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SF PERUSALS

THE HOLLOW

by Agatha Christie

SAMUEL FRENCH

samuelfrench.co.uk

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THE HOLLOW was first presented by Peter Saunders at the Fortune Theatre, London on June 7, 1951. The performance was directed by Hubert Gregg. The cast was as follows:

HENRIETTA ANGKATELL ..... Beryl Baxter
SIR HENRY ANGKATELL, K.C.B. ..... George Thorpe
LADY ANGKATELL ..... Jeanne de Casalis
MIDGE HARVEY ..... Jessica Spencer
GUDGEON ..... A.J.Brown
EDWARD ANGKATELL ..... Colin Douglas
DORIS ..... Patricia Jones
GERDA CRISTOW ..... Joan Newell
JOHN CRISTOW, M.D., F.R.C.P. ..... Ernest Clark
VERONICA CRAYE ..... Dianne Foster
INSPECTOR COLQUHOUN, C.I.D. ..... Martin Wyldech
DETECTIVE SERGEANT PENNY ..... Shaw Taylor

The play was subsequently transferred to the Ambassadors Theatre.

CHARACTERS

HENRIETTA ANGKATELL
SIR HENRY ANGKATELL, K.C.B.
LADY ANGKATELL
MIDGE HARVEY
GUDGEON
EDWARD ANGKATELL
DORIS
GERDA CRISTOW
JOHN CRISTOW, M.D., F.R.C.P.
VERONICA CRAYE
INSPECTOR COLQUHOUN, C.I.D.
DETECTIVE SERGEANT PENNY

NOTES ON CASTING

DORIS may double with **VERONICA CRAYE**.

JOHN CRISTOW may double with **INSPECTOR COLQUHOUN** or **DETECTIVE SERGEANT PENNY**.

Minimum number of performers: 10.

SETTING & TIME

The action of the play passes in the garden room of Sir Henry Angkatell's house, The Hollow, about eighteen miles from London.

ACT I

A Friday afternoon in early September.

ACT II

Scene One: Saturday morning.

Scene Two: Later the same day.

ACT III

The following Monday morning. The lights are lowered during Act III to denote the passing of one hour.

ACT I

(The garden room of Sir Henry Angkatell's house, The Hollow, about eighteen miles from London. A Friday afternoon in early September. It is an informal room, but furnished with taste. There are French windows opening on to a terrace and also smaller French windows leading to a garden. Inside there is a door that leads to other parts of the house. There is a large alcove in which a piece of statuary can be supposed to stand offstage. A heavy curtain closes it off from the rest of the room. There is a fireplace, over which is a fine picture depicting the idyllic scene of a Georgian house with columns, set in woodlands. There is an armchair, a comfortable sofa and a small, circular coffee table. There is also a small writing table, on which stands a radio receiver and a telephone. A small chair is set at the table and a waste-paper basket below it. There is also a drinks table and a pedestal on which stands a piece of abstract statuary. At night the room is lit by electric candle-lamps, and there is a bell-push for calling the servants. It is a fine afternoon and all the French windows stand open. **SIR HENRY ANGKATELL, K.C.B.**, *a distinguished-looking, elderly man, is seated reading* The Times. **HENRIETTA ANGKATELL** *is on the terrace outside, standing at a tall sculptor's stand, modelling in clay. She is a handsome young woman of about thirty-three, dressed in good country tweeds and*

over them a painter's overall. She advances and retreats towards her creation once or twice, then enters. There is a smear of clay on her nose.)

HENRIETTA. Damn and damn and damn!

SIR HENRY. Not going well?

*(***HENRIETTA** *takes a cigarette from a box on the coffee table.)*

HENRIETTA. What misery it is to be a sculptor.

SIR HENRY. It must be. I always thought you had to have models for this sort of thing.

HENRIETTA. It's an abstract piece I'm modelling, darling.

*(***SIR HENRY** *points with distaste to the piece of modern sculpture on the pedestal.)*

SIR HENRY. What – like that?

HENRIETTA. Anything interesting in *The Times*?

SIR HENRY. Lots of people dead.

(He looks at **HENRIETTA**.*)*

You've got clay on your nose.

HENRIETTA. What?

SIR HENRY. Clay – on your nose.

HENRIETTA. Oh, so I have.

(She rubs her nose, then her forehead.)

SIR HENRY. Now it's all over your face.

HENRIETTA. *(Exasperated.)* Does it matter, darling?

SIR HENRY. Evidently not.

*(***HENRIETTA** *goes on to the terrace and resumes work.* **LADY ANGKATELL** *enters from the garden. She is a very charming and aristocratic looking woman aged about sixty, completely vague, but with a lot of personality.)*

LADY ANGKATELL. Oh dear, oh dear! If it isn't one thing it's another. Did I leave a mole-trap in here?

(She picks up a mole-trap from the mantelpiece.)

Ah yes – there it is. The worst of moles is – you never know where they are going to pop up next. People are quite right when they say that nature in the wild is seldom raw. Don't you think I'm right, Henry?

SIR HENRY. I couldn't say, my dear, unless I know what you're talking about.

LADY ANGKATELL. I'm going to pursue them quite ruthlessly – I really am.

(Her voice dies away as she exits to the garden. **HENRIETTA** *looks in from the terrace.)*

HENRIETTA. What did Lucy say?

SIR HENRY. Nothing much. Just being Lucyish. I say, it's half past six.

HENRIETTA. I'll have to stop and clean myself up. They're all coming by car, I suppose?

*(***HENRIETTA** *drapes a damp cloth over her work and enters.)*

SIR HENRY. All except Midge. She's coming by Green Line bus. Ought to be here by now.

HENRIETTA. Darling Midge. She is nice. Heaps nicer than any of us, don't you think?

SIR HENRY. I must have notice of that question.

HENRIETTA. *(Laughing.)* Well, less eccentric, anyway. There's something very sane about Midge.

(She rubs her hands on her overall.)

SIR HENRY. *(Indignantly.)* I'm perfectly sane, thank you.

HENRIETTA. Ye-es – perhaps *you* are.

SIR HENRY. *(Smiling.)* As sane as anyone can be that has to live with Lucy, bless her heart.

*(***HENRIETTA** *laughs.)*

You know, Henrietta, I'm getting worried about Lucy.

HENRIETTA. Worried? Why?

SIR HENRY. Lucy doesn't realise there are certain things she can't do.

HENRIETTA. I don't think I quite know what you mean.

SIR HENRY. She's always got away with things. I don't suppose any other woman in the world could have flouted the traditions of Government House as she did.

(He takes his pipe from his pocket.)

Most governors' wives have to toe the line of convention. But not Lucy! Oh dear me, no! She played merry hell with precedence at dinner parties – and that, my dear Henrietta, is the blackest of crimes.

(He pats his pockets, feeling for his tobacco pouch.)

She put deadly enemies next to each other. She ran riot over the colour question. And instead of setting everyone at loggerheads, I'm damned if she didn't get away with it.

*(***HENRIETTA** *picks up the tobacco jar from the mantelpiece and hands it to* **SIR HENRY**.*)*

Oh, thank you. It's that trick of hers – always smiling at people and looking so sweet and helpless. Servants are the same – she gives them any amount of trouble and they simply adore her.

HENRIETTA. I know what you mean. Things you wouldn't stand from anyone else, you feel they are quite all right if Lucy does them. What is it? Charm? Hypnotism?

*(***SIR HENRY** *fills his pipe.)*

SIR HENRY. I don't know. She's always been the same from a girl. But you know, Henrietta, it's growing on her. She doesn't seem to realise there *are* limits. I really believe Lucy would feel she could get away with *murder*.

*(***HENRIETTA** *picks up a piece of clay from the carpet and puts it in the waste-paper basket.)*

HENRIETTA. Darling Henry, you and Lucy are angels letting me make my messes here – treading clay into your

carpet. When I had that fire at my studio, I thought it was the end of everything – it was sweet of you to let me move in on you.

SIR HENRY. My dear, we're proud of you. Why, I've just been reading a whole article about you and your show in *The Times*.

HENRIETTA. Where?

*(***SIR HENRY** *hands her the paper.)*

SIR HENRY. Top of the page. There, I believe. Of course, I don't profess to know much about it myself.

HENRIETTA. *(Reading.)* "The most significant piece of the year." Oh, what gup! I must go and wash.

(She drops the paper and exits hurriedly into the house. **SIR HENRY** *takes up a match as* **MIDGE HARVEY** *enters from terrace. She is small, neatly dressed but obviously badly off. She is a warm-hearted, practical and very nice young woman, a little younger than Henrietta. She carries a suitcase.)*

MIDGE. Hullo, Cousin Henry.

SIR HENRY. Midge! Nice to see you.

*(***SIR HENRY** *takes the suitcase from her and puts it on the floor, kissing her.)*

MIDGE. Nice to see *you*.

SIR HENRY. How are you?

MIDGE. Terribly well.

SIR HENRY. Not been overworking you in that damned dress shop of yours?

MIDGE. Business is pretty slack at the moment, or I shouldn't have got the weekend off. The bus was absolutely crowded; I've never known it go so slowly. It's heaven to be here. Who's coming this weekend?

SIR HENRY. Nobody much. The Cristows. You know them, of course.

MIDGE. The Harley Street doctor with a rather dim wife?

SIR HENRY. That's right. Nobody else. Oh yes –

(He strikes a match.)

Edward, of course.

*(***MIDGE** *turns suddenly stricken by the sound of the name.)*

MIDGE. Edward!

SIR HENRY. Quite a job to get Edward away from Ainswick these days.

MIDGE. Ainswick! Lovely, lovely Ainswick!

(She gazes up at the picture above the fireplace.)

SIR HENRY. Yes, it's a beautiful place.

MIDGE. *(Feelingly.)* It's the most beautiful place in the world.

SIR HENRY. Had some happy times there, eh?

MIDGE. All the happy times I've ever had were there.

*(***LADY ANGKATELL** *enters from the garden. She carries a large, empty flower pot.)*

LADY ANGKATELL. Would you believe it, they've been at it again. They've pushed up a whole row of lovely little lobelias. Ah well, as long as the weather keeps fine…

SIR HENRY. Here's Midge.

LADY ANGKATELL. Where? Oh, darling Midge, I didn't see you, dear.

(She kisses **MIDGE**.*)*

That would help, wouldn't it? What were you both doing when I came in?

SIR HENRY. Talking Ainswick.

LADY ANGKATELL. Ainswick…

*(***LADY ANGKATELL** *has a sudden change of manner.* **SIR HENRY** *pats her shoulder before exiting into the house.)*

SIR HENRY. There, there, Lucy.

*(***MIDGE** *indicates the flower pot; surprised.)*

MIDGE. Now why did you bring that in here, darling?

LADY ANGKATELL. I can't begin to think. Take it away.

*(***MIDGE** *takes the flower pot out onto the terrace.)*

Thank you, darling. As I was saying, at any rate the weather's all right. That's *something*. Because if a lot of discordant personalities are boxed up indoors –

(She looks around.)

– where are you?

*(***MIDGE** *re-enters.)*

Ah, there you are. It makes things ten times worse. Don't you agree?

MIDGE. Makes what worse?

LADY ANGKATELL. One can play games, of course – but that would be like last year when I shall never forgive myself about poor Gerda – and the worst of it is that she really is so nice. It's odd that anyone as nice as Gerda should be so devoid of any kind of intelligence. If that is what they mean by the law of compensation I don't think it's at all fair.

MIDGE. What are you talking about, Lucy?

LADY ANGKATELL. This weekend, darling. It's such a relief to talk it over with you, Midge dear, you're so practical.

MIDGE. Yes, but what *are* we talking over?

LADY ANGKATELL. John, of course, is delightful, with that dynamic personality that all really successful doctors seem to have. But as for Gerda, ah well, we must all be very, very kind.

MIDGE. Come now, Gerda Cristow isn't as bad as all that.

LADY ANGKATELL. Darling. Those eyes. Like a puzzled cow. And she never seems to understand a word one says to her.

MIDGE. I don't suppose she understands a word *you* say – and I don't know that I blame her. Your mind goes so

fast, Lucy, that to keep pace with it, your conversation has to take the most astonishing leaps – with all the connecting links left out.

LADY ANGKATELL. Like monkeys. Fortunately Henrietta is here. She was wonderful last spring when we played limericks or anagrams – one of those things – we had all finished when we suddenly discovered that poor Gerda hadn't even started. She didn't even know what the game *was*. It was dreadful, wasn't it, Midge?

MIDGE. Why anyone ever comes to stay with the Angkatells, I don't know. What with the brainwork and the round games and your peculiar style of conversation, Lucy.

LADY ANGKATELL. I suppose we must be rather trying. The poor dear looked so bewildered; and John looked so impatient. It was then that I was grateful to Henrietta. She turned to Gerda and asked for the pattern of the knitted pullover she was wearing – a dreadful affair in pea green – with little bobbles and pom-poms and things – oh, sordid – but Gerda brightened up at once and looked so pleased. The worst of it is Henrietta had to buy some wool and knit one.

MIDGE. And was it very terrible?

LADY ANGKATELL. Oh, it was ghastly. No – on Henrietta it looked quite charming – which is what I mean when I say that the world is so very very sad. One simply doesn't know *why*...

MIDGE. Woah! Don't start rambling again, darling. Let's stick to the weekend. I don't see where the worry is. If you manage to keep off round games, and try to be coherent when you're talking to Gerda, and put Henrietta on duty to tide over the awkward moments, where's the difficulty?

LADY ANGKATELL. It would all be perfectly all right if only Edward weren't coming.

*(***MIDGE** *reacts at the name.)*

MIDGE. Edward? Yes, of course. What on earth made you ask Edward for the weekend, Lucy?

LADY ANGKATELL. I didn't ask him. He wired to know if we could have him. You know how sensitive Edward is. If I'd wired back "No," he would never have asked himself again. Edward's like that.

MIDGE. Yes.

LADY ANGKATELL. Dear Edward. If only Henrietta would make up her mind to marry him.

*(***MIDGE** *faces* **LADY ANGKATELL**.*)*

She really is quite fond of him. If only they could have been alone this weekend without the Cristows. As it is, John has the most unfortunate effect on Edward. John becomes so much *more* so, and Edward so much *less* so. If you know what I mean.

*(***MIDGE** *nods.)*

But I do feel that it's all going to be terribly difficult.

(She picks up the Daily Graphic. **GUDGEON**, *the butler, enters from the house. He is in all respects the perfect butler. Announcing:)*

GUDGEON. Mr. Edward.

*(***EDWARD ANGKATELL** *enters. He is a tall, slightly stooping man, between thirty-five and forty-five, with a pleasant smile and a diffident manner. He is a bookish man and wears well-cut but rather shabby tweeds.* **GUDGEON** *exits back into the house.)*

LADY ANGKATELL. Edward.

(She kisses him.)

We were just saying how nice it was of you to come.

EDWARD. Lucy, Lucy. How nice of you to *let* me come.

(He turns to **MIDGE**. *Pleased and surprised. He talks to her throughout with indulgent affection, as to a child.)*

Why – it's little Midge. You look very grown-up.

MIDGE. *(Acidly.)* I've been grown-up for quite a few years now.

EDWARD. I suppose you have. I haven't noticed it.

MIDGE. I know.

EDWARD. At Ainswick, you see, time stands still. I always remember you as you used to be in the holidays when Uncle Hugh was alive. I wish you'd come more often to Ainswick, Lucy. It's looking so beautiful just now.

LADY ANGKATELL. Is it, darling?

*(***GUDGEON** *enters from the house.)*

GUDGEON. Excuse me, m'lady, but Mrs. Medway would like to see you a moment. It's about the savoury for dinner.

LADY ANGKATELL. Chicken livers. Butchers have no conscience about chicken livers. Don't tell me they haven't arrived.

GUDGEON. They have arrived, m'lady, but Mrs. Medway is a little dubious...

*(***LADY ANGKATELL** *exits into the house.* **GUDGEON** *follows her off, closing the door behind him.* **EDWARD** *takes his cigarette case from his pocket.)*

EDWARD. I sometimes wonder whether Lucy minds very much about Ainswick.

MIDGE. In what way?

EDWARD. Well, it was her home.

*(***EDWARD** *takes a cigarette from his case.)*

MIDGE. May I?

EDWARD. Yes, of course.

*(***MIDGE** *takes a cigarette.)*

If she'd been born a boy it would have gone to her instead of to me. I wonder if she resents it?

MIDGE. Not in the sense you mean. After all, you're an Angkatell and that's all that matters. The Angkatells stick together. They even marry their cousins.

EDWARD. Yes, but she does care very much about Ainswick.

*(**MIDGE** looks up at the picture over the mantelpiece.)*

MIDGE. Oh yes. Lucy cares more about Ainswick than anything in the world. That picture up there is the dominating note of this house. But if you think Lucy resents *you*, you're wrong, Edward.

*(**EDWARD** lights **MIDGE**'s cigarette, then his own.)*

EDWARD. I never quite understand Lucy. She's got the most extraordinary charm.

MIDGE. Lucy is the most adorable creature I know – and the most maddening.

*(**HENRIETTA** enters from the house. She has tidied herself.)*

HENRIETTA. Hullo, Edward.

EDWARD. Henrietta, lovely to see you.

HENRIETTA. How's Ainswick?

EDWARD. It's looking beautiful just now.

HENRIETTA. Hullo, Midge darling. How are you?

*(**EDWARD** offers **HENRIETTA** a cigarette, which she takes.)*

EDWARD. You ought to come, Henrietta.

HENRIETTA. Yes, I know I ought – what fun we all had there as children.

*(**LADY ANGKATELL** enters from the house. She carries a large lobster on a short length of string.)*

LADY ANGKATELL. Tradespeople are just like gardeners. They take advantage of your not knowing. Don't you agree, Edward? When you want them to mass in big clumps – they start fiddling about with...

(She suddenly becomes conscious of the lobster.)

LADY ANGKATELL. Now what *is* that?

EDWARD. It looks to me like a lobster.

LADY ANGKATELL. It is a lobster. Where did I get it? How did I come by it?

HENRIETTA. I should think you got it off the kitchen table.

LADY ANGKATELL. Oh I remember. I thought a cushion this colour would look nice here. What do you feel about it?

HENRIETTA. No!

LADY ANGKATELL. No. Well it was just a little thought.

*(***GUDGEON** *enters. He carries a salver.)*

GUDGEON. Excuse me, m'lady, Mrs. Medway says, may she have the lobster?

*(***LADY ANGKATELL** *puts the lobster on the salver.)*

Thank you, m'lady.

(He exits. They all laugh.)

LADY ANGKATELL. Gudgeon is wonderful. He always appears at the right moment.

HENRIETTA. *(Aside.)* Could I have a light, Midge?

*(***EDWARD** *moves to* **LADY ANGKATELL**, *offering her a cigarette.)*

EDWARD. How's the sculpture, Henrietta?

LADY ANGKATELL. You know I don't smoke, dear.

*(***MIDGE** *picks up a table lighter from the mantelpiece and lights* **HENRIETTA***'s cigarette.)*

HENRIETTA. Getting along. I've finished the big wooden figure for the International Group. Would you like to see it?

EDWARD. Yes.

HENRIETTA. It's concealed in what I believe the house agent who sold Henry this house calls the "breakfast nook."

LADY ANGKATELL. Thank heavens that's something I have *never* had – my breakfast in a nook.

(They all laugh. **HENRIETTA** *moves to the alcove and draws back the curtain.* **EDWARD** *leads* **MIDGE** *into the alcove. They both look at the statue off.)*

HENRIETTA. It's called The Worshipper.

EDWARD. *(Impressed.)* That's a very powerful figure. Beautiful graining. What wood is it?

HENRIETTA. Pearwood.

EDWARD. *(Slowly.)* It's – an uncomfortable sort of thing.

MIDGE. *(Nervously.)* It's horrible.

EDWARD. That heavy forward slant of the neck and shoulders – the submission. The fanaticism of the face – the eyes – she's blind?

HENRIETTA. Yes.

EDWARD. What's she looking at – with her blind eyes?

*(***HENRIETTA** *turns away.)*

HENRIETTA. I don't know. Her God, I suppose.

LADY ANGKATELL. *(Softly.)* Poor Henrietta.

HENRIETTA. What did you say, Lucy?

LADY ANGKATELL. Nothing.

(She glances off into the garden.)

Ah look, chaffinches. Sweet. One ought to look at birds through glasses, on tops of trees, oughtn't one? Are there still herons at Ainswick, Edward?

EDWARD. Ah, yes – down by the river.

LADY ANGKATELL. *(Softly.)* Down by the river – ah dear.

(Her voice fades away as she exits into the garden. **MIDGE** *closes the alcove curtain.)*

EDWARD. Why did she say, "Poor Henrietta"?

HENRIETTA. Lucy isn't blind.

*(***EDWARD** *stubs his cigarette in the ashtray on the mantelpiece.)*

EDWARD. Shall we go for a walk, Henrietta? I'd like to stretch my legs after that drive.

HENRIETTA. I'd love to. I've been modelling most of the day.

*(**HENRIETTA** stubs her cigarette in the ashtray on the coffee table.)*

Coming, Midge?

MIDGE. No, thank you. I'll stay here and help Lucy with the Cristows when they arrive.

*(**EDWARD** starts; speaking sharply:)*

EDWARD. Cristow? Is he coming?

HENRIETTA. Yes.

EDWARD. I wish I'd known.

HENRIETTA. *(Belligerently.)* Why?

EDWARD. *(Very quietly.)* I could have come – some other weekend.

*(There is a pause, then **HENRIETTA** and **EDWARD** exit off by the terrace. **MIDGE** watches them go, her face revealing her hopeless love for **EDWARD**. **LADY ANGKATELL** enters from the garden.)*

LADY ANGKATELL. *(Whispering.)* Have Henrietta and Edward gone for a walk?

MIDGE. Yes.

LADY ANGKATELL. Does Edward know about the Cristows?

MIDGE. Yes.

LADY ANGKATELL. Was it all right?

MIDGE. Not noticeably.

LADY ANGKATELL. Oh dear. I knew this weekend was going to be awkward.

*(**MIDGE** stubs out her cigarette.)*

MIDGE. Let's go round the garden, Lucy. What's on in the flower world at the moment? I'm such a hopeless cockney nowadays. Mostly dahlias?

LADY ANGKATELL. Yes. Handsome – in a rather dull way. And so full of earwigs. Mind you, I'm told earwigs are very good mothers, not that it makes one *like* them any better.

*(***LADY ANGKATELL** *and* **MIDGE** *exit into the garden.* **DORIS**, *the maid, enters from the house and holds the door open. She looks slightly half-witted and is terrified of* **GUDGEON**. **GUDGEON** *enters; he carries a tray of drinks and a tea cloth.* **DORIS** *closes the door and stands gaping.* **GUDGEON** *puts the tray on the drinks table and starts to polish the glasses.)*

GUDGEON. Well, fold the papers, Doris, the way I showed you.

DORIS. Yes, Mr. Gudgeon.

(She picks up The Times *and folds it.)*

Her ladyship is bats, isn't she, Mr. Gudgeon?

GUDGEON. Certainly not. Her ladyship has a very keen intellect. She speaks five foreign languages, and has been all over the world with Sir Henry. Sir Henry was governor of one of the principal provinces in India. He would have been the next viceroy most probably if it hadn't been for that terrible Labour government doing away with the empire.

DORIS. My *dad's* Labour.

(There is a pause as **GUDGEON** *looks almost pityingly at her. She takes a step back apologetically.)*

Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Gudgeon.

GUDGEON. *(Tolerantly.)* You can't help your parents, Doris.

DORIS. *(Humbly.)* I know they're not class.

GUDGEON. *(Patronisingly.)* You are coming along quite nicely – although it's not what any of us have been used to. Gamekeeper's daughter, or head groom's daughter, a young girl who knows her manners, and has been brought up right.

*(***DORIS** *picks up the* Daily Graphic *and folds it, putting all the papers together tidily on the coffee table.)*

GUDGEON. That's what I like to train.

DORIS. Sorry, Mr. Gudgeon.

GUDGEON. Ah well, it seems those days are gone forever.

DORIS. Miss Simmonds is always down on me, too.

GUDGEON. She's doing it for your own good, Doris. She's training you.

*(**DORIS** picks up the ashtray from the coffee table and begins emptying it into the one on the mantelpiece.)*

DORIS. Shan't get more money, shall I, when I'm trained?

GUDGEON. Not much, I'm afraid.

DORIS. Doesn't seem worth being trained then, does it?

GUDGEON. I'm afraid you may be right, my girl.

*(**DORIS** picks up the full ashtray from the mantelpiece and is about to empty it into the fire.)*

Ah!

(She turns guiltily and puts the ashtray on the mantelpiece.)

The trouble is there are no proper *employers* nowadays. Nobody who knows what's what. Those who have the money to employ servants don't appreciate what a good servant is.

DORIS. My dad says I ought to call myself a domestic help.

(They begin tidying the cushions.)

GUDGEON. That's about all you are. Let me tell you, my girl, you're very lucky to be in a household where wine glasses are used in the proper way, and where the master and mistress appreciate highly technical skill. There aren't many employers left who'd even notice if you went the wrong way round the table.

DORIS. I still think her ladyship does funny things. Picking up that lobster now.

*(**DORIS** picks up the full ashtray from the mantelpiece.)*

GUDGEON. Her ladyship is somewhat forgetful, not to say absent-minded, but in this house I see to it that everything possible is done to spare her ladyship trouble and annoyance.

(The sound of a motor-car horn is heard off. **GUDGEON** *picks up the tea cloth, then Midge's suitcase.)*

That will be Dr. and Mrs. Cristow. Go upstairs and be ready to help Simmonds with the unpacking.

DORIS. Yes, Mr. Gudgeon.

*(***DORIS** *moves to the door, opening it. She starts to exit.)*

GUDGEON. *(Reprovingly.)* Ah-ah!

DORIS. Oh!

*(***DORIS** *steps back, holding the door open for* **GUDGEON**.*)*

GUDGEON. Thank you.

*(***DORIS** *follows him off, leaving the door open. A clock strikes seven. After the fourth stroke, off.)*

Good evening, sir.

JOHN. *(Offstage.)* Good evening, Gudgeon. How are you?

GUDGEON. *(Offstage.)* Good evening, Madam. Very well, thank you, sir.

GERDA. *(Offstage.)* Good evening, Gudgeon.

*(***GUDGEON** *enters and ushers in* **JOHN** *and* **GERDA CRISTOW**. **JOHN** *is a good-looking man of thirty-eight with a dynamic personality but is somewhat brusque in manner.* **GERDA** *is timid and rather stupid. She carries an arty leather handbag.)*

GUDGEON. Will you come through, Madam?

GERDA. Very warm, still.

GUDGEON. Still very warm, Madam. I hope you had a pleasant drive down.

GERDA. Yes, thank you.

GUDGEON. I think her ladyship is in the garden, sir. I'll inform her that you've arrived.

JOHN. Thank you, Gudgeon.

*(***GUDGEON** *exits into the garden.* **JOHN** *goes out onto the terrace.)*

Mm, wonderful to get out of town into this.

GERDA. *(Flatly.)* Yes, it's very nice.

JOHN. God, I hate being penned up in London. Sitting in that blasted consulting room, listening to whining women. How I hate sick people!

GERDA. Oh, John, you don't mean that.

JOHN. I loathe illness.

GERDA. If you hated sick people, you wouldn't be a doctor, would you, dear?

JOHN. A man doesn't become a doctor because he has a partiality for sick people. It's the disease that's interesting, not the patient. You have odd ideas, Gerda.

*(***JOHN** *studies the piece of sculpture on the pedestal.)*

GERDA. But you do like curing people.

JOHN. I don't cure them. Just hand out faith, hope and probably a laxative. Oh, good Lord, I'm tired.

GERDA. John, you work too hard. You're so unselfish. I'm always telling the children how a doctor's life is almost a dedication. I'm so proud of the way you give all your time and all your energy and never spare yourself.

JOHN. Oh, for heaven's sake, Gerda. You don't know in the least what you're talking about. Don't you realise I enjoy my profession? It's damned interesting and I make a lot of money.

GERDA. It's not the money you do it for, dear. Look how interested you are in your hospital work. It's to relieve pain and suffering.

JOHN. Pain is a biological necessity and suffering will always be with us. It's the techniques of medicine that interest me.

GERDA. And – people suffering.

JOHN. Oh, for God's sake…

(He breaks off, suddenly ashamed.)

I'm sorry, Gerda. I didn't mean to shout at you. I'm afraid I've been terribly nervy and bad-tempered lately. I'm – I'm sorry.

GERDA. It's quite all right, dear. *I* understand.

JOHN. You know, Gerda, if you weren't so patient, so long-suffering, it would be better. Why don't you turn on me sometimes, swear at me, give as good as you get? Oh, don't look so shocked. It would be better if you did. No man likes being drowned in treacle.

GERDA. You're tired, John.

*(***JOHN** *sits in the armchair.)*

JOHN. *(Sombrely.)* Yes, I'm tired.

(He leans back and closes his eyes.)

GERDA. You need a holiday.

JOHN. *(Dreamily.)* I'd like to go to the South of France – the Mediterranean – the sun, the mimosa in flower…

GERDA. Why shouldn't we go, then? *(Doubtfully.)* Oh, I don't quite know how we should manage about the children; of course, Terence is at school all day, but he's so rude to Mademoiselle. She really has very little authority even over Zena. No, I don't think I should be very happy. Of course, they could go to Elsie at Bexhill. Or perhaps Mary Foley would take them…

*(***JOHN** *opens his eyes.)*

JOHN. 'M, what were you saying?

GERDA. The children.

JOHN. What about them?

GERDA. I was wondering how we could manage about them if we went to the South of France.

JOHN. Why should we go to the South of France, what are you talking about?

GERDA. Because you said – you – would – like to.

JOHN. Oh that! I was day-dreaming.

GERDA. I don't see why we couldn't manage it – only it's a little worrying if one feels that the person left in charge isn't really reliable, and I do sometimes feel...

JOHN. You never stop worrying about something or other. For heaven's sake let's relax and enjoy this weekend. At least you have a respite from domestic bothers.

GERDA. Yes, I know.

JOHN. Wonderful people – the Angkatells. I always find them an absolute tonic.

GERDA. Yes.

JOHN. I wonder where they all are?

GERDA. Will Henrietta be here?

JOHN. Yes, she's here.

GERDA. Oh, I'm so glad. I do like Henrietta.

JOHN. *(Shortly.)* Henrietta's all right.

GERDA. I wonder if she's finished that statuette she was doing of me?

JOHN. *(Sharply.)* I don't know why she asked you to sit for her. Most extraordinary.

*(***GERDA** *flinches at his tone.)*

I always think it's rather a good thing if people are around to meet their guests.

*(***JOHN** *exits to the garden.* **GERDA** *rises to follow, hesitates, fidgets with her handbag, then gives a nervous cough.* **EDWARD** *is heard off from terrace.)*

EDWARD. *(Offstage.)* And this winter I'm going to cut down that avenue of trees so that we can have a better view of the lake.

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