

HELEN *(sweetly)* I've some notes for you too, Miss Sandars. But I can give them to you down here afterwards.

EDNA *(with cheerful rudeness, turning up to the door left)* Can't you tell them yourself you're two ping-pong balls and a bridge table short?

KEITH *(annoyed with her)* That'll do.

EDNA Yes, won't it?

She is about to move off when the wireless set begins announcing the news. **JORDAN** *steps to one side of it, and, watching it, begins lighting a cigarette.* **EDNA** *stops to listen.*

VOICE FROM SET *(very unctuous)* ...copyright reserved. The weather. *(The* **ANNOUNCER** *has a nasty attack of coughing)*

SALLY *(stopping to listen)* Well, what about it?

VOICE FROM SET I beg your pardon. Snow is still falling in the North and the Midlands, and already there are very high drifts in the Lake District, North Yorkshire and the Peak District. The Post Office reports that some telegraph and telephone lines in one or two districts in Westmorland, Cumberland and Derbyshire are now out of action. The Automobile Association have asked all members who propose travelling through the higher Midlands and the North to ask advice before venturing on any but main roads. This is the

heaviest fall of snow recorded in March for the last fifty-one years... Roumania. The government crisis in Roumania—

EDNA *(loudly)* No, not Roumania.

KEITH Turn it off, Arnold.

JORDAN *turns off the set and sits on the downstage chair right.*

JORDAN *(with droll despair)* More and more snow! And in less than a fortnight they think they open this hotel.

EDNA By that time, they'll be just about trying to dig us out. Or sending St. Bernard dogs to look for us.

KEITH I say, I suppose our telephone line's all right? Anybody tried it lately?

JORDAN That engineer—what's his name? —Burton—used it this morning, just before he left. I was with him.

EDNA That's the last voice they'll probably ever hear from the Greenfingers Palace Hotel.

MRS. HEATON I'll see if it's all right.

She goes out left. **CLARA** *and* **SALLY** *are both at the sideboard.*

SALLY I looked out of a window a bit since, Mr. Henley, and I couldn't see anything for snow.

CLARA *(supporting her)* Oo—yes. I never saw so much.

HELEN *(laughing, mostly to* **KEITH***)* We'll have to have winter sports. *(She moves to small table right)*

KEITH Good idea! Well, we're easily the highest big hotel in England. We're nearly fifteen hundred feet up.

EDNA Is that all? It feels like fifteen thousand. *(She comes to left centre above the table)*

SALLY *(sarcastically, as she takes a dish away)* Yes, I'll bet it's cold up here in winter.

CLARA *(innocently, to her)* Well, I call it winter now, don't you?

SALLY We can't keep anything hidden from you, can we?

She goes out right, followed by **CLARA**. **MRS. HEATON** *enters left, looking rather depressed.*

KEITH What about it, Mrs. Heaton?

MRS. HEATON No, the 'phone's quite dead.

KEITH Are you sure?

MRS. HEATON Yes. Something must have happened to the line. Are you ready, Miss Sandars?

EDNA *(pushing her chair in)* What, are you still going on with your stocktaking?

MRS. HEATON Why not?

EDNA *(dramatically)* Snowed up! Cut off from the world! And we're still counting sheets and pillowcases!

She and **MRS. HEATON** *go out left.* **JORDAN**, *who is slumped, gloomily smoking, groans.* **HELEN**, *who is now standing above the small table right, picks up the paper.*

JORDAN Keith, my friend, I told you this place was all wrong.

KEITH We did good business here last season.

JORDAN *(with mock despair)* This season they won't find us until the end of June. And what old Marini will say when he finds himself up here, after Bournemouth, and with that kitchen to run—and eight miles from a railway station, and a bad service—everything to be ordered so long in advance—he'll go back to Italy and take his chance with Mussolini. He's the best chef the company has, too. And I am the next best. They might as well have sent us to Greenland.

KEITH I like that! And Chadwick told me you specially asked to come here this season.

JORDAN *(gloomily, moving to right of the table)* That's because I'm a fool, Keith. Every year I do one big damn silly thing. This year I got it in early. I asked to come here.

Enter **FRED POOLE** *from left. He is carrying a bottle wrapped in tissue-paper.*

FRED *(handing over the bottle)* Here you are, Mr. Jordan. I think this is what you wanted. Will you sign for it?

JORDAN *signs a chit at the sideboard.*

KEITH *(to* **HELEN***)* This is Fred, best cocktail-bar man in the company.

HELEN *(to* **FRED***)* Oh, yes—we've met before, haven't we? You were down at Cannes, when I went to help Mrs. Morrison there, last season.

FRED *(crossing to* **HELEN***)* That's right. Miss Tennant, isn't it? How d'you like it up here? Change from Cannes, all right, eh?

HELEN Yes. But it's my first chance as hostess on my own, so I can't grumble. But why did you leave Cannes?

FRED *(jauntily)* Oh—like to move round a bit, y'know, Miss Tennant. Don't make much money, but we do see life, eh?

JORDAN *(gloomily, coming to left of* **FRED***)* When do you think you will see life here, Fred?

FRED *(grinning)* You have a good pull at that bottle, Mr. Jordan, and you'll see anything you want to see.

KEITH Here, what's he got there?

JORDAN *(deliberately)* Old rum—very old rum.

KEITH *(with mock alarm)* Hoy, steady!

JORDAN When things are so bad, they cannot be any worse, I drink old rum. I think I will go round that kitchen once again, and then drink myself unconscious. *(He moves towards the door right)*

KEITH If it's half as bad as you say it is, you'd better let me have a full report in the morning.

JORDAN I will write it in rum and blood and tears.

He goes out right.

FRED Only about half my stuff's here, Mr. Henley. I'd better get through to head office first thing in the morning.

KEITH If you can.

FRED Why not?

KEITH Telephone line must be down. We can't get through. And I shouldn't be surprised if we're snowed in.

FRED *whistles.*

HELEN *(laughing)* Now don't you wish you were back in Cannes?

FRED That's right, Miss Tennant. Bitter cold up in the storeroom, and the bar too. Been wearing my overcoat. Can't we have the heat on up there, Mr. Henley?

KEITH No, Fred, we can't. Plant isn't working. *(Crossing to* **HELEN***)* Burton went off this morning to get some new parts.

Enter **SALLY**, *followed by* **CLARA**. **FRED** *moves to the door left.*

SALLY *(lighting up)* Hello, Fred!

FRED Sally Philips! Keeping well?

SALLY I was before I landed up here. *(To* **CLARA**, *impressively)* This is Fred.

CLARA *(impressed, to* **FRED***)* Oo, I've heard a lot about you.

FRED Well, don't believe all you hear. That's right, isn't it, Mr. Henley?

He takes out a cigarette in dashing manner, lights it neatly with a lighter, nods and winks and goes off left. **CLARA** *and* **SALLY** *gaze after him in profound*

admiration, then slowly go on clearing during the following dialogue.

KEITH *(to* **HELEN***)* No, you needn't have come here so early, you know—

HELEN *(smiling)* That's not very complimentary.

KEITH *(hastily)* Oh—I mean—I'm awfully glad you did—naturally—

HELEN Why—naturally?

KEITH *(warmly, but confusedly)* Well, I mean, I was looking forward to seeing as much of you as I could. And your being here is the only bright spot in this show just now. But I was thinking about *you*. It's beastly uncomfortable, with just a skeleton staff like this, and there can't be much for you to do.

HELEN No, I don't suppose there is, but I was dead keen to get started, so when they told me at head office you people were coming up, I thought I'd better come too and see if my things were going to be all right. As a matter of fact, I've put in some pretty good work already—taken notes of what there is and what there isn't—

KEITH *(enthusiastically)* Good! Give them to me and I'll see you get what you want.

HELEN *(rising and crossing to right of the table)* And I've got some rather bright ideas about turning that long lounge into a proper games room.

KEITH *(coming down to her and crossing left with her)* Just what we want, of course. Look here, I know it's filthily cold along there and you're probably rather tired—but would you like to show me what exactly you'd like to do?

HELEN Love to. Wait a minute—where's my notebook? I feel very grand with my notebook.

KEITH *(escorting her out left)* You *look* very grand with your notebook.

They go out. **SALLY** *and* **CLARA** *stop work at once.*

CLARA *(whispering urgently)* See the way he looked at 'er. Oo—proper case, I calls it. Make a nice pair, wouldn't they?

SALLY Yes, all right.

CLARA *(above the table—slowly folding serviettes)* Oo—I think she's lovely. I think he's lovely too.

SALLY Go on. I suppose you think everything in the garden's lovely. Sentimental, that's what you are.

CLARA *(innocently)* I know. Aren't you?

SALLY No, I've seen too much. It takes a lot to take me in now. *(She pauses—then comes down to* **CLARA***, polishing a tumbler)* What do you think of Fred?

CLARA I thought he was lovely too.

SALLY He's a smart boy, Fred is. Clever. Nice manners with everybody, high or low. Makes a lot o' money too, Fred does.

CLARA *(rather wistfully)* Is he married?

SALLY Not that I know of. And if there's been one after him, there's been hundreds. Won't let him alone. Guests too—rich women. I've seen them in his bar.

CLARA *(aghast)* Were they after him too?

SALLY Yes. Some of these rich women's worse than we are—and we're bad enough. *(She goes back to the sideboard)*

CLARA What does *she* do?

SALLY Who? Miss Tennant?

CLARA Yes.

SALLY She's sort of hostess. She introduces 'em, and asks 'em if they'd like to play tennis or golf or cards.

CLARA Well, don't they know whether they'd like to play?

SALLY No, some of 'em don't know anything. Half barmy. They build these hotels for them people.

CLARA And is that all she'll do?

SALLY Well, she's at it all day and half the night, 'cos she has to ask 'em if they'd like to dance at night—they don't know until she asks 'em—and she has to be polite and smile all the time and say *(with burlesque of* **HELEN***'s best Mayfair accent)*, "Oh yers, of cors, how jally ripping!" Drive you potty!

MRS. HEATON *enters left and looks round quickly.*

MRS. HEATON *(a trifle hesitantly, staying at the door)* Where's Mr. Jordan?

SALLY *(coolly)* He's along there somewhere *(indicating kitchens)*—drinking himself unconscious.

MRS. HEATON *(angrily)* How dare you! What do you mean?

SALLY Well, that's what he said he was going to do.

MRS. HEATON *gives her a furious look and then marches off right.* **SALLY** *and* **CLARA** *look after her, then look at each other.*

CLARA *(lowering her voice)* What's matter with her?

SALLY Don't ask me. It just shows you. They said she was the nicest staff manageress in the company. My friend was under her at the Bournemouth hotel and said you couldn't wish for anybody nicer.

CLARA Well, I don't think she's nice.

SALLY Nice! If she's like this now, when there's just a few of us here, all being matey like, what's she going to be like when everybody comes and we're run off our feet? She's going to be murder.

CLARA *(as if this followed)* I think I'd better make some more tea.

SALLY Yes, you do.

CLARA *goes off right.* **MRS. HEATON** *comes in right carrying the bottle that* **JORDAN** *went off with. The*

tissue-paper is torn. She marches straight out left with it, looking determined. **SALLY** *watches her, then calls.*

Hoy, Clara. Did you see what she had with her?

CLARA *(slicking her head in, confidentially)* I didn't notice. What was it?

SALLY *(triumphantly, as she folds up the tablecloth)* It was that bottle Mr. Jordan took in there. She's taken it away from him.

CLARA *(gasping)* But how could she?

SALLY Now you're asking. He's big enough to stand up for his own bottle.

CLARA She's nothing to do with him, has she?

SALLY I didn't know she had. But she can go and take his drink away from him.

CLARA *(eagerly)* Then she must have something to do with him.

As she says this, **EDNA SANDARS** *strolls in left.* **CLARA***'s head disappears.*

EDNA What's the argument?

SALLY *(approaching with the folded tablecloth and speaking confidentially)* How can Mrs. Heaton go and take Mr. Jordan's bottle away from him?

EDNA *(solemnly)* I give it up, Sally. What's the answer?

She sits left of the table.

SALLY Well, that's what we want to know.

EDNA Oh—I thought you'd invented a dirty riddle. Where is everybody? Where's Keith Henley?

SALLY He had a very tender conversation with Miss Tennant, and then they went off to look at one of the lounges.

She puts the cloth on the sideboard.

EDNA *(significantly)* Ah, we're all having a very long and busy day, aren't we?

CLARA *pops her head in right.*

CLARA *(excitedly)* I heard a car. Round at the back.

SALLY Go right through and see.

CLARA *goes.*

Clara's a nice girl, but straight out of the egg. I wonder who's there.

EDNA Probably yesterday's milk.

JORDAN *enters from right, gloomier than ever.*

JORDAN I heard a car.

EDNA I've been hearing a lot about it too.

JORDAN *(coming to below right of the table and lowering his voice)* Do you know if Fred's up in his store-room?

EDNA I think so.

JORDAN Let me see, you were working with—er—Mrs. Heaton just now.

EDNA Yes, but I tore myself away. I think she's having fun by herself now with the counterpanes.

JORDAN *crosses to the door left in front of* **EDNA.**

Want to see her?

JORDAN *(in a tiny whisper)* No. Fred.

He goes out right **EDNA** *and* **SALLY** *look at each other.*

EDNA Yes, you're right. There's a mystery there

SALLY You see—

EDNA Yes, I remember. Why did she take his bottle away? I still don't know.

CLARA *enters right, all a-goggle, followed by* **CROWTHER,** *dressed in heavy overcoat, still wet from snowflakes, and shaking his hat.* **CLARA** *stays at the door.*

CLARA It's Mr. Crowther.

EDNA *(recognizing him)* Not our own detective? It is. Nice work, Mr. Crowther. I knew somebody would find us. What did you use—bloodhounds?

CROWTHER *(right of the table)* I think I've heard this funny line before, haven't I?

EDNA *(rising and coming round to front of the table and speaking in same burlesque "bright" manner)* Yes, Mr. Crowther. Sandars is the name, Edna Sandars.

CROWTHER *(without enthusiasm)* I remember.

EDNA *(same manner)* Yes, the last time we met was last autumn at our Bournemouth establishment. You wanted thirty-five bob for expenses from the till and I wouldn't let you have it without a note from head office. We had quite an argument—

CROWTHER *(cutting in, heavily)* All right, all right. *(To* **CLARA***)* Mr. Henley's here, isn't he? Well, tell him *I'm* here.

SALLY I'll tell him.

EDNA No, let me. I'll enjoy it more than you.

She goes out quickly left. **CROWTHER** *is now taking off his overcoat.*

CROWTHER *(to* **CLARA***, who is staring at him)* What's your name?

CLARA Clara Packer.

CROWTHER Well, Miss Clara Packer, if you'd take this hat and coat and put 'em where they might dry, and then bring me a nice hot cup of tea, I'd be obliged.

CLARA *(taking his hat and coat)* I was just making some tea.

CROWTHER That's a good girl.

CLARA *takes things out right.* **SALLY** *follows to the door right with the tray.* **CROWTHER** *notices her.*

Hello, I've met you before. Where was it?

SALLY *(sulkily)* London.

CROWTHER You mean at our London hotel?

SALLY *nods sulkily.*

Yes—now wait a minute. You— *(He rubs his chin, looking at her)*

SALLY *(bitterly)* Yes, I was one of the five chambermaids you put in a row and accused of stealing a fur coat—

CROWTHER Ah—that was it, yes. The fur-coat job.

SALLY *(indignantly, her back to the open door)* Yes, and though I'd never set eyes on the coat and hadn't looked after the woman who said she'd lost it, you put me through it with the other four, and after that everybody in the place looked sideways at me.

CROWTHER *(ignoring this outburst)* Let's see—what was *your* name?

SALLY *(at the door, impudently)* You'll be surprised. Greta Garbo.

She exits. **CROWTHER** *looks at the door and nods his head solemnly, as if saying to himself, "You look out, my girl." He has just finished doing this, when* **KEITH HENLEY**, *looking astonished, enters quickly left.*

KEITH Crowther! What on earth are you doing here?

CROWTHER *(with a rueful grin)* Trying to find the North Pole. That's what it feels like. But head office told me to go round and see you all, on a special job.

KEITH Yes, but we're not open, you know. Staff's not here yet. Only a few of us, taking stock, and so on. The rest of 'em won't be here for another week.

CROWTHER Oh, I know that. But I want to know exactly who is here.

KEITH All right, but what's the idea?

CROWTHER *(seriously)* Can't tell you that, yet. But it's a serious job. They don't send me out like this for fun, y'know. Can we talk here?

KEITH Yes. Sit down.

He indicates the two chairs right. **CROWTHER** *takes the lower one,* **KEITH** *the other.*

It's about as good as anywhere. Better, because at least it's warm. You see, the big plant's broken down. Burton, the engineer, went off this morning. We're in a mess here, Crowther. Latest news is that the telephone line must be down. Can't get through to the exchange. Jolly, isn't it?

CROWTHER Yes, and it may be worse before it's better. It's still snowing like the devil, and it took me all my time to get my little car through at all. Wouldn't surprise me if we're not snowed up in a few hours' time.

Enter **CLARA** *right with a cup of tea, which she puts on the upstage right corner of the table, then fetches the sugar-basin from the sideboard.*

Ah—thanks—just what I wanted.

CLARA *(languishingly to* **KEITH***)* Wouldn't you like one, Mr. Henley?

KEITH No, thank you, Clara. But keep the kettle going. And clean up in there.

CLARA Yes, sir. *(She crosses to the door right)*

CROWTHER That's right. We don't want to be disturbed for a few minutes—see?

CLARA *nods and goes out right, shutting the door behind her.* **CROWTHER** *crosses to the table and picks up the tea,*

then perches on the corner of the table, facing **KEITH**. *The latter rises.*

KEITH You want to know who's here *now,* eh?

CROWTHER *(takes a sip of tea, then produces a notebook)* Yes, I want to know who's here—and why?

KEITH *(confidentially)* Right. But first, I ought to explain we're making a big push here this season. Last week, at head office, the Chief told me they think they can make this an English *Gleneagles*. We're having Chick Blaze's Band—which'll cost 'em two hundred and fifty a week—right through from June to September. And though they've kept me on as assistant manager—thank God!—they're moving in some of the best people we've got in nearly all the departments. So we're all on our toes. *(During the following* **KEITH** *moves down stage right and back occasionally while* **CROWTHER** *jots down his notes)* But you want to know who's here now. Well, there's Arnold Jordan who'll be chief assistant chef under old Marini. He's been reporting on the kitchens—with Burton to explain the plant. You know Arnold, don't you?

CROWTHER Yes, I think so. Frenchman, isn't he?

KEITH I believe he's only half-French. Nice chap. Bit gloomy, just now.

CROWTHER What's he gloomy about?

KEITH I dunno. Perhaps the weather's getting him down. He doesn't like the kitchens either. Then there's Miss Tennant—Helen Tennant. She's sports and social hostess.

CROWTHER What's she doing here already?

KEITH Oh—well—this is her first big job—she was assistant before—and she wanted to look round and make suggestions in good time. She's very keen, y'know, not like some of the girls we've had. Just the right type.

CROWTHER Was she down at Cannes part of the time last year?

KEITH Yes. Know her?

CROWTHER *(making a note)* I think so. Next?

KEITH Mrs. Heaton. She's going to be staff manageress, but she's doing housekeeper's work just now. Very hard worker, doesn't say much for herself. She's new to me, but you may have struck her.

CROWTHER *(making a note)* Yes, I remember her.

KEITH Then Fred's here—you know, in the cocktail bar.

CROWTHER Oh—he's going to be up here, is he? But what's *he* come so soon for?

KEITH He's only come for a couple of days, to take stock and look the bar over. He says head office never get him all the various fancy drinks he needs in time, so he'd come and then ginger them up. The cocktail bar here should be worth a lot this season.

CROWTHER *(making a note)* He was down at Cannes last season too, wasn't he? Then there's this cheeky girl—what's her name—Sandars? I suppose she's bookkeeping?

KEITH Yes, she'll be up here this season. They sent her in advance to help us with stock and letters. She's a secretary as well as a bookkeeper.

CROWTHER *(making a note)* She's got a lot o' lip. Always had.

KEITH Yes, I've had to pull her up once or twice already. She's been rude to Miss Tennant, who's been very decent about it, considering she's not used to that kind of thing.

CROWTHER Are these two the only maids they've sent up so far?

KEITH Sally and Clara? Yes. Just to look after us, and help Mrs. Heaton. Don't know much about them.

CROWTHER *(closing the notebook)* Oh—I can attend to them. I know their sort, and I've had dealings with one of 'em already. And that's the lot?

KEITH Yes.

CROWTHER *(finishing his tea)* Right. Now don't mention to anybody I've come round on a special job. If they want to know, just tell 'em I've dropped in.

KEITH *nods, and goes to the door right to call one of the maids.*

KEITH Oh—Sally—Clara—one of you. Tell Mrs. Heaton that Mr. Crowther's here and he'll want a bedroom.

CROWTHER I'd like a warm one.

KEITH *(grinning)* You're out of luck.

CLARA *goes through to the door left and out.*

Your car all right?

CROWTHER Should be. I ran it right under the back entrance—you know that space there? Seemed warm enough under there.

KEITH Yes, that's where I keep mine. And Miss Tennant's got hers there.

Enter **JORDAN** *left. He is surprised to see* **CROWTHER.** *He crosses right above the table.*

JORDAN Hello! I didn't expect to see you here, Mr. Crowther.

CROWTHER No, I ran in for a cheap night's lodging. How are you, Mr. Jordan?

JORDAN Not so good, not so good. *(He brings* **CROWTHER** *down right)* Now—tell me—you have been a policeman—

CROWTHER I was nearly twenty years at Scotland Yard, if that's what you mean by being a policeman—

JORDAN Yes, it is. Well, then, tell me something. Is there a nice big prison in a warmer place than this? Not Dartmoor, that must be as bad as this.

KEITH *crosses centre. upstage, sits on the table and watches these two with amusement.*

CROWTHER Well, there's Parkhurst, in the Isle of Wight.

JORDAN That's the place. Now, supposing I commit a crime, and I am found out, would they send me to Parkhurst?

CROWTHER Why, would you like to try your hand at something?

JORDAN Yes. Something with plenty of money in it. If it comes off, I go at once to the South of France or the Argentine. If I am found out, they send me to Parkhurst in the Isle of Wight. And that will be better than staying here.

CROWTHER The food wouldn't be as good.

JORDAN Food! I hate food! Besides—once in prison, perhaps they would make me chef. I think I should like to cook for convicts for a change. I am tired of the rich. I am tired of trying to tickle their fat stomachs.

KEITH Hoy, don't you start going Bolshie, Arnold!

Enter **HELEN TENNANT** *left, looking animated. She crosses right centre below the table, putting her handbag on the bottom left-hand corner as she passes.*

JORDAN Miss Tennant, you are looking very, very pretty. *(He kisses his hand to her and moves up right)*

HELEN How nice! That's probably because I've just been having a row.

KEITH You've probably met Mr. Crowther before, haven't you? He's the company's detective.

HELEN *(smiling)* Yes, I think I have. How d'you do?

CROWTHER *greets her right.* **KEITH** *drops down left of her.*

CROWTHER How d'*you* do, Miss Tennant? And who've you been having a row with?

HELEN *(more to* **KEITH***)* After you left, the Sandars girl really was the limit. She seemed to think—just because I'd ignored her bits of rudeness, so far—she could say what she liked. So she started again, and I flared up and jolly well ticked her off.

KEITH Quite right.

CROWTHER Yes, I'm all for that piece getting it in the neck. Too cheeky by half.

FRED *looks in at the door left.*

FRED *(brightly)* Hello, Mr. Crowther. Just heard you'd arrived.

CROWTHER Came in out of the snow, Fred. *(He crosses centre below the table and shakes hands with* **FRED***, while* **JORDAN** *joins* **KEITH** *and* **HELEN***)* How are you?

FRED Might be worse. Thought about turning in soon. I've had a long day, checking up on everything.

CROWTHER Saw an old friend of yours in town, the other day, Fred. Charlie.

FRED What, Charlie Francis?

CROWTHER No, have another guess. Anyhow, they were just sending him up for two years.

FRED Couldn't have been an old friend of mine, then, Mr. Crowther.

CROWTHER Perhaps not, but you know him.

FRED *(with mock disgust)* I have to know too many people. That's what's wrong with my little job. Can't afford to be particular. If you're going to be taken bad in the night, Mr. Crowther, I *might* be able to find something that 'ud take the pain away. And my room's Number Twenty-Seven. Nighty-night, all.

THE OTHERS *(variously)* 'Night. Good night, Fred. Be good. *(Etc.)*

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