

# **SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL**

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# FIDDLERS THREE

by Agatha Christie

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

[samuelfrench.co.uk](http://samuelfrench.co.uk)

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*FIDDLERS THREE* was first written under the title *FIDDLERS FIVE* but was later revised and received its premiere at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre on 1st August 1972.

The performance was directed by Allan Davis, with sets by Anthony Holland and lighting by Michael Saddington. The cast was as follows:

**GINA JONES** ..... Julia Knight  
**SALLY BLUNT** ..... Doris Hare  
**SAM FLETCHER** ..... Raymond Francis  
**FELIX BOGUSIAN** ..... Gabor Baraker  
**HENRY PANHACKER** ..... Mark Wing-Davey  
**JONATHAN PANHACKER** ..... John Boswall  
**AN AIR HOSTESS** ..... Suzanne Barrett  
**DR. NOLAN** ..... D. Williams Newton  
**A WAITER** ..... Bruce Montague  
**MR. TRUSTCOTT** ..... Arthur Howard  
**MR. MOSS** ..... George Lacey

## **CHARACTERS**

**GINA JONES**

**SALLY BLUNT**

**SAM FLETCHER**

**FELIX BOGUSIAN**

**HENRY PANHACKER**

**JONATHAN PANHACKER**

**AN AIR HOSTESS**

**DR. NOLAN**

**A WAITER**

**MR. TRUSTCOTT**

**MR. MOSS**

**JONATHAN PANHACKER** may double with **MR. MOSS**.

**DR. NOLAN** may double with **MR. TRUSTCOTT**.

## **SETTING**

### **ACT I**

The office of Fletcher Developments, near Victoria.

### **ACT II**

A private suite at a Bognor Regis Hotel.

## **TIME**

### **ACT I**

June 11th

### **ACT II**

June 17th



## ACT I

*(Sam Fletcher's office on the second floor of the newly built Mammoth building in London. The office is partitioned into two sections. Fletcher's inner office has a large desk, telephone, and some comfortable chairs. A door leads to a larger outer office which is much the same, slick rather than luxurious. A further door leads to the rest of the building and the street. In the outer office, there is a large desk with a chair and telephone at which **SALLY** is sat. She is an attractive woman of thirty-eight, full of vitality and brimming over with good humour. At her elbow is a box of chocolates from which she helps herself from time to time. At a smaller desk **GINA** is sat typing. She is a pretty, rather timid young girl, not smart, but with possibilities. Both women are typing, **SALLY** at great speed, **GINA** slowly.)*

**GINA.** *(Pausing.)* How do you spell advantageous, Mrs. Blunt?

**SALLY.** A D V A N A I G I O U S.

**GINA.** Thank you.

*(She types.)*

It doesn't look right, somehow.

**SALLY.** Where's the office dictionary? That's what we bought it for. It must be somewhere around. I've told you before not to ask me. I was never any good at spelling. It's psychological. Lots of the best people can't spell, even those who've been to universities.

*(The telephone rings. SALLY answers it.)*

**SALLY.** Samuel Fletcher's office... Can I take a message?... Well, I really couldn't say... He had to fly to Bucharest... Yes... Yes... Perhaps you'd ring again in a few days.

*(SALLY hangs up.)*

**GINA.** *(Surprised.)* Has Mr. Fletcher gone to Bucharest?

**SALLY.** No.

**GINA.** Oh – I wondered.

**SALLY.** Well, don't start wondering. That's not what you're here for.

**GINA.** No, Mrs. Blunt.

*(GINA types. SALLY dials.)*

**SALLY.** Is that Braboune and Trant? Mr. Samuel Fletcher's secretary speaking. We ordered two dozen box files and... Over a week ago... They haven't been delivered yet. We're waiting for them. Yes, yes I'll hang on.

*(Pause. She eats a chocolate.)*

Yes? You surprise me... When was the account sent in?... Yes, yes, I see... It must have got overlooked. I'll make enquiries. In the meantime send the goods round as soon as possible – we're wanting them at once.

*(She snaps down the receiver.)*

Have a chocolate, Gina.

**GINA.** No, thank you, Mrs. Blunt. I'm dieting.

**SALLY.** You're dieting! You don't need to diet, child. I'm the one who needs to diet. And I'm the one who can't keep off the chocolates! Isn't that like life?

*(GINA brings across some typed sheets. SALLY checks them over, making corrections.)*

Not that kind of council, dear, the legal kind. Nobody would want to take a town council's opinion. Not if they had to pay for it, anyway!

*(She looks at the typed sheets again.)*

**SALLY.** That word, there, ought to be untenable – two N’s, I think, but you’d better look it up. “Further advise you as to the resignation as awaited” – that sentence doesn’t seem to make sense. Better go back over your shorthand.

**GINA.** Do you think my typing is improving, Mrs. Blunt?

**SALLY.** (*Unconvincingly.*) Of course it is.

**GINA.** My speed’s not very good.

**SALLY.** You just need practice, that’s all.

**GINA.** Do you think I’ll be good enough to be somebody’s secretary one day?

**SALLY.** Of course you will. But remember, Gina, you’ve got to be careful. It’s not every employer who says he wants a secretary, who really wants just that. The job may be something quite different.

**GINA.** (*Doubtfully.*) You mean?

**SALLY.** Yes, I mean! You’ve been brought up rather sheltered in that convent of yours. Now, I knew all the wrong side of the facts of life before I was ten. It’s come in very useful, I can tell you. You watch out. You’re a pretty girl, or you could be if you took any trouble about yourself. If you notice that any would-be employer is paying too much attention to your vital statistics – watch out!

**GINA.** I will, Mrs. Blunt. (*Pause.*) Do you really think I’m pretty?

**SALLY.** You’ve got all the makings of it. You haven’t done much about it yet.

*(The telephone rings.)*

Samuel Fletcher’s office... Oh yes, Mr. Marshall... I’m so sorry, I’m afraid he’s away... Yes... He had to fly to Belgrade. Yes, Belgrade... Something to do with oil, I believe. I can’t say exactly when he’ll be back... I’ll give you a ring, shall I?

*(SALLY hangs up the receiver.)*

**GINA.** (*Puzzled.*) I thought it was Bucharest Mr. Fletcher had gone to?

**SALLY.** Oh dear, did I say Bucharest before? Just like me.  
Oh well, I don't suppose it matters. They both begin with B and it's long odds against their comparing notes.

**GINA.** (*Puzzled.*) Oh. What I'd really like to do is fashion drawing.

**SALLY.** Why don't you take a course at the Polytechnic or one of those places? You know, evening classes.

**GINA.** I don't really draw very well. (*Pause.*) Perhaps I could be a model.

**SALLY.** Artist or clothes?

**GINA.** Oh, clothes. I'd love to wear really beautiful clothes.

**SALLY.** Cheer up, love. Life won't always be as bad as it seems now. Haven't you got a boyfriend?

**GINA.** Well – not really.

**SALLY.** Oh, only that kind.

**GINA.** I feel there must be something –

**SALLY.** We've all felt that some time or other. One gets over it and on the whole, life isn't too bad.

**GINA.** You always seem very happy.

**SALLY.** It takes a lot to stop me enjoying life – what did I do with that file?

*(FLETCHER enters. He is middle-aged. A rough forthright type. Possibly North Country. A bit flashy but likeable.)*

**GINA.** (*Surprised.*) Oh, good morning, Mr. Fletcher.

*(FLETCHER merely grunts and hangs up his coat and hat. SALLY gives him a quick look, as though realising that something is wrong.)*

**FLETCHER.** Any mail?

**SALLY.** It's all on your desk. Nothing important.

**FLETCHER.** Nothing from Panhacker?

**SALLY.** No.

*(FLETCHER grunts and goes to the door of his office. He stops and turns round.)*

**FLETCHER.** Levinstein ring up?

**SALLY.** Yes.

**FLETCHER.** Did you stall him off?

**SALLY.** I said you were in Belgrade – I mean Bucharest.

**FLETCHER.** Good.

*(He goes into his office.)*

Remember, I'm not available to *anyone*. Except Panhacker, of course.

**SALLY.** OK Sam.

*(FLETCHER goes into his office and starts leafing through the mail on his desk.)*

**GINA.** Is that the Panhacker who has the two top floors here?

**SALLY.** Yes.

**GINA.** He's a tycoon, isn't he? That's what the liftman told me. Rolling in money. He has a wonderful house in the Bahamas with his own swimming beach. He's hardly ever in London.

**SALLY.** Who would be, if they could be in the Bahamas?

**GINA.** And he's just married again, a woman twenty or thirty years younger than himself, a South American. And he's got a daughter who's just got engaged to an Italian prince.

**SALLY.** Where did you get all the dope from, the liftman?

**GINA.** No, it was in the Sunday gossip. And pictures of them all sunbathing, but he had his hat held in front of his face.

**SALLY.** He hates publicity. What did the wife look like?

**GINA.** Very exotic, one can't really see very well, not the faces, they're always so blurred, but she had a lovely figure.

**SALLY.** Now look here, love, you take your mind off social life in the Bahamas and get on with the work.

**GINA.** Sorry, Mrs. Blunt.

*(GINA types. The telephone rings.)*

**SALLY.** Hullo... Sorry?... This is the Amalgamated Dairies.  
You must have the wrong number.

*(She puts down the telephone, looking worried. GINA stops typing and looks up at her. The telephone rings again. SALLY lets it ring for some time, then answers in a flat, well-articulated voice.)*

What number are you requiring please? I am sorry, Whitehall 82395 is temporarily unobtainable.

*(SALLY hangs up the telephone. FLETCHER presses the buzzer which goes off on her desk. She stands and quickly enters FLETCHER'S office.)*

**FLETCHER.** Who was that?

**SALLY.** Grossman's.

**FLETCHER.** You stalled?

**SALLY.** Yes.

**FLETCHER.** He's the worst of them!

**SALLY.** How bad are things, Sam?

**FLETCHER.** They're not very good.

**SALLY.** That's what I thought.

**FLETCHER.** I've signed the contract and paid the ten percent deposit but that scraped the bottom of our barrel. There'll be no difficulty selling the plots once we own the land. It's the chance of a lifetime.

**SALLY.** So it's just a question of raising the rest of the purchase money?

**FLETCHER.** Exactly. And I have just ten days left to do it in.

**SALLY.** I wish I'd got some money, Sam. You should have every penny of it. I wish I could win the Littlewoods Pools!

**FLETCHER.** Me too. You're great, Sally. You'd give your last shilling to help a pal and you wouldn't lose by it. If only I could find the balance of the money!

**SALLY.** Won't they extend the time?

**FLETCHER.** If I don't raise the purchase money we'll lose our deposit and the islands five minutes later. If only I could find young Panhacker.

**SALLY.** He must be somewhere.

**FLETCHER.** Now, look at this mail –

*(BOGUSIAN enters the outer office. He is a very large Croatian man with a beaming smile.*

*GINA rises to greet him.)*

**GINA.** Can I help you?

**BOGUSIAN.** Yes, you can help me. I want to see my very good friend, Mr. Fletcher.

**GINA.** *(Confused.)* I don't think – I'm afraid he isn't available. He's gone to Budapest.

**BOGUSIAN.** Impossible!

**GINA.** I mean Bucharest.

**BOGUSIAN.** That, too, is impossible, for I have just come from Bucharest and he was not there.

**GINA.** *(Stumped.)* Oh.

**BOGUSIAN.** I tell you what I think. He is there in his office. But he does not want to see any Tom, Dick or Harry who comes and asks for him. But Papa Bogusian, that is different. Me, he will want to see! I promise you!

*(As he strides across to FLETCHER's office the door opens and SALLY emerges.)*

Sally! My Sally!

*(BOGUSIAN enfolds her in a bear's hug.)*

**SALLY.** Now, now give over, you. Who do you think you are?

**BOGUSIAN.** I am your adorer, your steady, your faithful one! You look good enough to eat. I could eat you, I am very hungry.

*(He looks to FLETCHER's office – his manner changes.)*

You got Sam in there?

**SALLY.** Yes, come in. He'll want to see you.

**BOGUSIAN.** But not others we can name, eh?

*(They enter FLETCHER's office.)*

**FLETCHER.** Felix!

**BOGUSIAN.** Sam!

**FLETCHER.** What's the latest with you?

**BOGUSIAN.** I am fine! And you? You look as though you were not happy. But why? That compulsory purchase order was a try on, that was all! They have backed out. They hadn't a leg to stand upon. You are in, boy. You take up the option. And after that –

*(BOGUSIAN blows a kiss in the air.)*

**FLETCHER.** *(Heavily.)* It's not all that simple, lad.

**BOGUSIAN.** What do you mean, it's not all that simple?

**FLETCHER.** What have you got in the way of ready money, Jack?

**BOGUSIAN.** Ready money? Me? At the moment, nothing, nothing at all.

**FLETCHER.** Could you raise some? At once?

**BOGUSIAN.** No, I could not. I have just raised everything I could. For a wonderful opportunity. In five months, six at most, it brings me in a packet! But now, at the moment, I can barely eat!

**SALLY.** The way you men go on beats me. You've always been the same ever since I've known you. One minute you're staying at the Ritz and handing out fur coats and diamond bracelets to all your girlfriends and next thing one knows, you haven't even got a taxi fare. You have to travel by bus.

**BOGUSIAN.** Fortunately on a bus, one does not need to pay. There is a special technique. I adopt it always.

**FLETCHER.** That's the way of business, Sally.

**SALLY.** Not all business. There are some kinds of business that aren't like that.

**BOGUSIAN.** And then what happens? The tax collector takes all. Why should I do business just to please the Inland Revenue?

**SALLY.** Don't talk to me about Income Tax and the Inland Revenue! Barefaced robbers they are! Look what they did to Lil West. Just went out to work, casual like, to get a bit of extra pay for her washing machine. Took the best of it away from her. And why, I'd like to know? She worked for it, didn't she? Why should they count it in with her husband? And poor old Ma Grant, they docked her Old-Age Pension, said she did too much sewing at home. Then there were the poor old Smiths, on National Assistance and they cut that down because –

**FLETCHER.** Ease up, Sally, ease up. We know all about that.

**SALLY.** Well, it makes me mad, it does! I'd give them Inland Revenue!

**BOGUSIAN.** So you see, in business you do the business in a way that the tax collector, he cannot touch it. And when the business comes off nicely and you have the big money, why then you look round for some more business that will be like that again. But sometimes, in between, you are very, very short.

**FLETCHER.** And sometimes it's worse than just being short.

**BOGUSIAN.** My friend, if I had got the ready money I'd give it to you. But I have not got the money. Why do you need it so much?

**FLETCHER.** I had to get a loan from Levinsteins and from the Grossman people to tide me over. But with this hitch over the compulsory purchase, it has put the date forward. And to repay the loan and retain control, I have to have the money now.

**BOGUSIAN.** That is not so good.

**FLETCHER.** You're damned right it's not good.

**BOGUSIAN.** Is there no one?

**FLETCHER.** Yes, there's young Panhacker. He wants to come in on it too.

**BOGUSIAN.** Well, then –

**FLETCHER.** Any time after the eighteenth, he said. That's a week from now. Some question of coming into money on that date.

**BOGUSIAN.** Then, it is simple. You can make the arrangements to go ahead. He's Jonathan Panhacker's son?

**FLETCHER.** Yes, his only son.

**BOGUSIAN.** His credit is good. You have only to arrange with him –

**SALLY.** That's easy to say.

**FLETCHER.** He's gone abroad.

**BOGUSIAN.** What about the penthouse upstairs? Haven't they got a forwarding address?

**FLETCHER.** He's the sort of vague young man who doesn't bother about leaving addresses. I've cabled the Bahamas, I've tried everywhere.

**SALLY.** And if he doesn't show up?

**FLETCHER.** I'm for it. Carey Street.

**SALLY.** No, Sam, no. We'll find a way out. There's got to be a way out.

*(She turns to BOGUSIAN.)*

Hasn't there?

**BOGUSIAN.** Of course. Of course. There is always a way. *(Sighing.)* Even if it is not honest, we must find a way.

**SALLY.** Who cares about being honest? I don't. Not when it's Sam.

**FLETCHER.** Come now, Sally, I don't want to get you into trouble. You were brought up honest.

**SALLY.** That's all you know about it! Dad was in and out of gaol all the time, pinched things on the tube in the rush hour. And Mum used to take us kids shoplifting. Trained us to be as slick as anything. I won't say as I didn't look forward to going straight when I grew up. You know how it is – brought up strict in a clergyman's family you take to crime, but brought up dishonest all you want to do is go straight. Training at Boots I was when I left school, wanted to be a pharmacist. You know, mix things up, make people better.

**FLETCHER.** I didn't know that. What went wrong?

**SALLY.** Boots don't only dispense, do they? Mum came to pick me up from work one day.

**BOGUSIAN.** And then?

**SALLY.** Well, with her sticky fingers I wasn't the only thing she picked up, was I? That was the end of that job – run in for shoplifting! Got married soon after that. Nice fellow, good job, trustworthy, it all looked lovely –

**BOGUSIAN.** What happened?

**SALLY.** Confidence man! Sold space.

**FLETCHER.** What, advertising space?

**SALLY.** Outer space. We split up. Then I went into the church for a bit.

**FLETCHER.** You what?

**SALLY.** Scrubbing floors in a convent. Jobs weren't so easy to come by in those days.

**BOGUSIAN.** You certainly got around.

**SALLY.** You know Sam, I've always wanted to be an honest woman but fate's been against me.

*(The telephone rings.)*

This may be Panhacker!

**FLETCHER.** That sort of luck doesn't happen.

*(SALLY picks up the telephone.)*

**SALLY.** Hullo... No, this is the Honeycomb Aerated Bread Company. You must have got the wrong number –

*(She hangs up.)*

It's the enemy.

**BOGUSIAN.** Honeycomb Bread.

*(He smacks his lips.)*

It sounds good. What is it?

**SALLY.** I just cooked it up.

**FLETCHER.** Why do you want to worry about your stomach now?

**BOGUSIAN.** I was very sick on the channel boat. My stomach it is very empty. And when my stomach is empty it makes me think about it.

*(BOGUSIAN takes out a small tin and pops a peppermint into his mouth. The telephone rings again.)*

**SALLY.** Let it ring. Best not to answer.

*(They sit watching it. In the outer office, GINA stops typing and looks doubtfully at the telephone. She crosses and answers it.)*

**GINA.** Yes? Yes, this is Mr. Fletcher's office. Who's calling? I'm so sorry. I'm afraid he's not available. He's gone to Beirut.

*(GINA hangs up the phone then approaches FLETCHER's office and knocks.)*

**FLETCHER.** What is it?

*(GINA opens the door tentatively.)*

**GINA.** A Mr. Henry Panhacker wanted to speak to you. I said you'd gone to Beirut, was that right?

**FLETCHER.** Where was he speaking from?

**GINA.** I don't know. I'm so sorry if I've done wrong. I thought -

*(SALLY picks up the receiver and dials.)*

**FLETCHER.** Try the penthouse.

**SALLY.** What do you suppose I'm doing, ringing Battersea Dogs Home?

*(There is a pause.)*

No reply...

*(Then suddenly there is an answer.)*

Hullo - is Mr. Henry Panhacker there -

*(She covers the receiver and speaks to the others.)*

It's all right. He's there.

(**FLETCHER** seizes the receiver. **GINA** goes back to work. She glances up at the clock and compares it with her watch.)

**FLETCHER.** Henry? It's you? Where were you? No, I haven't been to Beirut that was a mistake. She meant Basingstoke. And you're upstairs now? Sure! Come down right away.

(*He hangs up the telephone.*)

Just got back from New York this minute. It's an answer to our prayer.

**SALLY.** I'd better get back to the outer office.

(*She looks at her watch.*)

The infant wanted to go early for lunch.

**BOGUSIAN.** A pretty kid, how's she shaping?

**SALLY.** She was brought up by nuns. But she'll outgrow that.

**FLETCHER.** She balls up her shorthand, she can't spell, she's not a good typist and the one call I'm sweating on she says I'm in Beirut!

**SALLY.** But she's cheap.

(*She looks happily at FLETCHER.*)

I'm so glad it's turning out all right, Sam. I was worried. You'll be King of the Coleman Islands.

**BOGUSIAN.** And the Prime Minister will put your head on the postage stamp.

**SALLY.** And if you're not careful he'll take it off again.

(*SALLY exits into the outer office.*)

**BOGUSIAN.** That's a good girl, that is.

**FLETCHER.** She's one in a thousand. She's a pal, that's what Sally is. Scatty as they make them, mind you.

**FLETCHER.** But every now and again she comes up with something that's nothing short of a brainwave.

(*SALLY turns to GINA.*)

**SALLY.** You ought to have gone, Ducks, it's passed your time.

**GINA.** I didn't think I ought to leave the office empty. Is Mr. Fletcher cross with me about Beirut?

**SALLY.** No – that's all right.

*(GINA gathers her things and makes to exit. As she opens the door there is a knock and a man half stumbles into her. HENRY PANHACKER is a nervous young man with an occasional stammer, he wears big horn-rimmed glasses making him look rather owlsh.)*

**HENRY.** So sorry.

**GINA.** *(Smiling.)* It's quite all right.

*(GINA passes HENRY and goes out. He turns and looks after her.)*

**HENRY.** She's new, isn't she? What's her name?

**SALLY.** Gina Jones.

**HENRY.** How do you do, Mrs. Blunt?

**SALLY.** Very well, thank you. And you? Top of your form?

**HENRY.** *(Unhappily.)* Well – no, not exactly –

**SALLY.** Is anything wrong?

**HENRY.** Is Mr. Fletcher...?

**SALLY.** He's in his office.

*(She opens the door to the inner office.)*

Here's Henry Panhacker.

**FLETCHER.** Why, Henry, this is great – great.

*(He shakes him warmly by the hand.)*

Been trying to locate you. You know Felix Bogusian? He's with us in our little deal. And where have you been hiding yourself? Have a cigar.

**HENRY.** *(Gloomily.)* No, thank you. No, I – I – couldn't.

**BOGUSIAN.** *(Sympathetically.)* Ah – you have been air sick? Have a peppermint.

**HENRY.** No, it's not that.

**FLETCHER.** You're not looking too good.

**BOGUSIAN.** I tell you, it's the air travel.

(**BOGUSIAN** offers his peppermint tin.)

**HENRY.** No, no it's – I – I – I'm terribly sssorry –

**FLETCHER.** What's up? Is it the money?

**HENRY.** It's Father. He's had a seizure. It was awful.

**FLETCHER.** I'm sorry, very sorry. Here, sit yourself down.

**HENRY.** Early this morning, on the plane, coming from New York – quite suddenly, no warning. They gave him oxygen and at Heathrow they wanted to send him straight to hospital.

**SALLY.** Where is he now?

**HENRY.** Upstairs in the flat. They brought him here by ambulance.

**FLETCHER.** I'm sorry, lad, I can't tell you how sorry I am. It must be a shock to you.

**HENRY.** Oh yes, it is.

**BOGUSIAN.** My condolences.

**SALLY.** Try not to worry, he'll pull through.

**HENRY.** That's just it. The doctor at Heathrow warned me, "If he's just kept quiet he may get over it, but the probabilities are against it." The doctor gave him an injection but he couldn't give much hope. He thinks it probably won't be more than a day or two.

**FLETCHER.** Very sorry indeed. We must just hope he's wrong.

(**HENRY** nods.)

Well, I'm sure you're in no mood to discuss business at the moment, so if you want –

**HENRY.** That's why I felt I must come to you at once. There may not be any business. Between us, I mean.

(*There is a moment of shocked silence.*)

**FLETCHER.** I don't quite follow. You mean you've changed your mind?

**HENRY.** Oh no.

**BOGUSIAN.** Is it that your father disapproves of your deal with Sam Fletcher?

**HENRY.** Far from it, no. Only the other day in New York he said, "Less than two weeks now, Henry and you'll come into a packet." I told you I'm due to get money on the eighteenth?

**FLETCHER.** You did, yes.

**HENRY.** "God knows what you'll do with it," Father said. "Endow an art school, I expect, or found a new botanical garden or benefit some crazy anti-pollution scheme."

**SALLY.** You wouldn't do that?

**HENRY.** Oh no.

**SALLY.** Then what's gone wrong? The eighteenth is next Wednesday.

**HENRY.** You know Father has interests all over the world –

**BOGUSIAN.** Yes, I have followed these closely!

**HENRY.** I think I told you that some years ago he made over the income from his English investments to me.

**FLETCHER.** Yes, you told me that. But what about the capital sum you talked of for our deal?

**HENRY.** And you see it was better for tax purposes if he lived abroad. Also he liked sunshine, the Bahamas. I'm different, I've always loved our country place here. You can see the Welsh mountains, you know, and the sunsets – well, the sunsets –

**FLETCHER.** (*Impatiently.*) Yes, yes – lots of sunsets.

**HENRY.** We always loved the country, my mother and I. Father never cared for it much and after Mother died he took a special dislike to it. He said it was old and rambling. I think it reminded him of her too much.

**FLETCHER.** Yes, you could be right – then?

**HENRY.** And then, not long ago, he married again – I think I told you?

**FLETCHER.** Yes, yes – you did. But what's happened to you? Have your prospects altered?

**HENRY.** No, the income Father settled on me is adequate.

**FLETCHER.** But what about the capital sum you talked of for our deal?

**HENRY.** This is just what I'm telling you.

**FLETCHER.** (*Desperately.*) You haven't told me anything yet!

**HENRY.** That's what I'm telling you. Father had a wager with Benjamin Kleinfeldt – a very old pal of his.

**FLETCHER.** Kleinfeldt – “Nature's Nutty Nutrients.”

**HENRY.** Yes, he was a fanatical health food fiend.

**BOGUSIAN.** He was a real crank, old Kleinfeldt. He was mad – wasted millions advertising his products. Used to go to the Savoy Grill and order a glass of skimmed milk, a bowl of watery cabbage soup and this horrible special bread with a sort of oily nutmeg butter. And he'd pay ten pounds or more for it.

**FLETCHER.** (*Interrupting.*) Keep your mind off food, Felix. Let Henry get on, for God's sake.

**HENRY.** One evening Father and Kleinfeldt argued and shouted at each other until Father said, “If you go on chomping indigestible grasses and uncooked beans you'll be dead ten years before me.” “Bet you I'm still hale and hearty at seventy.” “Bet you never reach seventy.” And so the wager went on. They got their lawyers on to it, money put up and held by trustees.

**FLETCHER.** What a waste!

**HENRY.** As it happened Ben Kleinfeldt died at sixty-seven trying out his new breakfast cereal. He choked to death.

**BOGUSIAN.** I remember.

**HENRY.** That left Dad with just ten months to go before he could collect.

**FLETCHER.** I see. On the eighteenth of this month.

**BOGUSIAN.** How much was the wager?

**HENRY.** A hundred thousand pounds.

**SALLY.** I knew it! All men are mad!

**FLETCHER.** Shush, Sally. Let Henry tell us.

**HENRY.** Well, when Father remarried he set up a trust, sharing everything equally between Inez, my

stepmother, and my sister Geraldine. Half to Inez, half to Geraldine.

*(JONATHAN PANHACKER, Henry's father, enters the outer office, looks round, drops his scarf and exits, leaving the door open.)*

**SALLY.** What about your half?

**HENRY.** Subject to a special clause making all the wager money mine – so that I would have capital, as well as the income you know about. He said the wager money would teach me a sharp lesson.

**SALLY.** Teach you not to gamble, you mean?

**HENRY.** The other way round – teach me the advantages of gambling and taking risks.

**SALLY.** What an extraordinary man your father must be.

**HENRY.** I've always been a big disappointment to him. I'm so – well, ordinary – and cautious.

**FLETCHER.** Nothing wrong with that lad. But this capital?

**HENRY.** My sister – she is the exact opposite, takes risks all the time, and that doesn't please him either.

**FLETCHER.** Well, daughters are different, different altogether.

**HENRY.** It's no secret, you've probably seen it in the papers – Geraldine's got this Italian chap.

**SALLY.** Yes, Prince Positano.

**HENRY.** I've never met him, wouldn't know him if I saw him, but Father thinks he's a phoney. Certainly he has no money, Geraldine says so herself. But instead of understanding, Father talks about changing his will – leaving the lot to Inez and nothing to Geraldine if she marries this Italian.

**SALLY.** Girls get over these things.

**HENRY.** She told Father she'd marry who she liked, and he could – well, she said more or less what he might have said in similar circumstances.

**SALLY.** Good for Geraldine!

# WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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