SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

This sample is an excerpt - an appetiser, if you will - from a full Samuel French title.

This sample is just for you to try out, and it can't be used for performance, downloaded, printed or distributed in any way.

Take it for a whirl and see if it tickles your fancy!

For more information about licensing this or other shows, or to browse thousands more plays and theatre books to buy please visit our website.

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
or, in the US www.samuelfrench.com

SF PERUSALS

SPIDER'S WEB

by Agatha Christie

SAMUEL FRENCH

samuelfrench.co.uk

Copyright © 1954 by Agatha Christie Limited. All Rights Reserved.
'AGATHA CHRISTIE' and the Agatha Christie Signature Mark
are registered trademarks of Agatha Christie Limited. All Rights Reserved.

SPIDER'S WEB is fully protected under the copyright laws of the British Commonwealth, including Canada, the United States of America, and all other countries of the Copyright Union. All rights, including professional and amateur stage productions, recitation, lecturing, public reading, motion picture, radio broadcasting, television and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved.

ISBN 978-0-573-01427-7

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
www.samuelfrench.com
www.agathachristielimited.com

FOR PRODUCTION ENQUIRIES

UNITED KINGDOM AND WORLD
EXCLUDING NORTH AMERICA
plays@samuelfrench.co.uk
020 7255 4302/01

UNITED STATES AND CANADA
info@SamuelFrench.com
1-866-598-8449

Each title is subject to availability from Samuel French, depending upon country of performance.

CAUTION: Professional and amateur producers are hereby warned that SPIDER'S WEB is subject to a licensing fee. Publication of this play does not imply availability for performance. Both amateurs and professionals considering a production are strongly advised to apply to the appropriate agent before starting rehearsals, advertising, or booking a theatre. A licensing fee must be paid whether the title is presented for charity or gain and whether or not admission is charged.

No one shall make any changes in this title for the purpose of production. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means, now known or yet to be invented, including mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, videotaping, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. No one shall upload this title, or part of this title, to any social media websites.

For all enquiries regarding motion picture, television, and other media rights, please contact Samuel French.

The right of Agatha Christie to be identified as author of this work has been asserted in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

MUSIC USE NOTE

Licensees are solely responsible for obtaining formal written permission from copyright owners to use copyrighted music in the performance of this play and are strongly cautioned to do so. If no such permission is obtained by the licensee, then the licensee must use only original music that the licensee owns and controls. Licensees are solely responsible and liable for all music clearances and shall indemnify the copyright owners of the play(s) and their licensing agent, Samuel French, against any costs, expenses, losses and liabilities arising from the use of music by licensees. Please contact the appropriate music licensing authority in your territory for the rights to any incidental music.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

If you have obtained performance rights to this title, please refer to your licensing agreement for important billing and credit requirements.

SPIDER'S WEB was first produced by Peter Saunders at the Savoy Theatre, London on December 14, 1954. The performance was directed by Wallace Douglas, with sets by Michael Weight. The cast was as follows:

SIR ROWLAND DELAHAYE . . . . . Felix Aylmer
HUGO BIRCH. . . . . Harold Scott
JEREMY WARRENDER . . . . . Myles Eason
CLARISSA HAILSHAM-BROWN. . . . . Margaret Lockwood
PIPPA HAILSHAM-BROWN . . . . . Margaret Barton
MILDRED PEAKE . . . . . Judith Furse
ELGIN . . . . . .Sidney Monckton
OLIVER COSTELLO . . . . . Charles Morgan
HENRY HAILSHAM-BROWN . . . . . .John Warwick
INSPECTOR LORD. . . . . .Campbell Singer
CONSTABLE JONES . . . . . Desmond Llewelyn

CHARACTERS

SIR ROWLAND DELAHAYE
HUGO BIRCH
JEREMY WARRENDER
CLARISSA HAILSHAM-BROWN
PIPPA HAILSHAM-BROWN
MILDRED PEAKE
ELGIN
OLIVER COSTELLO
HENRY HAILSHAM-BROWN
INSPECTOR LORD
CONSTABLE JONES

NOTES ON CASTING

HENRY HAILSHAM-BROWN may double with **CONSTABLE JONES**.
OLIVER COSTELLO may double with the voice of the **DOCTOR**.
Minimum number of performers: 12.

SETTING & TIME

The action of the play passes in the drawing-room of Copplestone Court, the Hailsham-Browns' home in Kent.

ACT I

An evening in March.

ACT II

Scene One: A quarter of an hour later.
Scene Two: Ten minutes later.

ACT III

A few minutes later.

NOTES ON SENSITIVE TERMINOLOGY

Language used by the author in her stage directions and by her characters to describe religion, gender, sexuality, race and class is of the period in which the play was first performed. We are confident that the author's intention was to be neutral within the stage directions – not to convey anything other than the facts of the characteristics relevant to a character's portrayal. The dialogue, however, is the embodiment of the character speaking and must express his or her intentions at that point in the play. This means that the author will have chosen terminology to be spoken with varying degrees of precision, sensitivity and, possibly, deliberate insensitivity according to the character and the circumstances in which he or she is speaking.

In our published version, therefore, we have applied the following logic:

• In stage directions, we have used terminology which is as neutral and factual as can be conceived, knowing that this will sometimes still fail.

• In dialogue, we have preserved the author's words as originally written.

We license this play on the basis that terms used in dialogue relevant to the religion, gender, sexuality, race and class of these characters may be changed in production to whichever best convey the author's intention for the audience. Sometimes this will be a neutral term, sometimes it will be a term which reflects the character's personality and/or the context in which they are speaking. Which of these applies is for directors and actors to interpret.

ACT I

(The drawing room of Copplestone Court, the Hailsham-Browns' home in Kent. An evening in March. It is a charming and comfortable room with French windows opening on to the garden. Double doors lead to the entrance hall where the foot of the staircase can be seen. Another door gives access to the library, in which there is a door that leads back to the entrance hall. There is also a concealed door or panel which is actuated by a small lever in a set of built-in bookshelves. The panel opens into the room and when open reveals a recess with a door leading to the library. The room is furnished with good quality period furniture. There is a console table with a telephone and a small, silver cigarette box on it. There is also a handsome period desk which is fitted with a secret drawer. There is a sofa with small tables either side of it and an armchair. At night the room is lit by concealed lighting behind the ceiling cornice and wall-brackets. The console table is at a right angle to the wall, and on it there is a tray with three glasses of port marked one, two and three. Also on the table is a pencil and paper. **SIR ROWLAND DELAHAYE** *is sitting. He is aged fifty, distinguished and with very definite charm. He is blindfolded and sipping from glass number two.* **HUGO BIRCH** *is standing next to him. He is aged sixty and is a rather irascible type. He holds glass number three.* **HUGO** *and* **SIR ROWLAND** *are arguing.)*

SIR ROWLAND. *(Tasting.)* I should say – yes – definitely – yes, this is the Dow '42.

*(***HUGO** *takes the glass from* **SIR ROWLAND**.*)*

HUGO. Dow '42.

(He hands **SIR ROWLAND** *the next glass and notes* **SIR ROWLAND***'s opinion.* **SIR ROWLAND** *sips the port, sips again and nods affirmatively.)*

SIR ROWLAND. Ah yes, this is a wine indeed. Cockburn '27. To waste a bottle of Cockburn '27 on an experiment like this is positively sacrilegious.

*(***HUGO** *takes the glass from him and writes.* **SIR ROWLAND** *removes the blindfold.* **HUGO** *reads from his notes.)*

HUGO. That, you say, is Cockburn '27. Number two was the Dow '42. Number one was – *(With disgust.)* Rich Ruby port type wine. Pah! Can't think why Clarissa has such a thing in the house. My turn.

*(***SIR ROWLAND** *ties the blindfold onto* **HUGO**.*)*

SIR ROWLAND. Probably uses it for jugged hare or for flavouring soup. There you are, Hugo. Ought to turn you round three times like they do in Blind Man's Buff.

(He leads **HUGO** *to the chair and turns him round.)*

HUGO. Here, steady on.

*(***HUGO** *feels for the chair.)*

SIR ROWLAND. Got it?

HUGO. Yes.

*(***HUGO** *sits.)*

SIR ROWLAND. I'll swivel the glasses round instead.

(He moves the glasses.)

HUGO. No need to, think I'd be influenced by what you said? I'm as good a judge of port as you any day, Roly, my boy.

*(**JEREMY WARRENDER** enters by the French windows. He is an elegant young man and is wearing a raincoat. He is out of breath.)*

SIR ROWLAND. Can't be too careful.

(He picks up glass number three.)

JEREMY. *(Panting.)* What's going on here? The three-card trick with glasses?

(He removes his raincoat and jacket.)

HUGO. Who's that? Who's brought a dog into the room?

SIR ROWLAND. It's only young Warrender.

HUGO. Oh, sounds like a dog that's been chasing a rabbit.

JEREMY. Three times to the lodge gates and back in a mackintosh. The Herzoslovakian Minister did it in four minutes fifty-three seconds. I went all out but couldn't do better than six minutes ten seconds. I don't believe he did, either. Only Chris Chataway himself could do it in that time with or without a mackintosh.

SIR ROWLAND. Who told you that about the Herzoslovakian Minister?

JEREMY. Clarissa.

SIR ROWLAND. Clarissa!

HUGO. *(Snorting.)* Oh, Clarissa. Don't you pay any attention to what Clarissa tells you.

SIR ROWLAND. I'm afraid you don't know your hostess very well, Warrender. She's a young lady with a very vivid imagination.

JEREMY. Do you mean she made the whole thing up?

*(**SIR ROWLAND** hands glass number three to **HUGO**.)*

SIR ROWLAND. Well, I wouldn't put it past her.

JEREMY. You wait till I see that young woman. I'll have something to say to her. Gosh, I'm dead.

*(***JEREMY** *exits to the hall, puts his raincoat on the stairs and re-enters.)*

HUGO. Stop puffing like a grampus. I want to concentrate. There's a fiver at stake. Roly and I have got a bet on.

JEREMY. Oh, what is it?

HUGO. Who's the best judge of port. We've got Cockburn '27, Dow '42 and the local grocer's special. Quiet now. This is important.

(He sips. Non-committal:)

Mmm – ah.

SIR ROWLAND. Well?

HUGO. Don't hustle me, Roly – I'm not going to rush my fences. Where's the next one?

*(***SIR ROWLAND** *hands glass number one to* **HUGO**. *He sips.)*

Yes, I'm pretty sure about those two. This first one's the Dow. The second was the Cockburn.

(He hands the glasses to **SIR ROWLAND**, *who puts them on the table and writes.)*

SIR ROWLAND. Number three the Dow. Number one the Cockburn.

HUGO. Hardly necessary to taste the third, but I suppose I'd better go through with it.

*(***SIR ROWLAND** *hands* **HUGO** *glass number two.)*

SIR ROWLAND. Here you are.

HUGO. *(Sipping.)* Tschah! Ugh! What unspeakable muck.

(He returns the glass to **SIR ROWLAND**.*)*

Take me an hour to get the taste out of my mouth. Here, get me out of this, Roly.

JEREMY. I'll do it.

*(***JEREMY** *removes the blindfold.)*

SIR ROWLAND. So that's what you say, is it? Number two grocer's special. Rubbish! It's the Dow '42, not a doubt of it.

HUGO. Pah! You've lost your palate, Roly.

JEREMY. Let me try.

(He takes a quick sip from each glass.)

They all taste the same to me.

HUGO. You young people – it's all this confounded gin you're always drinking. Ruins your palate.

*(***CLARISSA HAILSHAM-BROWN** *enters from the library. She is aged mid-thirties to mid-forties and is an extremely vivacious character.)*

CLARISSA. Hello, my darlings. Have you settled it yet?

SIR ROWLAND. Yes, Clarissa. We're ready for you.

HUGO. Number one's the Cockburn, number two's the port type stuff, three's the Dow – right, eh?

SIR ROWLAND. Nonsense, number one's the port type stuff, two's the Dow, three's the Cockburn. I'm right, aren't I?

CLARISSA. Darlings.

(She kisses **HUGO**, *then* **SIR ROWLAND**.*)*

Now, you take the tray back to the dining room. You'll find the decanter on the sideboard.

SIR ROWLAND. *The* decanter?

CLARISSA. Yes, just one decanter. It's all the same port, you know.

*(***JEREMY** *laughs.)*

SIR ROWLAND. Clarissa, you unprincipled humbug.

CLARISSA. Well, it's been such a wet afternoon and you meant to play golf. You must have some fun, and you have had fun over this, darlings, haven't you?

SIR ROWLAND. Upon my soul. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, showing up your elders and betters.

HUGO. *(Laughing.)* Who was it said that he'd know Cockburn '27 anywhere?

SIR ROWLAND. Never mind, Hugo, let's have some more.

*(***SIR ROWLAND** *picks up the tray with the glasses. He and* **HUGO** *exit to the hall.* **HUGO** *closes the doors.)*

JEREMY. Now then, Clarissa, what's all this about the Herzoslovakian Minister?

CLARISSA. What about him?

JEREMY. Did he ever run to the lodge gates and back, in a mackintosh, three times in four minutes fifty-three seconds?

CLARISSA. The Herzoslovakian Minister is a dear, but he's well over sixty and I doubt very much if he's run anywhere for years.

JEREMY. So, you did make the whole thing up. Why?

CLARISSA. You've been complaining all day about not getting enough exercise.

JEREMY. Clarissa, do you ever speak the truth?

CLARISSA. Of course I do – sometimes. But when I am speaking the truth nobody ever seems to believe me. It's very odd. I suppose when you're making things up, you get carried away and that makes it sound more convincing.

JEREMY. I might have broken a blood vessel. Fat lot you'd have cared about that.

(She moves to the French windows.)

CLARISSA. *(Laughing.)* I do believe it's clearing up. It's going to be a lovely evening. How delicious the garden smells after rain.

(She sniffs.)

Narcissus.

JEREMY. Do you really like living down here in the country?

CLARISSA. Love it.

JEREMY. You must get bored to death. It's all so incongruous for you, Clarissa. You ought to lead a gay life in London.

CLARISSA. What – parties and night clubs?

JEREMY. You'd make a brilliant hostess.

CLARISSA. It sounds like an Edwardian novel. Anyway, diplomatic parties are terribly dull.

JEREMY. But it's such a waste.

(He tries to put his hand on her but she withdraws.)

CLARISSA. Of me?

JEREMY. Yes. Then there's Henry.

CLARISSA. What about Henry?

JEREMY. I can't imagine why you ever married him. Years older than you, with a daughter at school. An excellent man, I have no doubt, but of all the pompous stuffed shirts. Going about looking like a boiled owl. Dull as ditchwater. No sense of humour –

*(***CLARISSA** *looks at* **JEREMY** *and smiles.)*

– oh, I suppose you think I oughtn't to say these things.

CLARISSA. Oh, I don't mind. Say anything you like.

JEREMY. *(Eagerly.)* So you do realise that you've made a mistake?

CLARISSA. But I haven't made a mistake. *(Teasingly.)* Are you making immoral advances to me, Jeremy?

JEREMY. Definitely.

CLARISSA. How lovely. Go on.

JEREMY. I love you.

CLARISSA. *(Cheerfully.)* I'm so glad.

JEREMY. That's entirely the wrong answer. You ought to say, "I'm so sorry," in a deep, sympathetic voice.

CLARISSA. But I'm not sorry. I'm delighted. I *like* people to be in love with me. Would you do anything in the world for me?

JEREMY. *(Eagerly.)* Anything.

CLARISSA. Really? Supposing I murdered someone, would you help... No, I must stop.

JEREMY. No, go on.

CLARISSA. You said just now did I ever get bored?

JEREMY. Yes.

CLARISSA. Well, I suppose in a way I do, or rather I might if it wasn't for my private hobby.

JEREMY. Oh, what is it?

CLARISSA. You see, Jeremy, my life has always been peaceful and happy. Nothing exciting ever happens, so I began to play my little game. I call it "Supposing."

JEREMY. "Supposing"?

CLARISSA. Yes. I say to myself – supposing I were to come down one morning and find a dead body in the library, what should I do? Or supposing a woman were to be shown in here one day and told me that she and Henry had been secretly married in Constantinople, and that our marriage was bigamous, what should I say to her? Or supposing I had to choose between betraying my country and seeing Henry shot before my eyes?

(She smiles suddenly at **JEREMY**.*)*

Or, even supposing I were to run away with Jeremy, what would happen next?

JEREMY. I feel flattered. What did happen?

(He takes her hand, which she withdraws.)

CLARISSA. Well, the *last* time I played, we were on the Riviera at Juan les Pins, and Henry came after us. He had a revolver with him.

JEREMY. My God, did he shoot me?

CLARISSA. He said – *(Dramatically.)* "Clarissa, either you come back with me, or I kill myself."

JEREMY. Jolly decent of him. I can't imagine anything more unlike Henry. And what did you say to that?

CLARISSA. *(Smiling.)* Well, I've played it both ways.

JEREMY. Well, darling, you certainly do have fun.

*(**PIPPA HAILSHAM-BROWN** enters from the hall. She is a lanky child aged twelve, wearing school clothes. She carries a satchel.)*

PIPPA. Hullo, Clarissa.

CLARISSA. Hullo, Pippa. You're late.

PIPPA. Music lesson.

(She puts her hat and satchel on the armchair.)

Any food about? I'm starving.

CLARISSA. Didn't you get your buns to eat on the bus?

PIPPA. Oh, yes, but that was half an hour ago. Can't I have some cake or something to last me till supper?

CLARISSA. *(Laughing.)* We'll see what we can find.

*(**CLARISSA** and **PIPPA** exit to the hall.)*

PIPPA. *(Offstage.)* Is there any of that cake with the cherries on top?

CLARISSA. *(Offstage.)* No, you finished that yesterday.

*(**JEREMY** moves to the desk and quickly opens and closes the drawers.)*

MISS PEAKE. *(Offstage.)* Ahoy there!

*(**JEREMY** hastily closes the drawers. The daylight commences to fade as evening falls. **MILDRED PEAKE** enters by the French windows. She is a big, jolly-looking woman of forty odd, in tweeds and gumboots. She stands on the window step.)*

Mrs. Hailsham-Brown about?

JEREMY. Yes, she just went with Pippa to get her something to eat.

MISS PEAKE. Children shouldn't eat between meals.

JEREMY. Will you come in, Miss Peake?

MISS PEAKE. No, I won't come in because of my boots. Bring half the garden with me if I did.

(She laughs.)

MISS PEAKE. I just wanted to ask what veggies for tomorrow's lunch.

JEREMY. I'm afraid I...

MISS PEAKE. Tell you what, I'll come back.

(She turns to go, but stops.)

Oh, you will be careful of that desk, won't you, Mr. Warrender?

JEREMY. Yes, of course I will.

MISS PEAKE. It's a valuable antique. You oughtn't to wrench the drawers out like that.

JEREMY. I'm terribly sorry, I was only looking for notepaper.

MISS PEAKE. Middle pigeon-hole.

*(***JEREMY** *opens the middle pigeon-hole and extracts a sheet of writing paper.)*

That's right. Curious how often people can't see what's right in front of their eyes.

*(***MISS PEAKE** *laughs heartily and exits by the French windows.* **JEREMY** *joins in her laughter, but stops abruptly when she has gone.* **PIPPA** *enters from the hall, munching a bun.)*

PIPPA. Smashing bun.

(She closes the hall door.)

JEREMY. Hullo, there. How was school today?

PIPPA. Pretty foul. World affairs. Miss Wilkinson loves world affairs. She's terribly wet, can't keep order.

(She puts her bun on the table and takes a book from her satchel.)

JEREMY. What's your favourite subject?

PIPPA. Biology. It's heaven. Yesterday we dissected a frog's leg.

(She pushes the book in **JEREMY***'s face.)*

Look what I got in the second-hand bookstall. It's awfully rare, I'm sure. Over a hundred years old.

JEREMY. What is it, exactly?

PIPPA. It's a kind of recipe book. It's thrilling, absolutely thrilling.

(She opens the book, becoming immediately enthralled.)

JEREMY. What's it all about?

PIPPA. What?

JEREMY. It seems very absorbing.

PIPPA. What?

(To herself.) Gosh!

JEREMY. Evidently a good tuppenny-worth.

(He picks up a newspaper and begins to read.)

PIPPA. What's the difference between a wax candle and a tallow candle?

JEREMY. I should imagine that a tallow candle is markedly inferior. But surely you can't eat it?

PIPPA. *(Amused.)* "Can you eat it?" Sounds like "Twenty Questions."

(She laughs, throws the book onto the chair, then takes a pack of cards from the bottom of the bookshelves.)

Do you know Demon Patience?

*(***JEREMY** *is engrossed in his paper.)*

JEREMY. Um.

PIPPA. I suppose you wouldn't like to play Beggar-My-Neighbour?

JEREMY. No.

PIPPA. I thought you wouldn't. I wish we could have a fine day for a change. Such a waste being in the country, when it's wet.

(She kneels on the floor, lays out her cards and plays Demon Patience.)

JEREMY. Do you like living in the country?

PIPPA. Rather. I like it much better than living in London. This is a wizard house with a tennis court and everything. We've even got a priest's hole.

JEREMY. A priest's hole, in this house?

PIPPA. Yes.

JEREMY. Don't believe it. Wrong period.

PIPPA. Well, *I* call it a priest's hole. Look, I'll show you.

(She rises and moves to the bookshelves. She takes out a book and pulls down a small lever in the wall. The concealed door between the bookshelves swings open, revealing a good-sized recess, with a concealed door in its back wall, leading to the library.)

It isn't really a priest's hole, of course. Actually that door goes through into the library.

JEREMY. Oh, does it?

*(***JEREMY** *goes into the recess, opens the door in the back, glances into the library and returns.)*

So it does.

PIPPA. But it's all rather secret and you'd never guess it was there unless you knew.

(She lifts the lever. The panel closes.)

I'm using it all the time. It's the sort of place that would be very convenient for putting a dead body, don't you think?

JEREMY. Absolutely made for it.

*(***PIPPA** *resumes her game.* **CLARISSA** *enters from the hall.)*

The Amazon is looking for you.

CLARISSA. Miss Peake? Oh, what a bore.

(She picks up Pippa's bun and takes a bite.)

PIPPA. Hey! That's mine!

CLARISSA. Greedy thing.

(She replaces the bun.)

JEREMY. First she hailed me as though I were a ship, then ticked me off for manhandling this desk.

CLARISSA. She's a terrible pest, but she goes with the house –

(She looks at Pippa's game.)

– Black ten on the red jack –

(Turning back to **JEREMY**.*)*

– And she's really a very good gardener.

JEREMY. I know. I saw her out of my bedroom window this morning digging something that looked like an enormous grave.

CLARISSA. That's deep trenching.

*(***JEREMY** *looks at Pippa's game.)*

JEREMY. Red three on the black four.

*(***PIPPA** *looks furious.* **SIR ROWLAND** *and* **HUGO** *enter from the library.)*

SIR ROWLAND. Seems to have cleared at last. Too late for golf, though. Only about twenty minutes' daylight left.

(He looks at Pippa's game, then points with his foot.)

Look, that goes on there. Well, I suppose we might as well go across to the golf house.

HUGO. I'll go and get my coat.

(He leans over **PIPPA** *to point out a card.* **PIPPA**, *furious, covers them with her body.* **HUGO** *turns to* **JEREMY**.*)*

What about you, my boy?

JEREMY. I'll have to get my jacket.

*(***HUGO** *and* **JEREMY** *exit to the hall, leaving the door open.* **JEREMY** *goes up the stairs, passing* **ELGIN** *coming down.* **CLARISSA** *turns to* **SIR ROWLAND**.*)*

CLARISSA. Sure you don't mind dining at the club house, darling?

SIR ROWLAND. Not a bit. Very sensible arrangement as the servants are going out.

*(***ELGIN***, a middle-aged butler, enters from the hall.)*

ELGIN. Your supper is ready in the schoolroom, Miss Pippa.

PIPPA. Oh, good! I'm *ravenous*.

(She darts towards the hall door.)

CLARISSA. Here, here, you put those cards away first.

PIPPA. Oh, bother.

(She reluctantly begins shovelling the cards into a heap against the sofa.)

ELGIN. Excuse me, madam.

CLARISSA. Yes, Elgin, what is it?

ELGIN. There has been a little – er – unpleasantness, over the vegetables.

CLARISSA. Oh, dear. With Miss Peake?

ELGIN. Yes, madam. Mrs. Elgin finds Miss Peake most difficult, madam. She is continually coming into the kitchen and criticising and making remarks, and Mrs. Elgin doesn't like it, she doesn't like it at all. Wherever we have been, Mrs. Elgin and myself have always had very pleasant relations with the garden.

CLARISSA. I'm very sorry. I'll – er – I'll try to arrange it.

ELGIN. Thank you, madam.

*(***ELGIN** *exits to the hall, closing the doors behind him.)*

CLARISSA. How tiresome they are, and what curious things they say. How can one have pleasant relations with the garden? It sounds improper, in a pagan kind of way.

SIR ROWLAND. You're lucky with this couple you've got. Where did you get them?

CLARISSA. Registry Office.

SIR ROWLAND. I hope not that what's-its-name one where they always send you crooks.

PIPPA. Cooks?

SIR ROWLAND. No, crooks.

CLARISSA. Come on, Pippa, hurry up.

*(***PIPPA** *picks up the cards but accidently leaves the Ace of Spades just under the end of the sofa. She replaces the cards on the bookshelves.)*

PIPPA. There! I wish one didn't always have to do clearing up.

(She moves to the hall door. **CLARISSA** *picks up the bun from the table and hands it to* **PIPPA**.*)*

CLARISSA. Here, take your bun with you.

*(***PIPPA** *starts to go.)*

And your satchel.

*(***PIPPA** *snatches up her satchel, then turns towards the hall door.)*

Hat!

*(***PIPPA** *puts the bun on the table, picks up her hat and runs to the hall door.)*

Here!

*(***CLARISSA** *picks up the bun, stuffs it in* **PIPPA***'s mouth, takes the hat, jams it on her head and pushes her into the hall.)*

And shut the door.

*(***PIPPA** *exits to the hall, closing the doors behind her. The light in the room begins to fade a little.* **SIR ROWLAND** *laughs.)*

SIR ROWLAND. Wonderful. She's a different child. You've done a good job there, Clarissa.

CLARISSA. I think she really likes me now, and trusts me. I quite enjoy being a stepmother.

SIR ROWLAND. She seems a normal, happy child again.

CLARISSA. I think living in the country has made all the difference, and she goes to a very nice school and is making lots of friends there. Yes, I think she's happy, and as you say, *normal*.

SIR ROWLAND. It's a shocking thing to see a kid get into the state she was in. I'd like to wring Miranda's neck.

CLARISSA. Pippa was absolutely terrified of her mother.

SIR ROWLAND. A shocking business.

CLARISSA. I feel furious every time I think of Miranda. What she made Henry suffer and what she made that child go through. I still can't understand how any woman *could*.

SIR ROWLAND. Taking drugs is a nasty business. It alters your whole character.

CLARISSA. Well, what started her on them in the first place?

SIR ROWLAND. I think it was that swine Oliver Costello. I believe he's in on the drug racket.

CLARISSA. He's a horrible man. Really evil, I always think.

SIR ROWLAND. She's married him, hasn't she?

CLARISSA. About a month ago.

SIR ROWLAND. Well, Henry's well rid of Miranda. He's a nice fellow, Henry. A really nice fellow.

CLARISSA. Do you think you need to tell me that?

SIR ROWLAND. He doesn't say much. Undemonstrative – but he's sound all through.

(He pauses.)

That young fellow, Jeremy what's-his-name. What do you know about him?

CLARISSA. *(Smiling.)* He's very amusing.

SIR ROWLAND. Ptscha! That's all people seem to care about these days. Don't – don't do anything foolish, will you?

CLARISSA. Don't fall in love with Jeremy Warrender. That's what you mean?

SIR ROWLAND. That would be extremely foolish. You know, Clarissa darling, I've watched you grow up. You really

mean a great deal to me. If ever you're in trouble of any kind, you would come to your old guardian, wouldn't you?

(She kisses him.)

CLARISSA. Of course, Roly darling. And you needn't worry about Jeremy.

*(***MISS PEAKE** *enters by the French windows. She is in her stockinged feet and carries a head of broccoli.)*

MISS PEAKE. I hope you don't mind my coming in this way, Mrs. Brown-Hailsham. I shan't make the room dirty, I've left my boots outside. I'd just like you to look at this broccoli.

(She sticks it under **CLARISSA***'s nose.)*

CLARISSA. It – er – it looks very nice.

(She thrusts it at **SIR ROWLAND**.*)*

MISS PEAKE. Take a look.

SIR ROWLAND. I can't see anything wrong with it.

(He takes the broccoli from her.)

MISS PEAKE. Of course there's nothing wrong with it. I took in just such another yesterday and that woman in the kitchen – of course, I don't want to say anything against your servants, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, though I *could* say a great deal – but that Mrs. Elgin actually told me that it was such a poor specimen she wasn't going to cook it. She said something about "If you can't do better than *that* in the kitchen garden you'd better take up some other job." I was so angry I could have killed her.

*(***CLARISSA** *starts to speak.)*

I never want to make trouble, but I'm *not* going into the kitchen to be insulted. In future I shall leave the vegetables outside the back door and Mrs. Elgin can leave a list there of what is required.

(The telephone rings.)

MISS PEAKE. I'll answer it.

(She lifts the receiver.)

Hullo... Yes... Copplestone Court... You want Mrs. Brown? ...Yes – she's here.

*(***CLARISSA** *takes the receiver.)*

CLARISSA. This is Mrs. Hailsham – Hullo... Hullo... How odd! They seem to have rung off.

(She replaces the receiver. **MISS PEAKE** *suddenly moves forward and sets the console table back against the wall.)*

MISS PEAKE. Excuse me, but Mr. Sellon always liked this table flat against the wall.

*(***CLARISSA** *assists with the table.)*

Thank you, and you will be careful about marks made by glasses on the furniture –

*(***CLARISSA** *looks anxiously at the table.)*

– Won't you, Mrs. Brown-Hailsham – I mean Mrs. Hailsham-Brown.

(She laughs heartily.)

Oh well, Brown-Hailsham, Hailsham-Brown, it's really all the same thing, isn't it?

SIR ROWLAND. No, it's not. A horse chestnut is hardly the same thing as a chestnut horse.

*(***MISS PEAKE** *laughs again, turning to* **HUGO** *as he enters from the hall.)*

MISS PEAKE. I'm getting a regular ticking off. Quite sarcastic.

(She thumps **HUGO** *on the back.)*

Well, good night, all. I must be toddling back. Give me the broccoli.

*(***SIR ROWLAND** *hands the broccoli to* **MISS PEAKE**.*)*

Horse chestnut, chestnut horse. Jolly good – I must remember that.

(She laughs and exits by the French windows.)

HUGO. How does Henry bear that woman?

CLARISSA. He finds her very hard to take.

HUGO. I should think so. So damned arch! All that hearty schoolgirl manner.

SIR ROWLAND. A case of arrested development, I'm afraid.

CLARISSA. I agree she's maddening but she's a very good gardener, and she goes with the house, and since the house is so wonderfully cheap...

HUGO. Cheap? Is it? You surprise me.

CLARISSA. Marvellously cheap. It was advertised. We came down and saw it and took it then and there for six months furnished.

SIR ROWLAND. Who does it belong to?

CLARISSA. It belonged to a Mr. Sellon. He died. He was an antique dealer in Maidstone.

HUGO. That's right. Sellon and Brown. I once bought a very nice Chippendale mirror there. Sellon lived here and used to go into Maidstone every day, but I believe he sometimes brought customers out here.

CLARISSA. Mind you, there are one or two disadvantages about the house. Only yesterday a man in a violent check suit drove up in a sports car and wanted to buy that desk. I told him it wasn't ours and we couldn't sell it, but he simply wouldn't believe me and kept on raising the price. He went up to five hundred pounds in the end.

SIR ROWLAND. *(Startled.)* Five hundred pounds! Good Lord! Why, even at the Antique Dealers' Fair...

*(***PIPPA** *enters from the hall.)*

PIPPA. I'm still hungry.

CLARISSA. You can't be.

PIPPA. I am. Milk and chocolate biscuits and a banana aren't really filling.

SIR ROWLAND. It's a nice desk, quite genuine, but not what I'd call a collector's piece.

HUGO. Perhaps it's got a secret drawer with a diamond necklace in it.

PIPPA. It has got a secret drawer.

CLARISSA. What!

PIPPA. I found a book in the market all about secret drawers in old furniture and I tried all over the house, but this is the only one that's got one. Look, I'll show you.

(She moves to the desk and takes out a drawer.)

See, you slide out this and there's a sort of little catch thing underneath.

HUGO. Humph! Not very secret.

PIPPA. Ah, but that's not all. Underneath there's a spring – and a drawer flies out.

(She demonstrates and a small drawer shoots out of the desk.)

See!

*(***HUGO** *picks a piece of paper out of the draw.)*

HUGO. Hullo, what's inside?

(He reads:)

"Sucks to you!"

SIR ROWLAND. What!

(They all laugh.)

PIPPA. I put that there.

SIR ROWLAND. Villain!

PIPPA. Actually, there was an envelope with an autograph of Queen Victoria in it. Look, I'll show you.

(She dashes to the bookshelves. **CLARISSA** *replaces the drawers.* **PIPPA** *opens a shell box and takes out an old envelope containing three scraps of paper. She passes them to* **HUGO** *one by one, then to* **SIR ROWLAND**.*)*

SIR ROWLAND. Do you collect autographs, Pippa?

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

Please visit our website to buy the full script, apply for a license to perform this show (if it's available), or to explore hundreds of similar titles.

www.samuelfrench.co.uk
or, in the US www.samuelfrench.com

To be the first to know about new books, licensing releases, and enjoy other theatre-related larks, do follow us on our spangley social media channels.



Samuel French London



SamuelFrenchLtd

SF **PERUSALS**