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TOWARDS ZERO

by Agatha Christie and Gerald Verner

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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TOWARDS ZERO was first presented by Peter Saunders at the St. James's Theatre, London, on September 4, 1956. The performance was directed by Murray MacDonald, with sets by Michael Weight. The cast was as follows:

THOMAS ROYDE	Cyril Raymond
KAY STRANGE	Mary Law
MARY ALDIN	Gillian Lind
MATHEW TREVES	Frederick Leister
NEVILE STRANGE	George Baker
LADY TRESSILIAN	Janet Barrow
AUDREY STRANGE	Gwen Cherrell
TED LATIMER	Michael Scott
SUPERINTENDENT BATTLE	William Kendall
INSPECTOR LEACH	Max Brimmell
P.C. BENSON	Michael Nightingale

CHARACTERS

THOMAS ROYDE

KAY STRANGE

MARY ALDIN

MATHEW TREVES

NEVILLE STRANGE

LADY TRESSILIAN

AUDREY STRANGE

TED LATIMER

SUPERINTENDENT BATTLE

INSPECTOR LEACH

P.C. BENSON

SETTING

The action of the play takes place in the drawing room at Gull's Point, Lady Tressilian's house, Saltcreek, Cornwall.

TIME

ACT I

Scene One: A morning in September.

Scene Two: After dinner, four days later.

ACT II

Scene One: Early the following morning.

Scene Two: Two hours later.

ACT III

Scene One: The next morning.

Scene Two: The same evening.

NOTES ON PUBLICATION

Arguably the best known adaptation of Agatha Christie's novel, *Towards Zero*, was that of prolific writer, Gerald Verner, in 1951. However, a few years ago, it was discovered that Agatha Christie had in fact written her own stage adaptation of the novel which was commissioned by the Shuberts in 1944 and we present both plays as part of The Collection.

Both versions of the text follow a similar narrative pattern. The events of both plays explore how the characters, through their various interactions move towards a 'zero hour' of murder. Both explore the idea that murder shouldn't be the beginning of a story but the end.

However, there are some important distinctions between the texts. Christie's adaptation is a three-act, five-scene drama set over eight days with thirteen actors whilst Verner's version is again three acts but with six scenes set over seven days involving eleven actors. Moreover, the setting is different; Christie's is set open air on the terrace of Lady Tressilian's house whereas Verner's takes a more familiar path and is set in the drawing room.

Both plays contain a familiar core group of characters however there are some important roles that differ. Angus McWhirter is perhaps the most important character missing from Verner's text but makes a very significant contribution to Christie's original. His interactions with Audrey are perhaps the most profound of the play – allowing Christie to explore thematically the notions of mortality, suicide, depression and even redemption. In place of McWhirter, Verner employs the shrewd and insightful Mathew Treves, a lawyer who is now house guest and confidant to Lady Tressilian. Verner also uses the well-known and notable Superintendent Battle to lead the murder investigation.

By all accounts Christie's adaptation is a more ambitious and dramatic piece of writing however Verner's play is structurally strong and provides a faithful and well realised adaptation of Christie's original novel.

ACT I

Scene One

(The drawing room at Gull's Point, Lady Tressilian's house at Saltcreek, Cornwall. A morning in September. It is a large, very beautiful room of exquisite taste. French windows open on to a terrace and a further door leads to the other parts of the house. A large bay window shows a view across the river to the Easterhead Bay Hotel. The room is furnished with a sofa and two armchairs, one of which has a standing sewing basket next to it. There is also a coffee table and a bureau bookcase with a framed photograph of Audrey on it. A low butler's tray has been set up with a variety of drinks and glasses. The room stands empty, except for an incongruous carpet sweeper which rests against the wall. THOMAS ROYDE enters immediately by the French windows. He is a good looking, middle-aged man, bronzed by many years in the sun. He carries a suitcase and a set of golf clubs. As he enters, the door leading to the rest of the house bangs shut as if someone had just rushed out. ROYDE shrugs, then moves to the bay window and stands gazing out. KAY STRANGE rushes in through the French windows, dressed in tennis kit. Clearly upset, she does not notice ROYDE. She takes a cigarette from the box on the coffee table then spots the photograph of Audrey. She quickly rips it from the frame,

tears it in half, then discards the pieces in the waste paper basket. ROYDE coughs discreetly.)

KAY. Oh! Who are you?

ROYDE. I've just walked up from the bus stop. I'm...

KAY. *(Interrupting.)* I know who you are. You're the man from Malaya.

ROYDE. *(Gravely.)* Yes, I'm the man from Malaya.

(There is a pause. ROYDE looks significantly at the waste paper basket.)

KAY. I just came in to get a cigarette.

(KAY looks at him guiltily. There is an awkward pause.)

Oh, hell, what's the good of explaining? What do I care what you think, anyway?

(She rushes out through the French windows.

ROYDE *stares thoughtfully after her. MARY ALDIN enters busily from the house. She is a dark haired woman of about thirty-six, reserved, pleasant and noncommittal in manner.)*

MARY. Mr. Royde?

(ROYDE holds out his hand.)

Lady Tressilian is not down yet. I am Mary Aldin, Lady Tressilian's dogsbody.

(They shake.)

ROYDE. Dogsbody?

MARY. The official term is secretary, but as I don't know shorthand – and what talents I do have are purely domestic – “dogsbody” is a much better word.

ROYDE. I know all about you. Lady Tressilian told me in her Christmas letter what a wonderful difference you had made to her.

MARY. I'm very fond of her. She has a lot of personality.

ROYDE. That's quite an understatement. How's her arthritis?

MARY. It makes her rather helpless, poor dear.

ROYDE. I'm sorry about that.

MARY. Can I offer you a drink?

ROYDE. No, thank you.

(He looks out the bay window.)

What's that great caravanserai over there?

MARY. That's the new Easterhead Bay Hotel. It was only finished last year. Isn't it a horror?

(She closes the window.)

Lady Tressilian doesn't like this window opened, she's always afraid that someone might fall out. Yes, Easterhead Bay is a terrific resort, you know, nowadays. I suppose when you came here as a boy there was nothing the other side of the estuary except a few fishermen's cottages.

(She pauses.)

You did come here for your school holiday, didn't you?

ROYDE. Yes, old Sir Mortimer used to take me out sailing, he was mad keen on sailing.

MARY. Yes. He was drowned out there.

ROYDE. Lady Tressilian saw it happen. I wonder she can go on living here.

MARY. I think she preferred to remain with her memories. But she won't have any boat kept here, she even had the boathouse pulled down.

ROYDE. So if I want to sail or go for a row, I've got to go to the ferry?

MARY. Or cross to the Easterhead side. That's where all the boats are nowadays.

ROYDE. I hate changes. Always have. *(Self-consciously.)* May I ask who else is staying here?

MARY. Old Mr. Treves – you know him?

(**ROYDE** *nods.*)

MARY. And the Stranges.

ROYDE. The Stranges? You mean Audrey Strange, Neville's first wife?

MARY. Audrey, yes. But Neville Strange and his *new* wife are here, too.

ROYDE. Isn't that a bit odd?

MARY. Lady Tressilian thinks it very odd indeed.

ROYDE. Bit awkward, wot?

(**MATHEW TREVES** *enters by the French windows. He is an elderly and distinguished lawyer of great experience and shrewdness. He retired from his London firm some years ago and is now a keen observer of human nature.*)

TREVES. Rather too much glare on the terrace today.

(*He sees* **ROYDE.**.)

Ah, Thomas. Nice to see you after all these years.

(*They shake hands.*)

ROYDE. I'm very glad to be here.

(**MARY** *looks over Royde's suitcase and golf clubs.*)

MARY. Shall I take your things up to your room?

ROYDE. No, no, I can't let you do that.

(*He rushes over and picks them up. MARY nods then leads the way, catching sight of the carpet sweeper as she does so.*)

MARY. (*Vexed.*) Really! Mrs. Barrett! These daily women are impossible. It makes Lady Tressilian very angry when things are left all over the place.

ROYDE. I think my sudden arrival on the terrace frightened the poor woman.

(*He looks back as* **TREVES**, *who smiles.*)

MARY. Oh, I see.

(MARY picks up the sweeper and exits into the house. ROYDE follows. TREVES quickly notices the empty photo frame then the torn photograph in the waste paper basket. He stoops to pick up the pieces. His eyebrows rise and he makes a little "Tut, tut.")

KAY. *(Offstage.)* Where are you going to, Neville?

NEVILLE. *(Offstage.)* Only into the house for a moment.

(TREVES quickly puts the pieces of the photograph back into the waste paper basket. NEVILLE STRANGE enters by the French windows wearing tennis kit.)

Isn't Audrey here?

TREVES. No.

NEVILLE. Where is she? Do you know?

TREVES. I have no idea.

KAY. *(Offstage.)* Neville – Neville!

NEVILLE. *(Frowning.)* Oh, damn.

KAY. *(Offstage.)* Neville!

NEVILLE. *(Calling.)* Coming – coming.

(ROYDE enters from the house.)

ROYDE. Neville.

NEVILLE. Hullo, Thomas.

(They shake hands.)

What time did you get here?

ROYDE. Just now.

NEVILLE. Must be quite a long time since I saw you last.

When was it you were home, three years ago?

ROYDE. Seven.

NEVILLE. Good Lord, is it, really? How time flies.

KAY. *(Offstage.)* Neville!

NEVILLE. *(Calling.)* All right, Kay.

(**KAY** enters by the French windows.)

KAY. Why can't you come? Ted and I are waiting.

NEVILLE. I just came to see if Audrey –

(**KAY** interrupts. She takes **NEVILLE** by the hand and leads him out by the French windows.)

KAY. Oh, bother Audrey, we can get on quite well...

(*Their voices die away as they exit.*)

ROYDE. And who is Kay?

TREVES. The present Mrs. Neville Strange.

(**MARY** enters from the house carrying some sewing. She holds the door open and **LADY TRESSILIAN** enters using a walking stick. She is a white-haired, aristocratic looking woman of immense gravitas.)

Good morning, Camilla.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Good morning, Mathew!

(She sees **ROYDE** and greets him with great affection.)

Well, Thomas, so here you are. I'm very glad to see you.

ROYDE. (*Shyly.*) Very glad to be here.

(**MARY** puts the sewing down and arranges the cushions on the armchair.)

LADY TRESSILIAN. Tell me all about yourself.

ROYDE. (*Mumbling.*) Nothing to tell.

(**LADY TRESSILIAN** studies his face.)

LADY TRESSILIAN. You look exactly the same as you did at fourteen. That same boiled owl look. And no more conversation now than you had then.

ROYDE. Never had the gift of the gab.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Then it's time you learnt. Have some sherry? Mathew? Thomas?

ROYDE. Thank you.

(**MARY** pours two glasses of sherry. **LADY TRESSILIAN** indicates the sofa.)

LADY TRESSILIAN. Then go and sit down. Somebody's got to amuse me by bringing me all the gossip.

(*She sits in the armchair. ROYDE waits politely then takes a seat on the sofa.*)

Why can't you be more like Adrian? I wish you'd known his brother, Mary, a really brilliant young man, witty, amusing – all the things that Thomas isn't. And don't go grinning at me, Thomas Royde, as though I were praising you. I'm scolding you.

ROYDE. Adrian was certainly the showman of our family.

(**MARY** hands out the sherry.)

MARY. Did he – was he – killed in the war?

ROYDE. No, he was killed in a motor accident two years ago.

MARY. How dreadful!

TREVES. The impossible way young people drive cars nowadays!

(**LADY TRESSILIAN** picks up her sewing.)

ROYDE. In his case it was some fault in the steering.

(**ROYDE** takes his pipe from his pocket and looks at **LADY TRESSILIAN**.)

I'm so sorry, may I?

LADY TRESSILIAN. I wouldn't know you without your pipe. But don't think you can just sit back and puff contentedly while you're here. You've got to exert yourself and help.

ROYDE. (*Surprised.*) Help?

LADY TRESSILIAN. We've got a difficult situation on our hands. Have you been told who's here?

(**MARY** takes a glass of sherry to **LADY TRESSILIAN**.)

No, no, much too early, pour it back into the decanter.

(**MARY** does so.)

ROYDE. Yes, I've just heard.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Well, don't you think it's disgraceful?

ROYDE. Well...

TREVES. You'll have to be a little more explicit, Camilla.

LADY TRESSILIAN. I intend to be. When I was a girl such things did not happen. Men had their affairs, naturally, but they did not allow them to break up their married life.

TREVES. Regrettable though the modern point of view may be, one has to accept it, Camilla.

(MARY takes a seat on the arm of the sofa.)

LADY TRESSILIAN. That's not the point. We were all delighted when Neville married Audrey. Such a sweet, gentle girl.

(She turns to ROYDE.)

You were all in love with her – you, Adrian and Neville. Neville won.

ROYDE. Naturally. He always wins.

(LADY TRESSILIAN looks at him with frustration.)

LADY TRESSILIAN. Of all the defeatist...

ROYDE. I don't blame her, Neville had everything – good looks, first-class athlete, even had a shot at swimming the channel.

TREVES. And all the kudos of that early Everest attempt – never stuck up about it.

ROYDE. *Mens sana in corpore sana.*

LADY TRESSILIAN. Sometimes I think that's the only bit of Latin you men ever learn in your expensive education.

TREVES. My dear Camilla, you must allow for its being invariably quoted by one's housemaster whenever he is slightly embarrassed.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Mary, I wish you wouldn't sit on the arms of chairs, you know how much I dislike it.

MARY. Sorry, Camilla.

(She quickly sits on the sofa.)

LADY TRESSILIAN. Now where was I?

MARY. You were saying that Audrey married Neville.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Oh, yes. Well, Audrey married Neville and we were all delighted. Mortimer was particularly pleased, wasn't he, Mathew?

TREVES. Yes, yes.

LADY TRESSILIAN. And they were very happy together until this creature, Kay, came along. How Neville could leave Audrey for a girl like Kay, I simply cannot imagine.

TREVES. I can – I've seen it happen so often.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Kay is quite the wrong wife for Neville – no background.

TREVES. But a singularly attractive young woman.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Bad stock. Her mother was notorious all over the Riviera.

ROYDE. What for?

LADY TRESSILIAN. Never you mind. What an upbringing for a girl. Kay made a dead set at Neville from the moment they met, and never rested until she got him to leave Audrey and go off with her. I blame Kay entirely for the whole thing.

TREVES *(Amused.)* I'm sure you do. You're very fond of Neville.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Neville's a fool. Breaking up his marriage for a silly infatuation. It nearly broke poor Audrey's heart.

(She turns to ROYDE.)

She went to your mother at the vicarage and practically had a nervous breakdown.

ROYDE. Er – yes – I know.

TREVES. When the divorce went through, Neville married Kay.

LADY TRESSILIAN. If I had been true to my principles I should have refused to receive them here.

TREVES. If one sticks too rigidly to one's principles, one would hardly see anybody.

LADY TRESSILIAN. You're very cynical, Mathew, but it's quite true. I've accepted Kay as Neville's wife, though I shall never really like her. But I must say, I was dumbfounded and very much upset, wasn't I, Mary?

MARY. Yes, you were, Camilla.

LADY TRESSILIAN. When Neville wrote asking if he could come home with Kay, under the pretext, if you please, that it would be nice if Audrey and Kay could be friends. (*Scornfully.*) Friends! I said I couldn't entertain such a suggestion for a moment, and that it would be very painful for Audrey.

TREVES. And what did he say to that?

LADY TRESSILIAN. He replied that he had already consulted Audrey and she thought it a good idea.

TREVES. And did Audrey think it a good idea?

LADY TRESSILIAN. Apparently, yes.

(She tosses a knot of silk to MARY.)

Unravel that.

MARY. Well, she said she did. Quite firmly.

LADY TRESSILIAN. But Audrey is obviously embarrassed and unhappy. If you ask me, it's just Neville being like Henry the Eighth.

ROYDE. Henry the Eighth?

LADY TRESSILIAN. Conscience. Neville feels guilty about Audrey and is trying to justify himself.

(MARY rises and puts the silk in the work-basket.)

Oh! I don't understand any of this modern nonsense.

(She turns to MARY.)

Do you?

MARY. In a way.

LADY TRESSILIAN. And you, Thomas?

ROYDE. Understand Audrey – but I don't understand Nevile. It's not like Nevile.

TREVES. I agree. Not like Nevile at all, to go looking for trouble.

MARY. Perhaps it was Audrey's suggestion.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Oh, no. Nevile says it was entirely his idea.

MARY. Perhaps he thinks it was.

(TREVES looks curiously at MARY.)

LADY TRESSILIAN. What a fool the boy is, bringing two women together who are both in love with him.

(ROYDE shifts uncomfortably.)

Audrey has behaved perfectly, but Nevile himself has paid far too much attention to her, and as a result Kay has become jealous, and she has no kind of self-control. It is all most embarrassing.

(She turns to TREVES.)

Isn't it?

(TREVES is gazing towards the French windows and does not hear.)

Mathew?

TREVES. There is undeniably a certain tension...

LADY TRESSILIAN. I'm glad you admit it.

(There is a knock on the door leading to the house.)

Who's that?

MARY. Mrs. Barrett, I expect, wanting to know about something.

LADY TRESSILIAN. *(Irritably.)* I wish you could teach these women that they only knock on bedroom doors.

(MARY exits into the house.)

LADY TRESSILIAN. The last so-called butler we had, actually whistled, *"Come into the Garden, Maud"* as he served at the table!

(**MARY** pops her head round the door.)

MARY. It's only about the lunch, Camilla. I'll see to it.

(*She exits again.*)

LADY TRESSILIAN. I don't know what I should do without Mary. She's so self-effacing that I sometimes wonder whether she has a self of her own.

TREVES. I know. She's been with you nearly two years now – but what's her background?

LADY TRESSILIAN. Her father was a professor of some kind, I believe. He was an invalid and she nursed him for years. Poor Mary, she's never had any life of her own. And now, perhaps, it's too late.

(*She rises and puts her sewing in the basket.*)

TREVES. I wonder.

(*He looks out the French windows.*)

They're still playing tennis.

(**ROYDE** rises and looks out as well.)

LADY TRESSILIAN. Nevile and Kay?

TREVES. No, Kay and that friend of hers from the Easterhead Bay Hotel – young Latimer.

LADY TRESSILIAN. That theatrical looking young man. Just the sort of friend she would have.

TREVES. One wonders what he does for a living.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Lives by his wits, I imagine.

TREVES. Or by his looks. A decorative young man – interesting shaped head. The last man I saw with a head shaped like that was at the Central Criminal Court – a case of brutal assault on an elderly jeweller.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Mathew! Do you mean to tell me?

TREVES. (*Perturbed.*) No, no, no, you misunderstand me. I am making no suggestion of any kind. I was only commenting on a matter of anatomical structure.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Oh, I thought...

TREVES. What reminded me of that was that I met a very old friend of mine this morning, Superintendent Battle of Scotland Yard. He's staying down here on holiday with his nephew who's in the local police.

LADY TRESSILIAN. You and your interest in criminology! The truth is I am thoroughly jumpy. I feel the whole time as though something was going to happen.

TREVES. Yes, there is a suggestion of gunpowder in the air. One little spark might set off an explosion.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Must you talk as though you were Guy Fawkes? Say something cheerful.

TREVES. (*Smiling.*) What can I say? "Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them – but not for love."

LADY TRESSILIAN. And he calls that cheerful. I shall go out on the terrace for a little.

(**TREVES** looks off out the French windows again. **LADY TRESSILIAN** pulls **ROYDE** aside.)

(*Confidentially.*) Don't make a fool of yourself a second time.

ROYDE. What do you mean?

LADY TRESSILIAN. You know quite well what I mean. Last time, you let Neville walk off with Audrey under your nose.

ROYDE. Is it likely she'd have preferred me to Neville?

LADY TRESSILIAN. She might have if you'd asked her!

(*There is a pause.*)

Are you going to ask her this time?

ROYDE. (*Forcefully.*) You bet your life I am.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Thank God for that.

(AUDREY enters by the French windows. She is very fair but carries a strange air of repressed emotion. With ROYDE however she is completely natural and happy.)

AUDREY. Thomas – dear Thomas.

(ROYDE takes AUDREY's outstretched hands. LADY TRESSILIAN looks at them warmly for a moment then turns quickly to TREVES.)

LADY TRESSILIAN. Mathew, your arm!

(TREVES offers his arm and they exit by the French windows. There is a pause.)

AUDREY. It's lovely to see you.

ROYDE. *(Shyly.)* Good to see you.

AUDREY. It's years since you've been home. Don't they give you any leave on rubber plantations?

ROYDE. I was coming home two years ago –

(He breaks off awkwardly.)

AUDREY. Two years ago! And then you didn't.

ROYDE. My dear, you know there were reasons.

AUDREY. *(Affectionately.)* Oh, Thomas, you look just the same as when we last met – pipe and all.

ROYDE. Do I?

AUDREY. Oh, Thomas, I am so glad you've come back. Now, at last, I can talk to someone. Thomas, there's something wrong.

ROYDE. Wrong?

AUDREY. Something's changed about this place. Ever since I arrived, I've felt there was something not quite right. Don't you feel there's something different? No, how can you, you've only just come. The only person who doesn't seem to feel it is Nevile.

ROYDE. Damn Nevile!

AUDREY. You don't like him?

ROYDE. *(Intensely.)* I hate his guts, always have.

(He quickly recovers himself.)

Sorry.

AUDREY. I didn't know...

ROYDE. Lots of things one doesn't know about people.

AUDREY. *(Thoughtfully.)* Yes – lots of things.

ROYDE. Gather there's a spot of bother. What made you come here at the same time as Neville and his new wife? Did you have to agree?

AUDREY. Yes. Oh, I know you can't understand...

ROYDE. But I do understand. I know all about it.

(AUDREY looks doubtfully at ROYDE.)

(Passionately.) I know exactly what you've been through but it's all past, Audrey – it's over. You must forget the past and think of the future.

(NEVILLE enters by the French windows.)

NEVILLE. Hullo, Audrey, where have you been all the morning?

AUDREY. I haven't been anywhere particular.

NEVILLE. I couldn't find you anywhere. What about coming down to the beach for a swim before lunch?

AUDREY No, I don't think so.

(She looks among the magazines on the coffee table.)

Have you seen this week's Illustrated London News?

NEVILLE. No. Come on, the water will be really warm today.

(NEVILLE holds out his hand to her.)

AUDREY. Actually, I told Mary I'd go into Saltington with her to the shop.

NEVILLE. Mary won't mind. Come on, Audrey.

(He takes her hand.)

AUDREY. No, really...

(KAY enters by the French windows. NEVILLE turns to her.)

NEVILLE. I'm trying to persuade Audrey to come bathing.

KAY. Oh? And what does Audrey say?

AUDREY. Audrey says "no".

(She withdraws her hand from NEVILLE's and exits into the house.)

ROYDE. If you'll excuse me, I'll go and unpack.

(ROYDE pauses a moment by the bureau bookcase, he selects a book then exits into the house.)

KAY. So that's that. Coming, Neville?

NEVILLE. Well, I'm not sure.

KAY. *(Impatiently.)* Well, make up your mind.

(NEVILLE looks off after AUDREY.)

NEVILLE. I'm not sure I won't just have a shower and laze in the garden.

KAY. It's a perfect day for bathing, come on.

NEVILLE. What have you done with the boyfriend?

KAY. Ted? I left him on the beach and came up to find you. You can laze on the beach.

(She touches his hair. He promptly moves her hand away.)

NEVILLE. With Latimer, I suppose? Doesn't appeal to me a lot.

KAY. You don't like Ted, do you?

NEVILLE. Not madly. But if it amuses you to pull him around on a string...

(KAY tweaks his ear playfully.)

KAY. I believe you're jealous.

NEVILLE. Of Latimer? Nonsense, Kay.

(He pushes her hand away.)

KAY. Ted's very attractive.

NEVILLE. I'm sure he is. He has that lithe South American charm.

KAY. You needn't sneer. He's very popular with women.

NEVILLE. Especially with the ones over fifty.

KAY. (*Pleased.*) You are jealous.

NEVILLE. My dear, I couldn't care less – he just doesn't count.

KAY. I think you're very rude about my friends. I have to put up with yours.

NEVILLE. What do you mean by that?

KAY. Dreary old Lady Tressilian and stuffy old Mr. Treves – and all the rest of them. Do you think I find them amusing?

(*Pause.*)

Nevile, do we have to stay on here? Can't we go away tomorrow? It's so boring.

NEVILLE. We've only just come.

KAY. We've been here four days! Four whole long days. Do let's go, Nevile, please.

NEVILLE. Why?

KAY. I want to go. We could easily find some excuse. Please, darling.

NEVILLE. Darling, it's out of the question. We came for a fortnight and we're going to stay a fortnight. You don't seem to understand. Sir Mortimer Tressilian was my guardian. I came here for holidays as a boy – Gull's Point was practically my home. Camilla would be terribly hurt.

KAY. (*Impatiently.*) Oh, all right, all right. I suppose we have to suck up to old Camilla because of getting all that money when she dies.

NEVILLE. (*Angrily.*) It's not a question of sucking up. I wish you wouldn't look at it like that. She's no control over the money. Old Mortimer left it in trust to come to me and my wife at her death. Don't you realise it's a question of affection?

KAY. Not with me, it isn't, she hates me.

NEVILLE. Don't be stupid.

KAY. Yes, she does. She looks down that bony nose of hers at me – and Mary Aldin talks to me as though I were someone she'd just met on a train. They only have me here on sufferance. You don't seem to know what goes on.

NEVILLE. They always seem to me to be very nice to you. You imagine things.

KAY. Of course they're polite. But they know how to get under my skin all right. I'm an interloper. That's what they feel.

NEVILLE. Well – I suppose that's only natural.

KAY. Oh, yes, I daresay it's quite natural. They're devoted to Audrey, aren't they? Dear, well bred, cool, colourless Audrey. Camilla has never forgiven me for taking Audrey's place. I'll tell you something – Audrey gives me the creeps. You never know what she's thinking.

NEVILLE. Oh, nonsense, Kay, don't be absurd.

(He sits heavily on the sofa.)

KAY. Audrey's never forgiven you for marrying me. Once or twice I've seen her looking at you – and the way she looked at you frightened me.

NEVILLE. You're prejudiced, Kay. Audrey's been charming. No one could have been nicer.

KAY. It seems like that, but it isn't true. There's something behind it all.

(There is a pause.)

Let's go away, at once, before it's too late.

NEVILLE. Don't be melodramatic. I'm not going to upset old Camilla just because you work yourself up into a state about nothing at all.

KAY. It isn't nothing at all! I don't think you know the first thing about your precious Audrey.

(LADY TRESSILIAN and TREVES enter by the French windows.)

NEVILE. (*Furiously.*) She isn't my precious Audrey!

KAY. Isn't she? Anyone would think so, the way you follow her about.

(*She catches sight of LADY TRESSILIAN.*)

LADY TRESSILIAN. Are you going down to bathe, Kay?

KAY. (*Nervously.*) Yes – yes, I was.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Almost high tide. It ought to be very pleasant. What about you, Nevile?

NEVILE. (*Sulkily.*) I don't want to bathe.

(**LADY TRESSILIAN** turns back to **KAY**.)

LADY TRESSILIAN. Your friend, I think, is down there waiting for you.

(**KAY** hesitates a moment, then exits.)

Nevile, you're behaving very badly. You really must stand up when I come into the room. What's the matter with you – forgetting your manners?

(**NEVILE** rises quickly.)

NEVILE. I'm sorry.

LADY TRESSILIAN. You're making us all very uncomfortable. I don't wonder your wife is annoyed.

NEVILE. My wife? Audrey?

LADY TRESSILIAN. Kay is your wife now.

NEVILE. With your high church principles I wonder you admit that fact.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Nevile, you are exceedingly rude.

(**NEVILE** crosses to **LADY TRESSILIAN**, takes her hand and kisses her on the cheek.)

NEVILE. I'm very sorry, Camilla. Please forgive me. I'm so worried, I don't know what I'm saying.

LADY TRESSILIAN. (*Affectionately.*) My dear boy, what else could you expect with this stupid idea of being all friends together?

NEVILLE. (*Wistfully.*) It still seems to me the sensible way to look at things.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Not with two women like Audrey and Kay.

NEVILLE. Audrey doesn't seem to care.

TREVES. How did the matter first come up, Neville?

NEVILLE. (*Eagerly.*) Well, I happened to run across Audrey in London, quite by chance, and she was awfully nice about things – didn't seem to bear any malice or anything like that. While I was talking to her the idea came to me – how sensible it would be if – if she and Kay could be friends – if we could all get together. And it seemed to me that this was the place where it could happen quite naturally.

TREVES. You thought of that all by yourself?

NEVILLE. Oh, yes, it was all my idea. And Audrey seemed quite pleased and ready to try.

TREVES. Was Kay equally pleased?

NEVILLE. Well, no. I had a spot of bother with Kay. I can't think why – I mean, if anyone were going to object, you'd think it would be Audrey.

LADY TRESSILIAN. Well, I'm an old woman. Nothing people do nowadays seems to make any sense.

(She makes for the door leading to the rest of the house. TREVES follows, opening it for her.)

TREVES. One has to go with the times, Camilla.

LADY TRESSILIAN. I feel very tired. I shall rest before lunch. But you must behave yourself, Neville – with or without reason, Kay is jealous. I will not have these discordant scenes in my house.

(She exits.)

(Offstage.) Ah, Mary, I shall lie down on the library sofa.

(TREVES closes the door and turns to NEVILLE.)

NEVILLE. She speaks to me as though I were six!

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