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SF PERUSALS

VERDICT

by Agatha Christie

SAMUEL FRENCH

samuelfrench.co.uk

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ISBN 978-0-573-11480-9

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VERDICT was first presented by Peter Saunders at the Strand Theatre, London, on the May 22, 1958. The performance was directed by Charles Hickman, with sets by Joan Jefferson Farjeon. The cast was as follows:

LESTER COLE . . . . . George Roubicek
MRS. ROPER . . . . . Gretchen Franklin
LISA KOLETZKY . . . . . Patricia Jessel
PROFESSOR KARL HENDRYK . . . . . Gerard Heinz
DR. STONER . . . . . Derek Oldham
ANYA HENDRYK . . . . . Viola Keats
HELEN ROLLANDER . . . . . Moira Redmond
SIR WILLIAM ROLLANDER . . . . . Norman Claridge
DETECTIVE INSPECTOR OGDEN . . . . . Michael Golden
POLICE SERGEANT PEARCE . . . . . Gerard Sim

CHARACTERS

LESTER COLE
MRS. ROPER
LISA KOLETZKY
PROFESSOR KARL HENDRYK
DR. STONER
ANYA HENDRYK
HELEN ROLLANDER
SIR WILLIAM ROLLANDER
DETECTIVE INSPECTOR OGDEN
POLICE SERGEANT PEARCE

NOTES ON CASTING

SIR WILLIAM ROLLANDER may double with **DETECTIVE INSPECTOR OGDEN**.

LESTER COLE may double with **POLICE SERGEANT PEARCE**.

Minimum number of performers: 8

SETTING

The action of the Play passes in the living-room of Professor Hendryk's flat in Bloomsbury.

TIME

The present.

ACT ONE

Scene One: An afternoon in early spring.
Scene Two: A fortnight later. Afternoon.

ACT TWO

Scene One: Four days later. About midday.
Scene Two: Six hours later. Evening.
Scene Three: Two months later. Late afternoon.

NOTES ON SENSITIVE TERMINOLOGY

Language used by the author in her stage directions and by her characters to describe mental and physical conditions and disabilities 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 physical and mental conditions 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

Scene One

(The living room of Professor Hendryk's flat in Bloomsbury. A late afternoon in early spring. During the course of the scene the light fades slowly for sunset. The flat is the upper floor of one of the old houses in Bloomsbury. It is a well proportioned room with comfortable, old-fashioned furniture. The main feature that strikes the eye is books; books everywhere, on shelves, lying on tables, on chairs, on the sofa and piled up in heaps on the floor. The walls are occupied by large built-in bookcases and a library ladder. Double doors lead to an entrance hall, down which is the front door, a door to Lisa's bedroom and a passage leading to the kitchen. Back inside the room there is a door leading to Anya's bedroom and a sash window leading to a small balcony. Karl's desk is filled with books as well as the telephone, blotter, calendar, etc. There is also a small portable work-table for Anya. Hanging on the wall by Anya's bedroom is a small set of shelves with more books and medicine in one corner. There is also a small cabinet with a record player on top. A sofa, armchair, three-tiered round table and a small console table complete the furniture. At night the room is lit by wall-brackets and table-lamps. **LESTER** *is seen precariously balanced on the library ladder. He is a clumsy but likeable*

young man of about twenty-four, shabbily dressed with a tousled head of hair. There is a pile of books on the top of the ladder. Now and again, **LESTER** *selects a book from the shelves, pauses to read a passage and either adds it to the pile or replaces it.* **MRS. ROPER** *is heard off down the hall. She is a rather shifty and unpleasant cleaning woman.)*

MRS. ROPER. *(Offstage.)* All right, Miss Koletzky, I'll see to it before I go home.

*(***MRS. ROPER** *enters the hall from the kitchen. She walks with great stealth, entering the room with her back against the wall. She is carrying her outdoor clothes and a shopping bag. She does not see* **LESTER** *who is engrossed in a book. She creeps towards the desk where there is a packet of cigarettes. She is just about to pocket them when* **LESTER** *shuts his book with a bang.* **MRS. ROPER***, startled out of her wits, spins round.)*

Oh, Mr. Cole – I didn't know you were still here.

*(***LESTER** *goes to return the book and nearly overbalances.)*

Do be careful. That thing's not safe, really it isn't.

(She puts on her coat.)

Come to pieces any minute, it might, and where would you be then, I'd like to know?

LESTER. Where indeed?

MRS. ROPER. Only yesterday I read in the papers of a gentleman as fell off a pair of steps in his library. Thought nothing of it at the time – but later he was took bad and they rushed him to hospital.

(She puts her scarf around her neck.)

Broken rib what had penetrated the lung. And the next day –

(She gives her scarf a final pull.)

– he was dead.

LESTER. What jolly papers you read, Mrs. Roper.

(Ignoring her, he becomes engrossed in a book.)

MRS. ROPER. And the same will happen to you if you go stretching over like that.

(She glances at the desk then back at **LESTER** *again. Seeing that he is taking no notice she starts to sidle over, humming quietly to herself. She empties the cigarettes into her pocket then holds up the empty packet.)*

Oh, look! The professor's run out of cigarettes again.

(A clock strikes five somewhere outside the window.)

I'd better slip out and get him another twenty before they shut. Tell Miss Koletzky I won't be long fetching back that washing.

(She picks up her bag, goes into the hall and calls.)

Bye!

(She exits through the front door. **LESTER** *barely takes his nose out of the book.)*

LESTER. I'll tell her.

(The kitchen door is heard to slam off. **LESTER** *jumps, knocking the pile of books off the steps.* **LISA KOLETZKY** *enters. She is a tall, handsome woman of thirty-five, with a strong and rather enigmatic personality. She is carrying a hot-water bottle.)*

Sorry, Miss Koletzky, I'll pick 'em up.

(He comes down the ladder and picks up the books.)

LISA. It does not matter. A few more books here and there are of no consequence.

LESTER. You startled me, you see. How is Mrs. Hendryk?

LISA. The same as usual. She feels the cold. I have a fresh bottle here for her.

LESTER. Has she been ill for a very long time?

LISA. Five years.

LESTER. Will she ever get any better?

LISA. She has her bad and her good days.

LESTER. Oh, yes, but I mean *really* better.

*(***LISA** *shakes her head.)*

I say, that's tough going, isn't it?

LISA. As you say, it is "tough going."

LESTER. Can't the doctors do anything?

LISA. No. She has one of these diseases for which at present there is no known cure. Someday perhaps they will discover one. In the meantime... She can never get any better. Every month, every year, she gets a little weaker. She may go on like that for many, many years.

LESTER. Yes, that is tough. It's tough on him.

LISA. As you say, it is tough on him.

LESTER. He's awfully good to her, isn't he?

LISA. He cares for her very much.

LESTER. What was she like when she was young?

LISA. She was very pretty. Yes, a very pretty girl, fair-haired and blue-eyed and always laughing.

LESTER. You know, it gets me. I mean, time – what it does to you. How people change, I mean, it's hard to know what's real and what isn't – or if anything is real.

LISA. This bottle seems to be real.

*(***LISA** *exits to Anya's bedroom, leaving the door open.* **LESTER** *collects his satchel and puts some books into it.* **LISA** *can be heard talking to* **ANYA**, *but the words are indistinguishable.* **LISA** *re-enters.)*

LESTER. *(Guiltily.)* The professor said it would be all right to take anything I wanted.

LISA. Of course, if he said so.

(She glances at a book.)

LESTER. He's rather wonderful, isn't he?

LISA. *(Absorbed.)* Hmm?

LESTER. The Prof, he's wonderful. We all think so, you know. Everybody's terrifically keen. The way he puts things. All the past seems to come alive. I mean, when he talks about it you see what everything means. He's pretty unusual, isn't he?

LISA. He has a very fine brain.

LESTER. Bit of luck for us that he had to leave his own country and came here. But it isn't only his brain, you know, it's something else.

*(***LISA** *selects a book of prose by Walter Savage Landor. She sits and reads.)*

LISA. I know what you mean.

LESTER. You just feel that he knows all about you. I mean, that he knows just how difficult everything is. Because you can't get away from it – life *is* difficult, isn't it?

*(***LISA** *is still reading.)*

LISA. I do not see why it should be so.

LESTER. *(Startled.)* I beg your pardon?

LISA. I don't see why you say – and so many people say – that life is difficult. I think life is very simple.

LESTER. Oh, come now – hardly simple.

LISA. But, yes. It has a pattern, the sharp edges, very easy to see.

LESTER. Well, *I* think it's just one unholy mess. Perhaps you're a kind of Christian Scientist.

LISA. *(Laughing.)* No, I'm not a Christian Scientist.

LESTER. But you really think life's easy and happy?

LISA. I did not say it was easy or happy. I said it was simple.

LESTER. I know you're awfully good – *(Embarrassed.)* I mean, the way you look after Mrs. Hendryk and everything.

LISA. I look after her because I want to do so, not because it is good.

LESTER. I mean, you could get quite a well-paid job if you tried.

LISA. Oh, yes, I could get a job quite easily. I am a trained physicist.

LESTER. *(Impressed.)* I'd no idea of that. But then, surely you ought to get a job, oughtn't you?

LISA. How do you mean – ought?

LESTER. Well, I mean it's rather a waste, isn't it, if you don't? Of your ability, I mean.

LISA. A waste of my training, perhaps, yes. But ability – I think what I am doing now I do well, and I like doing it.

LESTER. Yes, but...

(The front door is heard. **KARL HENDRYK** *enters from the hall. He is a virile and good-looking man of forty-five. He is carrying a briefcase and a small bunch of spring flowers. He switches on the lights. He smiles at* **LISA** *and his face lights up with pleasure to see* **LESTER**.*)*

KARL. Hello, Lisa.

LISA. Hello, Karl.

KARL. Look – spring.

(He hands her the flowers.)

LISA. How lovely.

(She puts the flowers on the table, takes **KARL***'s coat and hat and exits to the hall.)*

KARL. So you have come for more books? Good. Let me see what you are taking.

(They look over the books together.)

Yes, Loshen is good – very sound. And the Verthmer. Salzen – I warn you – he is very unsound.

LESTER. Then, perhaps, sir, I'd better not…

KARL. No. No, take it. Read it. I warn you out of my own experience, but *you* must make your own judgments.

LESTER. Thank you, sir. I'll remember what you say.

(He picks up a book from the table.)

I brought the Loftus back. It is just as you said – he really makes one think.

*(***KARL** *moves to the desk and takes some books from his briefcase.)*

KARL. Why not stay and have some supper with us?

LESTER. Thank you so much, sir, but I've got a date.

KARL. I see. Well, good-bye till Monday, then. Take care of the books.

*(***LESTER** *flushes guiltily.)*

LESTER. Oh, I will, sir. I'm awfully sorry – more sorry than I can tell you – about losing that other one.

*(***LISA** *re-enters from the hall.)*

KARL. Think no more about it. I have lost books myself in my time. It happens to all of us.

LESTER. You've been awfully good about it. Awfully good. Some people wouldn't have lent me any more books.

KARL. Tcha! That would have been foolish. Go on, my boy.

*(***LESTER** *rather unwillingly exits through the hall and out the front door.* **KARL** *turns to* **LISA**.*)*

How is Anya?

LISA. She has been very depressed and fretful this afternoon, but she settled down for a little sleep. I hope she is asleep now.

KARL. I won't wake her if she is asleep. My poor darling, she needs all the sleep she can get.

LISA. I'll get some water for the flowers.

(She takes the flowers and exits down the hall to the kitchen. **LESTER** *appears in the hall and comes back quickly into the room. He glances round to make sure he is alone with* **KARL**.*)*

LESTER. I've got to tell you, sir, I must. I – I didn't lose that book.

*(***LISA** *enters from the kitchen with the flowers in the vase. She quietly moves to the table and places them on it.)*

I – I sold it.

*(***KARL** *is not really surprised but kindly nods his head.)*

KARL. I see. You sold it.

LESTER. I never meant to tell you. I don't know why I have. But I just felt you'd got to know. I don't know what you'll think of me.

KARL. *(Thoughtfully.)* You sold it. For how much?

*(***LESTER** *is slightly pleased with himself.)*

LESTER. I got two pounds for it. Two pounds.

KARL. You wanted the money?

LESTER. Yes, I did. I wanted it badly.

KARL. What did you want the money for?

*(***LESTER** *gives* **KARL** *a rather shifty glance.)*

LESTER. Well, you see, my mother's been ill lately and…

(He breaks off.)

No, I won't tell you any more lies. I wanted it – you see, there was a girl. I wanted to take her out, and…

*(***KARL** *suddenly smiles.)*

KARL. Ah! You wanted it to spend on a girl. I see. Good. Very good – very good, indeed.

LESTER. Good? But…

KARL. So natural. Oh, yes, it was very wrong of you to steal my book and to sell it and to lie to me about it. But if you have to do bad things I am glad that you do them for a good motive. And at your age there is no better motive than that – to go out with a girl and enjoy yourself. She is pretty, your girl?

LESTER. Well, naturally, I think so.

(He becomes suddenly confident.)

Actually, she's pretty marvellous.

KARL. *(Laughing.)* And you had a good time on the two pounds?

LESTER. In a way. Well, I mean, I began by enjoying it awfully. But – but I did feel rather uncomfortable.

KARL. You felt uncomfortable – yes, that's interesting.

LESTER. Do believe me, sir, I am terribly sorry and ashamed, and it won't happen again. And I'll tell you this, too, I'm going to save up and buy that book back and bring it back to you.

KARL. *(Gravely.)* Then you shall do so if you can. Now, cheer up – that's all over and forgotten.

*(***LESTER** *nods gratefully and exits through the hall and out the front door.)*

I'm glad he came and told me about it himself. I hoped he would, but of course I wasn't at all sure.

LISA. You knew, then, that he'd stolen it?

KARL. Of course I knew.

LISA. *(Puzzled.)* But you didn't let him know that you knew?

KARL. No.

LISA. Why?

KARL. Because, as I say, I hoped he would tell me about it himself.

(A pause.)

LISA. Was it a valuable book?

KARL. Actually, it's quite irreplaceable.

LISA. Oh, Karl.

KARL. Poor devil – so pleased to have got two pounds for it. The dealer who bought it off him will probably have sold it for forty or fifty pounds by now.

LISA. So he won't be able to buy it back?

KARL. No.

LISA. *(Angrily.)* I don't understand you, Karl. It seems to me sometimes you go out of your way to let yourself be played upon – you allow yourself to have things stolen from you, to be deceived…

KARL. *(Amused.)* But, Lisa, I wasn't deceived.

LISA. Well, that makes it worse. Stealing is stealing. The way you go on positively encourages people to steal.

KARL. *(Thoughtfully.)* Does it? I wonder. I wonder.

LISA. How angry you make me.

KARL. I know. I always make you angry.

LISA. That miserable boy…

KARL. That miserable boy has the makings of a very fine scholar – a really fine scholar. That's rare, you know, Lisa. That's very rare. There are so many of these boys and girls, earnest, wanting to learn, but not the real thing. But Lester Cole is the real stuff of which scholars are made.

*(***LISA** *has calmed down. She puts her hand affectionately on* **KARL***'s. He smiles ruefully.)*

You've no idea of the difference one Lester Cole makes to a weary professor's life.

LISA. I can understand that. There is so much mediocrity.

KARL. Mediocrity and worse.

(He gives **LISA** *a cigarette and lights it.)*

I'm willing to spend time on the conscientious plodder, even if he isn't very bright, but the people who want to acquire learning as a form of intellectual snobbery, to try it on as you try on a piece of jewellery – who want just a smattering and only a smattering, and who ask

for their food to be predigested, that I won't stand for. I turned one of them down today.

LISA. Who was that?

KARL. A very spoiled young girl. Naturally she's at liberty to attend classes and waste her time, but she wants private tuition – special lessons.

LISA. Is she prepared to pay for them?

KARL. That is her idea. Her father, I gather, has immense wealth and has always bought his daughter everything she wanted. Well, he won't buy her private tuition from me.

LISA. We could do with the money.

KARL. I know. I know, but it's not a question of money – it's the time, you see, Lisa. I really haven't got the time. There are two boys, Sydney Abrahamson – you know him – and another boy. A coal miner's son. They're both keen, desperately keen, and I think they've got the stuff in them. But they're handicapped by a bad superficial education. I've got to give them private time if they're to have a chance. And they're worth it, Lisa, they're worth it. Do you understand?

LISA. I understand that one cannot possibly change you, Karl. You stand by and smile when a student helps himself to a valuable book, you refuse a rich pupil in favour of a penniless one. I'm sure it is very noble, but nobility doesn't pay the baker and the butcher and the grocer.

KARL. But, surely, Lisa, we are really not so hard up.

LISA. No, we are not really so hard up, but we could always do with some more money. Just think what we could do with this room.

(The thumping of a stick is heard from Anya's bedroom.)

Ah! Anya is awake.

KARL I'll go to her.

*(**KARL** exits to Anya's bedroom. The music of a barrel organ is heard off.* **LISA** picks up a book of prose by Walter Savage Landor and reads. **MRS. ROPER** enters the hall from the front door carrying a large parcel of washing. She exits to the kitchen, deposits it then re-enters and comes into the room with her shopping.)*

MRS. ROPER. I got the washing. And I got a few more fags for the professor – he was right out again.

(She takes a packet of cigarettes from her shopping bag and puts them on the desk.)

Oh! Don't they carry on when they run out of fags? You should have heard Mr. Freemantle at my last place. Screamed blue murder he did if he hadn't got a fag. Always sarcastic to his wife, he was. They were incompatible – you know, he had a secretary. Saucy cat! When the divorce case came up, I could have told them a thing or two, from what I saw. I would have done, too, but for Mr. Roper. I thought it was only right, but he said, "No, Ivy, never spit against the wind."

(The front door bell rings.)

Shall I see who it is?

LISA. If you please, Mrs. Roper.

*(**MRS. ROPER** exits through the hall to the front door.)*

DOCTOR. *(Offstage.)* Good evening, Mrs. Roper.

*(**MRS. ROPER** re-enters. **DOCTOR STONER** follows her. He is a typical family doctor of the old school, aged about sixty. He is affectionately at home.)*

MRS. ROPER. It's the doctor.

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DOCTOR. Good evening, Lisa, my dear.

LISA. Hello, Doctor Stoner.

MRS. ROPER. Well, I must be off. Oh, Miss Koletzky, I'll bring in another quarter of tea in the morning, we're right out again. 'Bye!

*(***MRS. ROPER** *exits into the hall, closing the doors behind her.)*

DOCTOR. Well, Lisa, and how goes it?

*(***LISA** *marks her place in the book before closing it.)*

Has Karl been buying books again, or is it only my fancy that there are more than usual?

(He busies himself clearing the books from the sofa.)

LISA. I have forbidden him to buy more, Doctor. Already there is practically nowhere to sit down.

DOCTOR. You are quite right to read him the riot act, Lisa, but you won't succeed. Karl would rather have a book for dinner than a piece of roast beef. How is Anya?

LISA. She has been very depressed and in bad spirits today. Yesterday she seemed a little better and more cheerful.

DOCTOR. Yes, yes, that's the way it goes. Is Karl with her, now?

LISA. Yes.

DOCTOR. He never fails her.

(The barrel organ music ceases.)

You realise, my dear, don't you, that Karl is a very remarkable man? People feel it, you know, they're influenced by him.

LISA. He makes his effect, yes.

DOCTOR. *(Sharply.)* Now, what do you mean by that, young woman?

*(***LISA** *shows him the Walter Savage Landor she has been reading.)*

LISA. "There are no fields of amaranth this side of the grave."

(The **DOCTOR** *takes the book from* **LISA** *and looks at the title.)*

DOCTOR. Hm. Walter Savage Landor. What's your exact meaning, Lisa, in quoting him?

LISA. Just that you know and I know that there are no fields of amaranth this side of the grave. But Karl doesn't know. For him the fields of amaranth are here and now, and that can be dangerous.

DOCTOR. Dangerous – to him?

LISA. Not only to him. Dangerous to others, to those who care for him, who depend on him. Men like Karl...

(She breaks off.)

DOCTOR. Yes?

(Voices are heard off. **LISA** *moves the work table and sets it ready for Anya.* **KARL** *enters pushing* **ANYA HENDRYK** *in a wheelchair. She is a woman of about thirty-eight, fretful and faded with a trace of former prettiness. Mostly she is querulous and whining but on occasion her manner shows she had at one time been a coquettish and pretty young girl.)*

KARL. I thought I heard your voice, Doctor.

DOCTOR. Good evening, Anya, you look very well this evening.

ANYA. I may look well, Doctor, but I don't feel it. How can I feel well cooped up here all day?

DOCTOR. *(Cheerfully.)* But you have that nice balcony outside your bedroom window. You can sit out there and get the air and the sunshine and see what's going on all around you.

ANYA. As if there's anything worth looking at going on round me. All these drab houses and all the drab people who live in them. Ah, when I think of our lovely

little house and the garden and all our nice furniture – everything gone. It's too much, Doctor, it's too much to lose everything you have.

KARL. Come, Anya, you still have a fine upstanding husband.

*(**LISA** takes the flowers and puts them on the work-table.)*

ANYA. Not such an upstanding husband as he was is he?

*(She turns to **LISA** who laughs before exiting to the hall.)*

You stoop, Karl, and your hair is grey.

KARL. That is a pity, but you must put up with me as I am.

ANYA. *(Miserably.)* I feel worse every day, Doctor. My back aches and I've got a twitching in this left arm. I don't think the last medicine suits me.

DOCTOR. Then we must try something else.

ANYA. The drops are all right, the ones for my heart, but Lisa only gives me four at a time. She said that you said I mustn't take more. But I think I've got used to them and it would be better if I took six or eight.

DOCTOR. Lisa is carrying out my orders. That is why I have told her not to leave them near you in case you should take too many. They are dangerous, you know.

ANYA. It's just as well you don't leave them near me. I'm sure if you did, one day I should take the whole bottle and finish it all.

DOCTOR. No, no, my dear. You wouldn't do that.

ANYA. What good am I to anyone, just lying there, ill and a nuisance to everyone? Oh, I know they're kind enough, but they must feel me a terrible burden.

KARL. You are not a burden to me, Anya.

ANYA. That's what you say, but I must be.

KARL. No, you're not.

ANYA. I know I am. It's not as though I am gay and amusing like I used to be. I'm just an invalid now, fretful and cross with nothing amusing to say or do.

KARL. No, no, my dear.

ANYA. If I were only dead and out of the way, Karl could marry – a young handsome wife who would help him in his career.

KARL. You would be surprised if you knew how many men's careers have been ruined by marrying young handsome wives when they themselves are middle-aged.

ANYA. You know what I mean. I'm just a burden on you.

*(***KARL** *shakes his head at* **ANYA**, *gently smiling.)*

DOCTOR. We'll try a tonic. A new tonic.

(The **DOCTOR** *writes a prescription on his pad.* **LISA** *enters from the kitchen carrying a tray of coffee. She puts it on the table and begins to pour.)*

LISA. Have you seen your flowers, Anya? Karl brought them for you.

ANYA. I don't want to be reminded of spring. Spring in this horrible city. You remember the woods and how we went and picked the little wild daffodils? Ah, life was so happy, then, so easy. We didn't know what was coming. Now, the world is hateful, horrible, all drab grey, and our friends are scattered, and most of them are dead, and we have to live in a foreign country.

*(***LISA** *hands a cup of coffee to the* **DOCTOR**.*)*

DOCTOR. Thank you, Lisa.

KARL. There are worse things.

ANYA. I know you think I complain all the time, but – if I were well I should be brave and bear it all.

*(***ANYA** *puts her hand out and* **KARL** *kisses it.* **LISA** *puts a cup of coffee on the work-table for* **ANYA**.*)*

KARL. I know, my dear, I know. You have a lot to bear.

ANYA. You don't know anything about it.

(The front door bell rings. **LISA** *exits through the hall.)*

You're well and strong and so is Lisa. What have I ever done that this should happen to me?

*(***KARL** *takes her hand in his.)*

KARL. Dearest – dearest – I understand.

LISA. *(Offstage.)* Good afternoon.

HELEN. *(Offstage.)* Could I see Professor Hendryk, please?

LISA. *(Offstage.)* Would you come this way, please.

*(***LISA** *enters followed by* **HELEN ROLLANDER**. **HELEN** *is a beautiful girl of about twenty-three. Her manner is self-assured and charming.)*

Miss Rollander to see you, Karl.

*(***HELEN** *goes straight towards* **KARL**. **LISA** *watches her sharply as she pours more coffee.)*

HELEN. I do hope you don't mind my butting in like this. I got your private address from Lester Cole.

KARL. Of course I do not mind. May I introduce you to my wife – Miss Rollander.

HELEN. How do you do, Mrs. Hendryk?

*(***LISA** *gives* **KARL** *a cup of coffee.)*

ANYA. How do you do? I am, you see, an invalid. I cannot get up.

HELEN. Of course not. I'm so sorry. I hope you don't mind my coming, but I'm a pupil of your husband's. I wanted to consult him about something.

*(***KARL** *indicates the others in turn.)*

KARL. This is Miss Koletzky and Doctor Stoner.

*(***HELEN** *turns to* **LISA**.*)*

HELEN. How do you do?

(She shakes hands with the **DOCTOR**.*)*

HELEN. How do you do?

DOCTOR. How do you do?

HELEN. So this is where you live. Books, books, and books.

(She moves to the sofa and sits.)

DOCTOR. Yes, Miss Rollander, you are very fortunate in being able to sit down. I cleared that sofa only five minutes ago.

HELEN. Oh, I'm always lucky.

KARL. Would you like some coffee?

HELEN. No, thank you. Professor Hendryk, I wonder if I could speak to you for a moment alone?

*(***LISA** *looks up sharply from her coffee at* **KARL**.*)*

KARL. *(Coldly.)* I'm afraid our accommodation is rather limited. This is the only sitting-room.

HELEN. Oh, well, I expect you know what I'm going to say. You told me today that your time was so taken up that you couldn't accept any more private pupils. I've come to ask you to change your mind, to make an exception in my favour.

KARL. I'm very sorry, Miss Rollander, but my time is absolutely booked up.

*(***HELEN** *speaks with great pace and assurance, almost gabbling.)*

HELEN. You can't put me off like that. I happen to know that after you refused me you agreed to take Sydney Abrahamson privately, so you see you *had* got time. You preferred him to me. Why?

KARL. If you want an honest answer...

HELEN. I do. I hate beating around the bush.

KARL. I think Sydney is more likely to profit than you are.

HELEN. Do you mean you think he's got a better brain than I have?

KARL. No, I would not say that, but he has, shall I say, a greater desire for learning.

HELEN. Oh, I see. You think I'm not serious?

*(***KARL** *does not answer.)*

But I *am* serious. The truth is you're prejudiced. You think that because I'm rich, because I've been a deb, and done all the silly things that debs do – you think I'm not in earnest.

*(***ANYA** *finds* **HELEN***'s chatter is too much.)*

ANYA. *(Interrupting.)* Karl.

HELEN. But, believe me, I am.

ANYA. Oh, dear – I wonder – Karl…

KARL. Yes, my darling?

ANYA. My head – I don't feel terribly well.

*(***HELEN** *is put out by* **ANYA***'s interruption, and takes some cigarettes and a lighter from her handbag.)*

I'm sorry – er – Miss Rollander, but if you'll excuse me I think I'll go back to my own room.

HELEN. *(bored.)* Of course, I quite understand.

*(***KARL** *pushes the chair towards the door to Anya's bedroom. The* **DOCTOR** *moves to the door, opens it then takes charge of the chair.)*

ANYA. My heart feels – very odd tonight. Doctor, don't you think you could…?

DOCTOR. Yes, yes, I think we can find something that will help you. Karl, will you bring my bag?

(He wheels **ANYA** *off.* **KARL** *picks up the Doctor's bag and turns to* **HELEN**.*)*

KARL. Excuse me, please.

(He exits.)

HELEN. Of course.

(There is quite a pause.)

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