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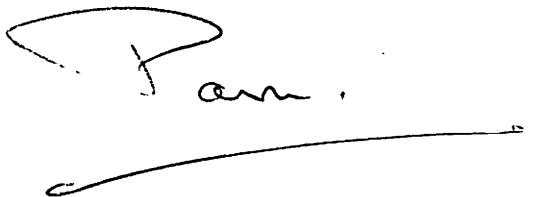
13th October, 1967.

Dear Maurice,

Here is the copy of the original version  
of ELAINE which I believe you wanted.

It seems so long since we've seen you.  
Do drop in some time (unless you think you  
and Margery might come to blows when discuss-  
ing the current trends in the London theatre !)  
At any rate, I'd love to hear about the summer  
in Italy and your evaluation of this year's  
vintage !

Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Pam.', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Elaine (Play)  
original version

Earlier version

E L A I N E.

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A Play  
in  
Three Acts.

## C H A R A C T E R S

Harold Betman.

Elaine, his wife.

Martha, their first daughter.

Rose, their second daughter.

Dick, their son.

Bob Eunnel, a nephew.

Audry Fenshore, a neighbour.

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S C E N E :

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A downstairs living room in a modest - but not cramped - house. It is in the country. On the right there is a door facing us which leads out into the garden, some of the trees and bushes of which (looking rather uncared-for) we can see. To the left of the door, that is to say in the middle of the wall facing us, there is a long window, and to the left of that, in the corner of the room, there is a black stove, with an oven - a survival from the days when this was the main room of a farm-house. Between the stove and the window there is a low sideboard with a mirror hanging over it, and a radio looking rather out of place.

There is a door leading out left into a corridor, where a staircase goes upstairs to the bedrooms.

Another door, consisting of frosted glass in a frame, leads off right, into a room which throughout the play is Bob Runnel's bedroom.

Against the left wall there is a settee, with an oak table before it. Armchairs help to form a cosy circle near the stove with this table as centre. In fact, the room gives an

immediate impression of cosiness. The old furniture suggests that the family - perhaps a generation or so ago - has seen better days; every piece could have come from a large country house.

ACT ONE.

SCENE ONE.

Autumn. It is early evening, and the stove is alight.

ELAINE BETMAN is sitting on a stool in the very corner, to the left of the stove, facing us.

ROSE, her daughter, is seated on the settee, knitting. She will have to turn her head in order to face ELAINE on her left or the audience on her right.

AUDRY FENSHORE, seated in <sup>the</sup> an armchair facing both of them, to the right of the fireplace, also has her profile towards the audience.

We are thus aware mostly of ELAINE'S expressions.

Tea things have been set on the table before them, and the kettle on the stove is boiling. There are cups for five.

ELAINE BETMAN is an attractive woman of about forty-six. She has a pretty face with black hair and quick, inquisitive eyes. She hardly gives the impression of a woman on the wane.

ROSE has none of her prettiness. But she has a kind of tall grace, especially noticeable when she walks. This gives her moments of beauty. But her face is disfigured by a large nose.

AUDRY FENSHORE is a woman in her thirties, at the height of her attraction. She is dressed in rather a sexy way - tight skirt and jumper - and her face is carefully made up. There is

something a little ruined about her, though - as if she has had too many experiences, There is a glass of wine before her, and she is smoking.

ELAINE looks thoughtfully from one to the other, then seems to come to a conclusion.

ELAINE: Well, I still say it's nothing.

ROSE shrugs and continues knitting in silence. Then she speaks, her voice flat and bored.

ROSE: She's your daughter, not mine ...

AUDRY: What does it matter, anyway?

ELAINE looks again from one to the other, unwilling to agree with either of them.

AUDRY: When I was that age -

ROSE: With a little laugh, looking up for the first time.

And look at you now! Divorced and living on alimony!

AUDRY looks at her in a shocked way for a moment, but then laughs good-naturedly.

ELAINE: Don't you mind her, Audry. It's about time she had a boy - then she wouldn't be so jealous of other people's.

ROSE: (cynical) Jealous ...

AUDRY: You've got a crush on Bob, haven't you? It's the first thing I noticed!

ROSE: Well, if that's all you saw you didn't see much. You were too busy with Dick!

ELAINE: (to Audry) There - you see? It's always on her mind! She's just like her father, - on the look-out from morning to night.

ROSE: There's plenty to see in this house - that's why.

ELAINE: You won't believe it, Audry, but he used to set people to watch me before we were married! He used to call at all hours of the day to make sure I was home - he'd push past the servant in the hall, walk straight up to my room - God knows what he was afraid of!

ROSE: without taking her eyes off her knitting.

I wonder what he was afraid of ...

ELAINE: (disregarding her) He used to frighten me.

AUDRY: (vividly) I think he is frightening!

ELAINE: I was eighteen then. I had no idea what marriage was. I didn't understand for years why he suddenly dashed into my room like that, straight from the street ... Those days were very unjust, you know. A woman wasn't allowed a thought or wish of her own.

AUDRY: I married for love. And that wasn't any better.

ELAINE: Yes, but you knew the man - you'd at least been alone with him. I was in love too - but the only man I'd ever been alone with was my father! Imagine that! So of course I couldn't see what was underneath the uniform - I fell in love with the cavalry officer!

AUDRY: Why didn't you leave him, then?

ELAINE: The children, I suppose.

ROSE: Daddy's all right ...

The garden door opens and MARTHA enters. She is older than ROSE but appears in every way younger. She has inherited all her mother's

prettiness, with more freshness and light in her face; but ELAINE's distinction is lacking. She wears her hair in a conventional and rather childish way, down to the base of her neck, and she is dressed smartly in outdoor clothes, which are about a decade behind the times in style.

AUDRY: Hullo, Mart.

MARTHA: Hullo, Audry.

ROSE: Hullo.

MARTHA as she lays hand-bag on the sideboard.

When did you get back, then?

ROSE: I had the afternoon off.

MARTHA (going towards her mother.) Oh, I thought you were staying late. Bus crowded as usual.

She goes to her mother as if by long Habit - there is no need for either of them to speak. ELAINE looks up at her with a smile as she bends down, and kisses her tenderly, then draws away from her a little to study her face. She strokes MARTHA's hair, and several seconds pass before she speaks softly.

Tired, my darling?

MARTHA: (in a childish way) Yes, Mummy.

She yawns and they smile at each other.

ELAINE: What a yawn! Now slip upstairs and change and we'll have some tea. Mm?

MARTHA rises and goes to the door left, rather indulging her tiredness. ELAINE begins preparing tea.

MARTHA: (to ROSE, as she passes her) Are you getting off for the Show?

ROSE: Me? It's no use even asking at my place! Why, are you?

MARTHA: Not this year - short on staff or something.

She leaves the room.

ELAINE: You'll have a cup of tea with us, won't you, Audry?

AUDRY: No, I'll keep to wine - it's lovely, it really is!

ELAINE: I make it every year, though the grooms seem to get most of it.

The frosted-glass door on the right opens and BOB RUNNEL appears. He has been asleep.

He is not so much a good-looking young man as simply gifted in manner. He is tall, and has short brown hair. He looks healthy and fresh. Women find his openness and his capacity for turning things into a lark irresistible.

BOB: Was that Marty just came in?

ELAINE: I thought you were out, darling!

ROSE gives him a quick deprecating glance and abruptly returns to her knitting.

Yes, she's just gone upstairs.

He walks yawning towards the group near the stove. Suddenly, when he is behind AUDRY's chair he springs into action, clasps her head from behind and gives her a loud smacking kiss on the cheek.

BOB: Hullo, my sweetheart!

AUDRY: Bob!

She pushes him away with a laugh, flattered, and straightens her hair. He walks to the door left and as he passes ROSE he moves his hand swiftly over her head so that her hair is slightly disturbed. Then he leaves.

AUDRY: (rather infatuated) Is that boy ever serious?

ELAINE: Oh, more than you think, Audry. (to ROSE) Is your father in the garden?

ROSE does not answer, only knits more busily.

AUDRY: I saw him by the pond when I came over.

ELAINE: Rose, go and call him.

Still ROSE doesn't move.

AUDRY: What's the matter?

ELAINE for answer simply points at the ceiling, to indicate BOB.

ELAINE: (appealing) Darling ... He'll want his tea.

ROSE: (putting her knitting down and rising.) You encourage them.

AUDRY: (as ROSE goes to the garden door) Go on, you are in love with him!

ROSE: (nodding sadly) In love ...

They watch her leave.

AUDRY: She's a funny girl.

ELAINE: (with a sigh) Yes. Martha's more loving, thank God.

Gazing at AUDRY for a moment.

I'm glad you moved here, Audry. It's nice having someone.

AUDRY: Well, I've got a lot to forget.

ELAINE: You're free. Isn't that wonderful, when you might have been tied down to a family by now? I've been here nearly thirty years. Martha's going to be twenty-eight in November. We moved in here twenty-eight years ago - just imagine that! - and I've never left this house for more than a week at a time, and then always with the children. Two meals a day - most of the time for a family of five - no wonder the maids always leave!

AUDRY: I can always come and give you a hand.

ELAINE: Oh, I don't mind it. But I'd like to go out sometimes. I'd like to put on a dress that didn't get stained in five minutes!

She gets up and sees to the fire.

The last ten years - oh, my God, they've been so dull! Why is it, Audry? Suddenly a death comes over our lives, and we are quite paralysed!

A pause, then almost to herself.

We haven't shared the same bed since Dick was born ...

AUDRY: (suddenly intrigued) You haven't?

ELAINE shakes her head but doesn't go on. AUDRY laughs, remembering the Captain.

The way he stood there with his mouth open when I walked in the front gate with the housing agent. I'm sure that's why he let me have the house - the way he looked me up and down!

ELAINE: (smiling) He always does that.

AUDRY: It's his hands - they always want to touch!

ELAINE: He was a very handsome man, you know, tall and fine-looking, especially in his uniform. I loved him in a way - like a daughter. But the moment he touched my body with his hands I felt a shudder go all over me!

AUDRY: Ugh!

ELAINE: If it hadn't been for Martha ... She was like a little woman from the day she was born, so understanding, so submissive and gentle, as if she knew what I felt all the time ... Oh, well - ! (in a lively way) Listen, Audry, why don't we go out one evening, just you and me? There's a bus back at 10.42.

AUDRY: What about the Captain?

ELAINE: (rising) I know. We'll go the night before the Show. He'll have his hands full at the stables then. We'll be quite honest with him - but afterwards! It'll save a lot of fuss!

AUDRY: I'll tell him. (indignantly) It's a shame to keep you indoors like this!

ELAINE: Stopping on her way out left - she is shrewdly aware that she has won an ally.

You tell him, then ...

Continuing to corridor.

Let me show you something, Audry.

She calls out from the corridor.

The others don't know yet.

She returns wearing an autumn coat of a deep scarlet, slightly off the shoulders, which gives her a striking and rather dramatic appearance. She turns like a mannequin so that AUDRY can see her.

AUDRY: Elaine - (getting up to examine it) what a lovely -

At this moment the door from the garden opens and the CAPTAIN enters, followed by ROSE. ELAINE has her back to them, in the midst of a pose, and only turns round when she hears the door close again.

CAPTAIN HAROLD BETMAN is nearly sixty. He is straight-backed, robust, with a thick grey moustache. He has masterful features - a fine nose, thick lips and eyes that flash white. But there is a flebbiness about him, of manner and appearance, which tends to belie this first impression. He is dressed in farmer's gaiters and boots, with a rough shirt open at the neck and his sleeves rolled up.

He stands near the door peering at his wife, at the same time intrigued and suspicious, his face screwed up. He gives AUDRY a quick, sexually appraising glance.

CAPTAIN: What the hell's that?

ROSE passes behind him and goes towards the stove, gazing at her mother's coat in a dark way, unwilling to show that she is in the slightest bit interested. She sits down at her former place.

We are not clear whether ELAINE feels shame, fear or an amused defiance as she looks back at her husband. All three play for a moment on her face.

ELAINE: It's an autumn coat.

ROSE: Rising again petulantly - the coat is clearly on her mind

Shall I pour, Mummy?

ELAINE: Yes, please, darling.

CAPTAIN: Have you seen this before, Rose?

ROSE: What?

CAPTAIN: This coat of your mother's?

ROSE: (attending to the tea things) No.

CAPTAIN: (to ELAINE, morbidly fascinated) When did you get it?

ELAINE: In the summer. I only brought it out today.

He draws nearer to them and, still watching ELAINE, puts a hand rather absently on AUDRY's shoulder.

ELAINE is not sure whether to pose for him as she has done for AUDRY.

CAPTAIN: (to AUDRY without looking down at her) What do you think of it?

AUDRY: (rather frightened with his arm round her) I think it's lovely.

CAPTAIN: Mm.

He turns away, suddenly tired of the subject, towards the table. He goes to the settee at ROSE's side, and she puts a cup of tea in front of him. ELAINE goes into the corridor again, taking off her coat. He sugars and stirs his tea vigorously, seeming unaware of the others. Then as abruptly he comes to life again.

CAPTAIN: (to ROSE) Martha back yet?

ROSE: She's upstairs.

CAPTAIN: (as ELAINE comes back into the room) Was that coat expensive?

ELAINE: Not very.

AUDRY: (taking the plunge) She'll be wearing it soon - I'm taking her out one evening.

CAPTAIN (to his wife, peering) Is that right?

ELAINE:

A little afraid at AUDRY's direct-  
ness - this isn't her way of doing  
things.

Yes. We'll have dinner somewhere and catch the 10.42 back.

CAPTAIN: Dinner? Where?

ELAINE: At the Metropole - it's such a time -

ROSE: (deliberately interrupting her) Pass me the sugar, Audry.

CAPTAIN: You're always out.

ELAINE: (mildly) Always ...

CAPTAIN: And who cooks for us?

ELAINE: Oh, Martha's going to be here, don't worry.

ROSE: (cutting in again) What horse did you take, Daddy?

CAPTAIN: The chestnut.

ROSE: Oh, he's a darling!

CAPTAIN: He's a mischievous job! (absorbed at once) Got a bit of a whistle, I thought. Talbot doesn't seem to know. Wonderful stayer, though. Never have to push him along.

ROSE: Where did you go?

CAPTAIN: Round by Lowley Woods, then back along the Bridle. I've never known the air so crisp and clean - you could drink it today!

There is silence while he takes a sip  
of tea, then he turns to ELAINE.

Bob in his room?

ROSE: (at once) No. He's upstairs with Martha.

CAPTAIN: (to ELAINE) What's he upstairs for?

ELAINE: Oh, don't be silly, Harold ...

CAPTAIN: How long have they been there?

AUDRY: (laughing) A couple of hours!

His face falls and he glances at his watch. Then he realises that she is pulling his leg and gives her a concupiscent, so-you're-game-for-a-joke-are-you look.

CAPTAIN: (to ROSE) Call your sister down.

ROSE goes to the door on the left and calls out, 'MARTHA! Tea's ready!' MARTHA answers from upstairs, 'Coming!'

ELAINE: (with a confiding smile at AUDRY) What are you afraid of, Harold?

CAPTAIN: She's better down here - that's all.

To ROSE as she returns to her seat - he is now in a general state of suspiciousness.

Was she on the 6.13?

ROSE: Of course she was.

CAPTAIN: Did you catch it together?

ROSE: I had the afternoon off.

ELAINE: Really, Harold, you saw her come in for lunch!

He pushes his cup towards ROSE for tea, then broods in silence. MARTHA appears at the door, followed by BOB. The CAPTAIN looks up sharply.

MARTHA: Hullo, Daddy.

CAPTAIN: Hullo.

She goes over to him. BOB sits on the arm of AUDRY's chair.

BOB: Any tea?

AUDRY: (pointing to a cup) That's yours.

CAPTAIN: (as MARTHA bends over to kiss him) Do you have to spend all evening upstairs?

MARTHA: All evening?

BOB: (with a laugh) He thinks we've been making love!

MARTHA: Shut up, you.

BOB: (putting his arm round AUDRY) Not a hope of that!  
(to ELAINE) She posted me in the next room while she changed. I had to talk through the door!

ELAINE: (quietly) Well, then, she knows how to behave.

BOB: Audry's much nicer! She isn't such a Miss ...

CAPTAIN: D'you need any help over there, Audry?

ELAINE: (laughing) Where?

CAPTAIN: Over at the house.

ELAINE: (to AUDRY) Oh I thought he wanted to sit on the other arm!

AUDRY: I've just got the walls done. And the curtains go up tomorrow.

CAPTAIN: I ought to come over and see how you're getting along.

ROSE: (smiling at AUDRY) He'd have lots of suggestions ...

ELAINE: I expect he made them long ago.

BOB: He did! I heard him in the garden!

CAPTAIN: wanting to keep his dignity as father of the family but also rather amused

Now, don't be silly. No, I mean if there's any way I can help. What about the morning?

BOB: Here we go.

AUDRY: I'll get everything ready, Captain, then I'll have you all over for a party.

BOB: So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it.

CAPTAIN: (disregarding him) Is the rent too high?

AUDRY: No, of course not.

CAPTAIN: That's a fair rent, you know. I worked it out strictly on the basis of costs, land tax, rates and so forth. It's not a penny more than it should be. You wouldn't find another place with four rooms, kitchen and bathroom, standing in its own garden, apple trees and a nice lawn, for that price.

ELAINE: All right, Harold ...

CAPTAIN: It's a fact. I'm just talking facts. (to MARTHA) Have you seen your mother's new coat?

MARTHA: (looking up slowly) What new coat?

ELAINE: (hesitantly) I bought it in the summer. I was showing it to Audry.

CAPTAIN: Didn't you see it?

MARTHA shakes her head, as if rejecting the matter

She's giving it a trial flight next week some time - with Audry.

MARTHA: (interested now - to ELAINE) What do you mean?

ELAINE: We're having the evening out.

There is silence. MARTHA turns away. ELAINE sighs.

ELAINE: (to AUDRY) They're so enthusiastic, aren't they?

CAPTAIN: (to MARTHA) You'll have five mouths to feed that night, if Dick turns up.

BOB: What, is she cooking?

MARTHA: (to ELAINE, with resentment) It's all arranged, is it?

ELAINE: What do you mean - all arranged? We don't even know ourselves when we're going.

MARTHA: Don't you think I have enough to do at the office, without looking after your family? (in an outburst) I brought up your son for you: what else do you want?

ELAINE is stung by this and does not speak at once.

BOB: Don't be so rude, Martha.

MARTHA: And don't put your spoke in!

ELAINE: You brought up my son for me, did you? And who do you think's been doing the shopping for thirty years, and cooking your meals, and making your beds? Just because you took him on your knee for a minute every day!

CAPTAIN: You needn't take her up. She's tired. You can see that.

ELAINE: No, it's because I'm having an evening out. But it doesn't matter. We'll forget about it, Audry.

ROSE: More wine, Audry?

AUDRY: No, thanks.

ROSE: More tea, Daddy?

CAPTAIN: (his eyes still on ELAINE) Not for me.

BOB gets up from AUDRY's chair and stretches.

ELAINE: (tenderly, to BOB) Did you have a good sleep, darling?

BOB: Yes, thanks.

ROSE: That's right. He's tired from doing nothing all and every day.

ELAINE: Oh, that won't last for long, don't you worry, my girl. He's got a fine career ahead of him.

ROSE: It's been ahead of him for nearly twelve months now.

BOB: And what's it got to do with you, Helen of Troy?

ROSE: This - I go out at seven o'clock in the morning to keep this house on it's feet!

CAPTAIN: (finding this distasteful) Rose ...

BOB: Oh, well we can't all be like you - good as well as beautiful.

He strolls away from the group near the stove, his hands in his pockets and begins singing to himself

Ring-a-ring-a-roses,  
Pocket full o' ...

He pauses, then adds nonchalantly but distinctly

- noses.

The others can hardly restrain their smiles, and ROSE titters.

Let's have a dance!

He turns on the radio, tries several stations, then finds some jazz, which he puts on full volume. ELAINE puts her hands over her ears and laughs.

BOB turns and holds out his arms towards her, inviting her to come and dance with him. She shakes her head, but he calls out urgently, beginning to move in the rhythm of the music, 'COME ON' So she gets up, excited, a little nervous, saying what seems like - for the music is so loud -

'BUT I CAN'T DO IT!' The CAPTAIN, MARTHA and ROSE are watching her curiously and intently.

He quickly sweeps her into the dance, doing a modern jitter-bug, but she cannot grasp the steps. So he draws her closer to him with a laugh and takes up the conventional ballroom position. At once she begins to shine. Her movements are graceful, and she takes long steps, her head high, as if she is used to dancing in large and fashionable ballrooms. Her face changes. She appears wrapt and lost. She seems no longer to belong to the room. The CAPTAIN watches her with awe, a little smile on his lips, and his eyes narrowed. MARTHA seems crushed: she is standing quite still by the stove, staring at her mother from under her eyebrows. Only ROSE is disengaged: she watches the couple with a remote and appraising eye, as if she is trying to divine something in ELAINE.

The music stops. We see in a moment how ELAINE would look if she led a grander life. She sighs delightedly, then turns round to face the mirror on the wall. The others still watch her. BOB leans on the table, panting. ELAINE draws herself to her full height, her hands above her head, gazing at her reflection, as if imagining the life she might have had. The others seem absent to her. There is silence. Then the radio starts again, with another tune. But she switches it off at once with a light flick of her hand. MARTHA is still gazing at her, crushed.

ELAINE: Oh, Bob - ! I haven't danced for years - not really danced!

AUDRY: (who has been watching Martha) What about Martha?

BOB: Remembering himself with a start and going to her.

Yes, Mart - come on!

MARTHA: No, it's all right.

ELAINE: (to AUDRY) A woman should dance every day - she really should!

BOB: (takes MARTHA's hand, but she will not move) Marty!  
(to ELAINE) You tell her!

ELAINE: (indifferently, without looking at her) Yes, go on, darling.

BOB switches the radio on again. At last MARTHA goes with him reluctantly, and they begin a jitterbug step. But she is very sluggish. It is clear that she is at home in the dance, but the life has gone out of her and she barely follows BOB's steps. ROSE is watching her, fascinated. ELAINE, seated again, stretches back magnificently.

To make her more lively BOB begins to dance faster. Then, determined to shake her out of her mood, he takes her up in his arms and begins madly whirling her round. At first she smiles unwillingly but then - as she tries to get down and he resists her - she grows furious. She shouts at him, 'Bob! Let me down!' But only when she is almost punching him in the face does he drop her. She switches the radio off with an angry gesture and then looks down at her crumpled skirt.

MARTHA: Now look what you've done! And it's new on today!

She stamps her foot and, seeing him quite unconcerned, goes up to him, white with anger and her lips pursed, and smacks him round the cheek. Everybody is shocked. He stands quite still for a moment, staring at her, then marches off to his room on the right and slams the door. There is silence.

ELAINE: Martha, really ...

CAPTAIN: There's no need for that, Martha.

MARTHA: (quietly) Oh yes, there is. And now he can sulk all he wants to.

AUDRY: Is it new on today?

ROSE: She bought it at the sale last week.

AUDRY gets up and takes a closer look at MARTHA's skirt.

AUDRY: Oh, you can't see a thing.

ELAINE: After all, Martha, it was only in fun. (she draws MARTHA towards her) Now go and make it up, darling.

MARTHA shakes her head like a child, as if on the edge of tears, and ELAINE puts her arm round her shoulder, then ruffles her hair, until at last MARTHA looks up with a little smile.

Go on, my baby. Be nice to him.

MARTHA: What did he have to -

ELAINE: It doesn't matter now.

MARTHA goes over to BOB's room and enters.

CAPTAIN: (to ELAINE, after gazing at BOB's closed door) You encourage them, don't you?

ELAINE: What - to be polite to each other, Harold?

CAPTAIN: You start it, then you -

ELAINE: Me start it?

CAPTAIN: Anyway, get her out of that room ...

ELAINE turns away and he jumps up with sudden fury, shouting at the top of his voice, which is surprisingly powerful.

Martha! Martha!

MARTHA appears from BOB's room, looking frightened.

MARTHA: Yes?

ELAINE: You father wants you here.

BOB comes out also, completely puzzled. The CAPTAIN goes to the garden-door and pulls it open.

CAPTAIN: (to ELAINE, gazing across at her menacingly) One in the family's enough!

ELAINE: subdued by his anger, but wanting to show defiance in front of the others.

One what?

BOB: (passing ELAINE) What's he talking about?

The CAPTAIN goes out, slamming the door after him.

C U R T A I N .

ACT ONE.

SCENE TWO.

The evening before the Show. It is late and the curtains are drawn. The door of BOB's bedroom is open and the light there is on.

ROSE is attending to the stove. MARTHA walks across to the window and peeps out. She appears cold, and is drawing her jumper closer about her shoulders.

ROSE goes back to her usual place on the settee and takes up her knitting. But after a few seconds she throws it back on the table hopelessly. There is absolute silence in the house. MARTHA remains by the window, anxious and pinched-looking.

MARTHA: Where did she say they were going?

ROSE: She didn't ... And I'll tell you another thing ...

MARTHA: (peering at her, for a moment like her father) What?

ROSE: This won't be the last of her evenings out - she's got an ally now ...

MARTHA: (breathlessly) She hasn't been seeing Talbot, has she?

ROSE silences her with a glance, for she has been BOB coming out of his bedroom. He stands in the doorway looking across at them.

BOB: What's the matter with everybody tonight?

MARTHA doesn't even turn round. ROSE takes up her knitting again.

ROSE: Minding their own business mostly.

BOB: (strolling over to the radio) What a rotten dinner that was!

MARTHA: Now don't switch that on!

BOB: But what's the matter?

MARTHA: It's late. And we're going to bed.

BOB: It's because she's out. Honestly - a girl of twenty-seven like you!

MARTHA: It's none of your business - I've told you that before.

There is a noise on the step outside the door, in the garden. Both the girls start. The door opens. It is the CAPTAIN. He remains by the dooring, holding it ajar as if he intended to leave again at once.

CAPTAIN: How's the time?

ROSE: Just after eleven.

CAPTAIN: Didn't I hear that bus?

ROSE: It isn't due in for another minute.

CAPTAIN: I could have sworn I heard it come in ...

ROSE: That's the 10.00. Why don't you go to bed?

CAPTAIN: With the Show tomorrow? I'm over with the grooms, girl!

ROSE: Oh, yes! (to MARTHA) I'd clean forgotten the Show.

CAPTAIN: (hot on his subject again) All the tackle's down - twenty-nine pairs of boots, thirteen saddles, there's enough leatherwork for a Squadron of horses there -

MARTHA: You're letting the draught in, Daddy ...

CAPTAIN: (coming to his senses slowly) Well, you know where I am ...

He goes.

ROSE: 'With the grooms' ... They'd have kissed his shoes twenty years ago.

BOB: (putting his arm round MARTHA) Let's go over and watch them at it - come on!

MARTHA: (shaking her head) You go.

He kisses her lightly on the lips and makes as if to push him away, but in truth she is quite pleased. ROSE watches them.

ROSE: You two ...

BOB: Why?

ROSE: Aren't you ashamed, in front of other people?

BOB: If you could see your eyes when I do this ...

He lowers his head on to MARTHA's, with a tender, voluptuous expression.

ROSE: You just look damned silly.

BOB: with mock sharpness, pointing his finger at her imperiously

Then why were your eyes burning?

MARTHA: (amused despite herself) They were burning.

ROSE: Here's the bus!

They listen, but there is nothing.

BOB: (to aggravate them) There are lots of other buses she could catch - there's the 11.33, the 12.17, the 1.03, the 2.46 -

MARTHA: Sssh!

This time there is a sound on the step outside and ELAINE enters, dressed in her new autumn coat. She is flushed, and her eyes are lively and dark. Her face is carefully made up. AUDRY is behind her.

BOB: Hullo! (with a glance at MARTHA) We were just talking about you ...

ELAINE: Hullo, darlings. (full of the evening) Well, we certainly did have a lovely time - !

AUDRY: You ought to have seen the dinner we ate!

ELAINE: (to AUDRY) We really should make a party of it one evening - all of us together - (to ROSE and MARTHA) You'd adore -

She stops, seeing their deliberately impassive faces. There is silence.

BOB: (helplessly to ELAINE) Don't you mind ...

ELAINE: (quietly) All right. The evening's finished now. (turning back to AUDRY) You see how they are?

She goes out left, taking off her coat.

AUDRY: (to MARTHA and ROSE) Why can't you be nicer with her?

There is the sound of a bus outside. MARTHA and ROSE stare at each other. ELAINE comes back into the room. She is dressed in a black evening gown, too splendid for a simple visit to town

BOB: (watching her) I've never seen you dressed like that ..

ELAINE: (kissing him on the cheek) Oh, yes you have, darling - but you were too small.

ROSE: (to her mother, almost trembling) Wasn't that the bus?

ELAINE: What?

ROSE: That was the 10.42 just came in!

ELAINE: What about it? (realising) Oh - ! We got a lift back.

MARTHA: A lift?

AUDRY: (to BOB) What's the matter with these two?

ELAINE: Shall we have some tea?

AUDRY: I think I'll go to bed, Elaine.

MARTHA: You got a lift?

ELAINE: Yes.

MARTHA: Who from?

ELAINE: (dishonestly) Oh, some man. (without reprimand) What are you looking at me like that for?

ROSE: She's just curious.

ELAINE: Oh, he was some man at the Metropole. He walked out just as we did.

AUDRY: What do they think, for God's sake?

ROSE He just came up to you?

ELAINE: He saw us walking away - and he had a car - so he offered us a lift home.

MARTHA: What was his name?

ELAINE: How do I know?

MARTHA Does he live here?

ELAINE: No. Beyond the Quarry, I think ... Where's your father?

ROSE: Over at the stables.

ELAINE Isn't it the Show tomorrow?

Neither of her daughters pay any attention to this.

BOB: Yes.

AUDRY: Hasn't Dick turned up?

MARTHA: He sent word across to say he'd be spending the night there.

ELAINE: (to AUDRY) Is he booked for a race?

AUDRY: Yes, after lunch, I think.

ELAINE: (sitting down with a tired sigh) Still, that was a beautiful evening.

AUDRY: (to BOB) You ought to have seen the food!

ELAINE: (also to BOB) We had trout, and a lovely wine, and it was all so quiet - You would have loved it, wouldn't you, darling?

He nods, glancing rather doubtfully at MARTHA.

ROSE: Well - so long as he didn't have to work for it.

BOB: Now then, Trojan beauty -

ELAINE: (cutting them off) If Dick's not here you'd better see Audry home, Bob. You'd better take a torch.

ROSE: Daddy can take her. He'll be back soon.

AUDRY: I'd rather go alone, then!

BOB: Where's the torch?

ELAINE: In one of those drawers. (Indicating the sideboard) but stay and have some tea, Audry.

AUDRY: No, I'm so tired. I'll come over in the morning.

BOB finds the torch.

BOB: All set, Audry.

MARTHA: I'd like a walk, too.

BOB: (triumphantly) She's jealous! That's the style, Martha!

He rushes across and draws her into his arms.

I'll play you and Audry against each other!

ROSE: You'd better watch out for Dick, then.

ELAINE: All right, Rose, he's only playing.

ROSE: Is he?

AUDRY: Good night, everybody.

ELAINE: Good night, dear. And thank you ever so much.

ROSE: Good night, Audry.

The three of them leave the house, BOB taking AUDRY's arm as well as MARTHA's.

ELAINE closes the door after them and at once turns to ROSE, who is putting her knitting in a bag, preparing to go to bed.

ELAINE: Really, Rose - [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] How do you think I feel when you ask me questions like that - 'Who gave you a lift? What was his name? Where does he come from?'

ROSE: Martha asked most of the questions ...

ELAINE: But it always feels like you, darling - as if the intention came from you.

ROSE: (lowering her gaze) It's all this ...

ELAINE: What, darling?

ROSE: (awkwardly) It's the way things are going - there's Audry ...

ELAINE: (laughing) What on earth's Audry got to do with it?

ROSE: Oh - her sort of life - divorce - going out all the time - And you don't seem to mind if Martha goes the same way.

ELAINE: Can you really compare the two?

ROSE: Of course you can. I don't suppose Audry was very different from Martha before she married - no weaker, I mean.

ELAINE: 'Goes the same way'? - no, it's ridiculous!

ROSE: But you encourage them!

ELAINE: Encourage who?

ROSE: Martha and Bob - just as Daddy said.

ELAINE: And I encourage them to do what?

ROSE: To behave like a married couple.

ELAINE stops, for the first time  
aware of danger.

ELAINE: (going closer to her daughter - speaking in a low voice)  
What are you saying?

ROSE: Nothing particular.

ELAINE: But what do you mean - 'married couple'?

ROSE: (with a shrug) I don't know - he's always mauling her about -

ELAINE: In here?

ROSE: Oh, on this sofa - over there in his room -

ELAINE: But have you any real evidence. - I mean - ? (gazing down - almost to herself) My daughter wouldn't - not in my house!

ROSE: But you didn't even know she was in love with him until I told you!

ELAINE: She likes her cousin. Don't you exaggerate? They're cousins, after all ... Perhaps they pet each other a bit ... Do they? I wonder if you don't exaggerate all this!

- ROSE: But just suppose she got herself into trouble. He wouldn't worry!
- ELAINE: If anything like that happened in this house - !  
He couldn't, Rose - against me, against your father ...
- ROSE: Then what about those women at Lowley Gate? That boy was going out with married women at the age of seventeen!
- ELAINE: You believe that kind of talk?
- ROSE: Yes - because women are just a joke for him!
- ELAINE: (shaking her head slowly) But you're wrong, darling - I'm sure of that ... I know that laugh for what it is, I know that way of being saucy to people - (she pauses) You never saw his grandfather, did you?
- ROSE: (in a bored voice) No.
- ELAINE: I used to stand outside the drawing room door just to hear him talk - he made everything so rich and warm!
- ROSE: (flatly) Yes - I've heard it before. Bob's the living image of him ... (with sudden sharpness) But why have Mart and I got to keep him alive?
- ELAINE: Oh, dear, the eternal subject ...
- ROSE: Well, you couldn't keep this house going on Daddy's retirement pay, could you?
- ELAINE: But don't you think your father and I have some sort of duty towards the boy, darling? Can you imagine what it's like to live motherless all your life?
- ROSE: That doesn't mean he can't work. Even an angel can fall. Adam did, so why shouldn't Bob?
- ELAINE: We agreed to take him for at least a year, without conditions.
- ROSE: It's more than a year now.

ELAINE: You'd think it nice if I told him to go out and earn his living straight away? Nothing very warm and loving about that!

ROSE: He's nearly twenty-one! I don't see it's very unkind to ask him to work. As it is he mopes all day, he's always sloughing round with his hands in his pockets, he's always trying to flirt with somebody, his hand's always on that radio - if you think that's how a young man ought to live - well!

The door from the garden opens and the CAPTAIN enters. He looks anxiously into the room, then sees ELAINE.

CAPTAIN: Ah, you're back.

ELAINE: (to ROSE) Now get to bed, darling. You'll never wake up in the morning.

ELAINE tidies the table, puts the chairs in place, turns down the flue-tap on the stove while ROSE begins banking up the fire for the night.

CAPTAIN: (watching ELAINE) Was the 10.42 on time?

ELAINE: I think so.

CAPTAIN: Where did you go?

ELAINE: To the Metropole.

CAPTAIN: For dinner?

ELAINE: Yes.

He gazes at her dress and figure.

CAPTAIN: Did you wear the coat?

ELAINE: Yes.

CAPTAIN: One of the grooms said you weren't on the 10.42.  
(pause) I said you must have been.

ELAINE: Well, I wasn't.

CAPTAIN: (screwing up his face, to listen better) What?

ELAINE: I said I wasn't.

CAPTAIN: What happened, then?

ELAINE: (with a sigh) We got a lift back.

There is a pause during which he  
tries not to ask the next question,  
but it gets the better of him.

CAPTAIN: Who from?

ELAINE: A man - I don't know who - he offered us a lift.

She busies herself with tidying the  
room, then prevents further questions.

Rose says we've got to find some work for Bob.

The CAPTAIN pauses, needing time to  
absorb this.

CAPTAIN: Why?

ELAINE: She's probably right. After all, he's got to start work  
some time.

CAPTAIN: Yes, but - (he waves his hand vaguely) He's only a boy.

ROSE: He's nearly twenty-one.

CAPTAIN: Oh, he's all right hanging round here for a bit. He helps  
me in the yard. He's got it in him. There's no need  
to push him into anything.

ROSE: (quietly) You see? You both want to spoil him.  
(to the CAPTAIN) And the other day you were shouting at

someone to come out of that room! It wasn't him you shouted at. But he was the cause.

CAPTAIN: (shelving it) All right, let's have a talk about it in the morning. (with a yawn) Was that dinner expensive? (going to the door left)

ELAINE: Audry paid.

CAPTAIN: Did she, by God? ... Well, good night.

ELAINE: Good night.

He goes.

ROSE: 'Tomorrow' ... (she takes up her knitting bag) He can never set about things today.

ELAINE: Well, it isn't easy ... Neither of us want to push the boy into anything.

ROSE: You just have to choose between him and Martha.

ROSE goes out left. ELAINE goes to the garden door and looks out into the night. There is no sign of MARTHA and BOB. She comes back into the room, thoughtfully, and at first we think she is going to wait for them. But she decides against it. She goes out left, leaving the door open and switching out the light. Only a dim light from the corridor is shining across the room.

There is silence. Nothing happens for some time. Then we hear a step outside. The door opens. There is whispering. MARTHA and BOB have come in, though we can barely see them. They tiptoe across towards the light. They are holding each other close. Suddenly he grasps hold of her shoulders, turns her sharply round to face

him and kisses her on the mouth. After a few seconds she pushes him away with a gasp, and he laughs softly. They go towards the door on the left and MARTHA slowly and carefully - so that it does not creak - closes it. The room is in darkness for a moment. Then she switches up the light. They go to the settee and sit down, she half lying across him with her head on his chest and her feet tucked up.

MARTHA: Daddy left that door open. He's so funny. He sleeps with one eye open.

BOB is staring before him. MARTHA has closed her eyes, but he seems wide-awake. Now that he is not being deliberately jolly we can see that there is a kind of wistful melancholy in his face. And with this there is also impatience.

They remain like this for some time.

BOB: Martha.

MARTHA: (without opening her eyes) Yes?

BOB: Why don't we go in my room?

MARTHA: (opening her eyes at once) Because of Daddy.

BOB: He's asleep. He's been chopping wood all day.

MARTHA: He senses things.

BOB: We can turn out the light here and -

MARTHA: (in distress) What for, Bob? It's always the same!

She jumps up, flings herself away from the settee.

Why can't you leave me in peace?

BOB: (getting up) Oh, peace! Every time I touch you it's 'peace'!

MARTHA: You aren't content just to be with me, are you?

BOB: Going up to her and trying to pull her towards him.

Don't be silly! (raising his voice) I do want you with me, but not there - (indicating the settee) Why can't we be alone some time?

MARTHA: I told you, didn't I? Because of Daddy.

BOB: (keeping hold of her) It's because of you. It is you, isn't it?

MARTHA: Well, why do you have to be pawing me about all the time?

BOB: 'Pawing' you?

MARTHA: You don't have to be touching someone all the time!

BOB: You said you liked kissing ....

MARTHA: Oh, why can't we be quiet sometimes?

BOB: (turning away) We're always quiet.

MARTHA: Are you sure you love me? Me?

BOB: Your body's you, isn't it?

MARTHA: Not all, no.

BOB: (pulling her again) Oh, come on, Marty!

She resists, calling out 'Bob' but in a muffled voice.

Come on!

There is a noise on the stairs.

MARTHA: (frightened) There! It's Daddy!

They stand quite still, their hands at their sides, waiting. It is ELAINE. She is in a dressing-gown which, like her coat, gives her a very striking and dramatic appearance. She seems paler. She stands at the door surveying them both withing smiling, in a very dignified way.

BOB: Hullo!

MARTHA: (easier) I thought it was Daddy...

ELAINE: (coming further into the room and speaking coldly) Now don't you think it's time for bed? I mean - ?

MARTHA: (astonished by her tone) What's the matter?

ELAINE: (suddenly sweet again, putting her arm round her daughter) Oh, I don't know. It's all this coming and going. You know what your father's like ...

MARTHA: I'm coming up now.

ELAINE: (she lets her arm fall from Martha) And you know, darling, I can hear every word you say upstairs.

She pauses, then speaks in a sharp, scathing tone, her face hard.

It isn't very nice, is it?

MARTHA is stunned and bewildered. She stares at her mother, her mouth open.

ELAINE: (hugging her again) All right, darling. Don't be long. (kisses her, then walks away) Good night, Bob.

BOB: Good night.

ELAINE leaves again, the door open behind her. MARTHA remains standing quite still.

BOB:            (softly)    Don't worry about her.    She's jealous.

He draws her towards him and tries to kiss her. She does nothing to resist him, only stares before her.

MARTHA:    I'm going to bed.

BOB:            Why do you let her upset you like that?

She looks down and shakes her head in silence. She breaks free of him.

MARTHA:    Good night, Bob.

She hurries to the door anxiously and goes out, closing it behind her.

He stares after her. He looks round for something to do. He goes to the settee and lounges there for a moment, puts his feet up on another chair, Yawns. Then he looks at his watch. He has thought of something to do.

He goes to the door leading into the garden, listens to the silence of the house for a moment, then slips out, switching off the light as he goes.

C U R T A I N.

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ACT TWO.

SCENE ONE.

The day of the Show, about noon.  
There is bright sunshine, and both  
the garden-door and the door on the  
left are open. Nothing stirs out-  
side, and it might be a summer's day.

The breakfast things, on the table  
near the hearth, have still not been  
cleared away. There are places for  
four people.

ELAINE is standing in the doorway  
gazing into the garden, so that she  
has her back towards us. She is  
dressed for housework.

Some time passes, then BOB's door on  
the right opens and he comes out. He  
is dressed sportively, in blue  
trousers and yellow sweater, with a  
silk scarf. He sees ELAINE. He  
creeps up behind her and suddenly  
puts his hands over her eyes from  
behind.

ELAINE: (with a jump) Bob! (she turns with a smile) You can  
be a fool!

BOB: (kissing her on the cheek) Hullo!

ELAINE: Look how lovely it is!

He puts his arm round her shoulder and  
they stand looking into the garden.

It must be horrible working in an office every day like  
Rose and Martha.

BOB: They could work on the farm.

ELAINE: And how much money would they get? Dick earns a quarter  
of their salary. Less. And he's over at the stables  
all hours of the night ...

BOB: Oh, he enjoys it!

ELAINE: (laughing) And what about you, darling? What's your line of work?

She hugs him and looks up into his eyes.

Kissing pretty girls?

BOB: What about some coffee?

ELAINE: (turning) I've just made some.

Taking him by the hand towards the stove.

Why don't you get up earlier, Bob?

BOB: I had a late night.

ELAINE: But Martha came up just after me.

BOB: I know. (rather darkly) I was reading.

ELAINE: (taking the coffee from the stove) This is the fourth I've made this morning. First there's Martha, then Rose, then the Captain and Dick - and by the time you're finished it's nearly time for lunch.

BOB: Where is everybody?

ELAINE: The Captain's at the Show. Dick's upstairs.

BOB: Is he riding?

ELAINE: Oh, yes - risking his life as usual.

BOB: I like to see him on horseback ...

ELAINE: Did you ever think about riding?

BOB: No - I've seen too many spills.

ELAINE: Coward.

BOB: Just sensible.

ELAINE: (stopping and looking at him) That's the first I saw of the Captain, taking a hurdle at a military point-to-point.

BOB: He even looks like a horse ... (tickled by his own fancy) Have you seen him walk across the garden from behind?

Getting up and imitating his walk.

ELAINE: (with a smile) That's your line of work - playing the fool.

She gives him his coffee, then sits down and looks at him more soberly.

But you can't go on like that for ever, Bob.

BOB: Are you angry about last night?

ELAINE: I wasn't angry with you, darling.

Gets up, opens the stove, rakes it and refills it with coal before she speaks again.

After all, you're a young man. There'd have to be something wrong with you if you didn't find Martha attractive, wouldn't there?

BOB: You didn't look at me once last night - you only talked to her - and when you said good-night you had your back turned.

ELAINE: Well, I told you: I wasn't angry with you.

BOB: But what's she done?

ELAINE: She hasn't realised - that's all ...

BOB: Realised what?

ELAINE: Let me ask you a question. Are you in love with her?

BOB: (after a pause) Yes, I think so.

ELAINE: (thumping the table with sudden anger) Exactly!  
'I think so!' 'I think so!' You aren't, Bob, you  
know you aren't!

Her face is flushed and he stares  
at her in surprise.

BOB: How do you know that?

ELAINE: (smiling sadly) Oh, darling, I know your face ... I've  
seen it before. You're playing, Bob ...

BOB: No, I'm not.

ELAINE: You're playing. And when your grandfather said some-  
thing very, very serious he had the same look - 'I think  
so' - and he used to cock his head a little to one side,  
just like you. My mother would ask, 'But wouldn't you  
like a house in the country and a settled routine?' And  
he's look at her with those same eyes and say, 'Yes.  
I think so.' Then he'd disappear for another six months.

BOB: (looking down, pouting a little) Well, I never met him ...

ELAINE: Look at me, darling. I'm not trying to scold you. I'm  
not saying he wasn't a serious man. He was the most  
serious man I ever set eyes on. But not for things like  
a house and marriage and children. That's what I loved  
him for.

BOB: I could marry her ...

ELAINE: But will you marry her?

BOB: (looking away) I haven't thought about it.

ELAINE: Of course you haven't. He never gave marriage a thought  
until he was quite an old man.

BOB: I'm me - not some gouty old boy who lived fifty years  
ago! Honestly -

ELAINE: He never had gout. He looked as firm as a rod until the  
last month of his life.

BOB: I'll go away then ...

ELAINE: Look, darling, I'm not asking you to think about marriage. In fact, it's the very opposite. Of course you're different people, you conceited boy! (after a pause, thoughtfully) How could I be angry with you? I've got you to thank for my evening out.

BOB: Me?

ELAINE: It was you who gave me the confidence - did you know that? Do you think I could have done it a year ago? Go out to a hotel - sit there, take coffee with Talbot in the lounge afterwards - I wouldn't have dared!

She puts her hand delicately on his head, and kisses him.

And last night, all the time we were talking to him, I had in the back of my mind, 'Bob's at home. He'll save me.' And that's how I felt when I was a child, towards your grandfather! 'Uncle's there. He'll understand'.

BOB: But why shouldn't you go out? You cook their meals and clean the house, you do more than any other woman I've seen!

ELAINE: That's just the point, darling - I've a conscience to be roused! And they know it!

BOB looks at her with clear eyes, seeming to appraise her.

BOB: (quietly) You're very strong, aren't you?

ELAINE: Why?

BOB: When you go out this house feels empty and cold - Martha looks out of the window all the time - they never forget you - (he pauses) She wouldn't miss me like that ... (he stops again) There's always something wrong when we're together. Yet she says she loves me ...

ELAINE: (suddenly) Did you ever go further than kissing, Bob?

BOB: No.

ELAINE: Are you sure?

BOB: I said no!

ELAINE: I'm her mother, darling ...

BOB: But God - she's twenty-seven!

ELAINE: Listen to me, Bob. You just enjoy running after her - it's no more than that!

BOB: How do you know?

ELAINE: Didn't you say so yourself? There isn't a shred of confidence between you! And I won't have my daughter going the same way as me. What did I fall in love with when I was eighteen? - a uniform and a brusque manner! And I've been wretched ever since!

BOB: (gazing at the table and mumbling rather) That's nothing to do with me ...

ELAINE: In the end it's the same. And I won't let you do it to each other! (with a sigh) But there! I can't really stop you!

There is silence between them for some time, and he continues to gaze at the table.

BOB: Perhaps she'll marry somebody like the old boy after all.

ELAINE: Oh, not while I'm alive.

BOB: kidding her, for he is now tired of the discussion.

You can't help fate, you know.

ELAINE: (smiling at him reflectively) There - that's how serious you are about the whole thing.

BOB: (jumping up) Oh, come on, let's go out! It's a lovely day!

He lifts her clean out of her chair  
and plants her on the floor.

BOB: Let's go to the Show! Come on!

He begins swing her round and round  
in a kind of dance, at the same time  
singing:

Cáptain Bétman's wife will go, with her néphew to the Show

ELAINE: stopping him and looking out of the  
window.

Shall I?

BOB: (leading her to the doorway) Look, you can see the top  
of the marquee!

ELAINE: (taking off her pinafore) All right.

A thought suddenly occurs to her -  
she is delighted.

Bob - let's have lunch over there!

BOB: Of course. What else did you think?

ELAINE: There'll be nobody here ... (seeing the table) Oh,  
Bob - what about the breakfast things - just help me  
a second!

She is very excited.

BOB: Oh, come on! There's a big race at half-past eleven!

ELAINE: But I can't go like this!

BOB: Why not?

ELAINE: I'll have to change!

BOB: Well, you can't!

ELAINE: But don't you want to be proud of me?

BOB gazes at her for a moment: she is dressed in a suit with a blouse buttoned at the neck. An idea occurs to him.

BOB: Look!

He takes off his silk scarf quickly, opens her blouse at the neck. Ties the scarf neatly round her, then stands back.

There!

He leads her to the mirror so that she can see herself.

Now we'll get some shoes. Where are they?

ELAINE: (laughing) There are some in the bathroom.

He goes out left while she brushes her hair in the mirror. After a few moments he returns with some brown shoes. He bends down while she leans on him, one hand on his shoulder, and he helps her off with the house-shoes.

ELAINE: I knew you'd get those. You've got such a wonderful gentility ...

He holds each shoe ready for her to put her foot in. And now she is standing in them. He has stepped back, and they are both ready to admire them when a voice calls from upstairs "Mummy!" They stop.

ELAINE: You go on, darling.

BOB: I thought he was riding?

ELAINE: It isn't time yet.

ELAINE goes to the door on the left and calls up.

ELAINE: Yes, darling?

DICK: (from upstairs) Have you seen my new riding boots?

ELAINE: Your father may have taken them.

DICK: (furiously) What the hell's he playing at? It's always the same!

ELAINE: Are you riding now?

DICK: No, this afternoon.

ELAINE: What's the hurry, then?

DICK: I've got the weigh-in before lunch.

ELAINE: Well, I didn't say he had. I said I thought he had.

She glances about the room anxiously, then speaks to BOB in a lower voice.

You go ahead, darling.

BOB: It's all right. I'll wait.

ELAINE: No, go ahead. I want a word with Dick. Only a few minutes.

BOB: (darkly, looking at her closely) Why?

ELAINE: (laughing) What do you mean - 'why'? - you cheeky boy! Now just leave me alone!

BOB: With a last curious glance at her before he goes:

Cheerio, then.

She looks in several places but finds nothing. At last she calls upstairs:

ELAINE: He must have taken them, Dick!

There is no reply. She goes to the door on the left and calls up again:

Dick!

DICK: Yes?

ELAINE: Your father must have taken them.

DICK: Well, damn him!

He is coming downstairs.

ELAINE: He's only at the marquee. You can get them easily enough.

DICK: Bue it's always the same! (entering) He's always taking my stuff! We're stuck upstairs in that bloody hen-roost, he pushes all my stuff in the corner - ! I don't know!

DICK is a thick-set young man about BOB's age. He has an affable face, but there is something a little too tight about his lips, as if he were keeping something back all the time. We are aware of a certain uncontained violence in him. When he smiles - always briefly - his face reveals great kindness and delicacy. But he has none of BOB's lightness of manner. He tends to move awkwardly, as if he were being watched. He is dressed in riding clothes.

ELAINE: (wearily, having heard it many times before) All right, Dick.

DICK: I told him six months ago - the left half of the wardrobe's mine and the right's yours. But it makes no difference. He's still using my shirts and cuff-links. All my riding crops have gone. I've had to take half my stuff to Audry's. It's like having a big fat-arsed baby round the place!

ELAINE: Why don't you tell him, then?

DICK: Because he's soft in the head! Because he doesn't know how to listen!

ELAINE: (coldly) But why tell me? That's what I mean.

DICK: subeiding, then noticing her elegance, unusual in the morning.

Where are you off to?

ELAINE: The same place as you. You're going to the Show, aren't you?

DICK: Yes.

ELAINE: Well, do you mind if I go as well?

DICK: (in embarrassment under her cold gaze) Oh, can it ...

ELAINE: But I'd like to have your permission.

DICK: Can it, I said!

ELAINE: And can't you find nicer things to say about your father?

DICK: (awkwardly) He gets on my nerves ...

ELAINE: (gazing at him rather derisively) Just because he takes a pair of boots?

DICK: I tell you, he's always taking things. I'm fed up with it. And he's always over at the stables interfering.

ELAINE: How?

DICK: Oh, asking for the loan of a horse. Then he comes back and says 'there's a bit of a whistle'. He's got whistles on the brain! Every horse in the stable's got a whistle according to him. Captain Whistle - that's what the grooms call him.

ELAINE: Well, he used to be one of the finest horsemen in the country ...

DICK: Yes - (reciting it) 'and he rode beside the royal landau and everybody commented on his style'.

ELAINE: And perhaps they have all got whistles.

DICK: What - seventeen horses? Don't talk rot! (he laughs). You never did know much about the stables, did you?

ELAINE: Come here, darling.

He goes close to her and she tides his shirt carefully.

ELAINE: Won't you be cold?

DICK: No.

ELAINE: You'd better take a jacket.

DICK: I'm going to leave this house ...

ELAINE: Why?

DICK: I'm sick of sharing a bedroom, for one thing.

ELAINE: And what are the other things?

DICK: Oh, there's too much going on here.

ELAINE: You've taken your clothes over to Audry's?

DICK: Yes.

ELAINE: Is she a better housekeeper than me?

DICK: She can cook, and it's quieter over there.

ELAINE: You haven't been in to dinner for nearly a week. (turning away) All right, go if you want to ...

DICK: After a pause during which he looks at her doubtfully.

I can have a room at the stables.

ELAINE: You want that room again, don't you?

indicating BOB's bedroom.

DICK: It was always mine until last year!

ELAINE: Do you hate him?

DICK: No.

ELAINE: What's the matter, then? He's your cousin.

DICK: (confused) Oh ...

ELAINE: What's the matter?

DICK: I tell you, I want some peace!

ELAINE: But why can't you find your peace with us? My children are so difficult!

DICK: He's cock of the walk all the time ...

ELAINE: Oh, that's just your imagination!

DICK: No, it isn't. Audry noticed it.

ELAINE (with a sharp look) Has she been talking to you?

DICK: She said what a marvellous personality he'd got. Why shouldn't she? It's the truth.

ELAINE: And you're jealous of him?

DICK: No.

ELAINE: What's the trouble, then?

DICK: I don't know - it's when I come home and he's here. All the girls are looking at him. He can do what he likes with Dad ... I can't behave naturally when he's here.

ELAINE: Why not?

He pauses and gazes at her in a desperate way for a moment

DICK: Because I want to be like him ...

ELAINE: What (she stares at him) Oh, you fool!

DICK: I try to make jokes like him over at the stables. It only lasts two minutes. Then I feel all heavy. I can't try here because everybody knows what I'm like.

ELAINE: And why can't you just be yourself?

DICK: (with a shrug) Because I don't like it. He makes everything exciting ...

She gazes before her, thinking about this, lost to the conversation for a moment.

But I don't. People don't look up when I come into the room.

ELAINE: (looking at him again) I had a talk with Rose last night. Can you get him a job with Talbot?

DICK: Over there?

ELAINE: Yes.

DICK: What can he do? He can't ride.

ELAINE: There's the farm.

DICK: Oh - I can imagine him on a farm!

ELAINE: He'd work. I'm sure of that.

DICK: (deliberately) Talbot's got some land in Scotland.

ELAINE: In Scotland yes, but -

DICK: You want him here, don't you?

ELAINE: It's what we agreed with his father.

DICK: That was for a year, and the year's up now.

ELAINE: But how can we send him away, Dick?

DICK: It's better for him in the long run.

She gazes at him reflectively for a few moments.

ELAINE: You really like him, don't you?

DICK: I said it's better for him.

ELAINE: You funny boy ...

Turns and looks at the door of BOB's room. Then, to herself:

He makes everything exciting ... (with a shudder)  
I couldn't bear it! This house again!

DICK: (quietly) He was over at Audry's last night.

ELAINE: (waking up) What do you mean?

He gazes at her. She looks startled

At Audry's place?

DICK: Yes.

ELAINE: She was out with me!

DICK: Afterwards.

ELAINE: How do you know?

DICK: One of the grooms saw him.

ELAINE: He just went over for a chat probably -

DICK: He didn't come back till two in the morning. The groom woke me. He thought it was funny. They had the light out.

She is silent. She doesn't look at him. He stands watching the gradual change in her feelings.

ELAINE: (suddenly, to herself) The fool ... (a pause) It's a disease ...

DICK: (casually) No, it isn't. He just needs to get away.

Going towards the garden door.

I haven't got time to talk.

Turning to face her again.

Shall I ask for a job up north?

She is in the same position as before, staring before her. There is an absolute silence in the house. Then she shrugs in a resigned way.

ELAINE: I suppose so ...

There is another pause, then she half turns to him and nods slowly, without looking at him.

Yes ... Then you'll get your peace.

DICK: Cheerio, then.

He goes. ELAINE remains standing there. There is a pause, then BOB appears from the garden.

BOB: Hullo.

ELAINE: (turning, startled) What are you doing here?

BOB: I was over by the pond. You were so long ... What's the matter?

ELAINE: You know what's the matter. I can see it in your face.

She walks up close to him.

What were you doing at Audry's last night?

BOB: - I went for a drink.

She continues to stand there watching him, then, white with anger, she smacks him smartly across the face.

ELAINE: Well, don't. In future, don't.

He looks at once frightened and hurt. She cannot bear to see him like this and slowly she draws him towards her, giving way to pity and grief.

Don't make me like that, darling. Don't make me like that.

BOB: Let's go.

He gently pushes her away by the shoulders and takes her hand, as she tries to prevent her tears.

Come on.

She looks up at him, searching his face.

ELAINE: I can't let them send you away, darling!

BOB: His eyes averted, trying to pull her by the hand.

Come on - it's late.

They go into the garden.

C U R T A I N .

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ACT TWO.

SCENE TWO.

The same day, late in the evening. MARTHA and ROSE have just finished a meal. The curtain rises during a pause in their conversation. MARTHA has a jumper round her shoulders and is sitting in a huddled way, as if she were cold. A little shiver goes through her. There is silence.

MARTHA: Shall I go and have a look?

ROSE: (quite calm) Whatever for?

MARTHA: Something might have happened ...

ROSE: Nothing's happened. They're all at the marquee - don't you worry about that.

MARTHA: But she never goes to the Show.

ROSE: (shrewdly) Yes, I wonder what was in her mind.

She begins piling the plates in a slow, thoughtful way.

There's always something in her mind ...

MARTHA: (brooding like a child) We ought to move out - they'd come to their senses then ... Fancy leaving the breakfast things!

ROSE: (with a smile) They could try living on Dick's money. Or Daddy's pension.

MARTHA gets up with a sigh. She goes over to the window slowly, dragging herself, and draws her jumper closer about her shoulders. She pulls the curtain a little to one side and peers out at the dark garden. ROSE watches her.

MARTHA: (turning) What's the time?

ROSE: It's after eleven.

There is silence again as MARTHA continues gazing out of the window.

MARTHA: (suddenly, her voice raised) I specially asked her - 'Shall I bring something in for tonight?' and she said, 'No, I'll be going to Lowley Gate, darling - '

ROSE: (smiling cynically) 'Darling' ...

MARTHA: And now there isn't a thing in the house!

ROSE: Do you remember last year when we tried to drag her over there? It was a Sunday and she said she couldn't bear seeing Dick take the hurdles! Well, she seems to have got herself a stronger stomach this year ...

There is silence again. ROSE tidies the table some more, still seated. She watches MARTHA's back for a moment, then speaks again.

She was with Bob, I expect.

MARTHA starts a little but does not speak.

She'd do anything for him. She'd let the housework go. (after a pause) Are you in love with him, Martha?

MARTHA: Yes, I think so ...

ROSE: Does he want to marry you?

MARTHA: (hesitantly) He never said ...

ROSE: He ought to get away from here. He'd be more of a man. But there, she'd never allow it ...

MARTHA: Who - Mummy?

ROSE: (rising) Of course.

MARTHA is about to pass on from this when she stops and returns to the subject.

MARTHA: Why not?

ROSE: Oh, I mean for herself. She'd hate it for herself.

MARTHA: Why?

ROSE: Well, you know how she loves him.

MARTHA: (nodding slowly) Yes.

ROSE goes out left with a pile of plates.

MARTHA is lost in her thoughts. Then she speaks again, the slightest trembling in her voice.

What sort of love?

She turns round for an answer and sees that ROSE has gone. She then walks absently over to the table and begins clearing up. But her thoughts overwhelm her and she puts everything down again, sitting before her.

The garden door opens smartly. She starts and swings round.

It is AUDRY smiling and breathless. She closes the door and comes quickly into the room, taking her coat off.

AUDRY: Hullo, Martha!

MARTHA: Hullo.

AUDRY: (stopping) What's the matter?

MARTHA: Nothing.

ROSE: (appearing in the doorway) Where is everybody?

AUDRY: They're still over there.

ROSE: At this time of night?

AUDRY: They've been having supper in the marquee. Too posh for me! I thought I'd stay with the grooms.

ROSE: Who's in the marquee?

AUDRY: Oh, all the nobs! There's champagne and chicken sandwiches and fruit sundaes! Did you hear about Dick?

ROSE: No?

AUDRY: He fell at the first fence. It was the nearest thing I ever saw! The filly nearly rolled over him. He got a graze down his side, that's all - goodness knows why, he didn't even fall that side.

ROSE: Was Mummy watching?

AUDRY: Yes - she was with me and Bob.

ROSE gives Martha a quick glance, MARTHA stares before her, her mouth slightly open.

ROSE: Who did she go with, then?

AUDRY: Bob, I think. You know how she's always told me she can't stand these Shows - but there she was, bang in front of the first fence!

MARTHA: Was she wearing her new coat?

AUDRY: No. (laughing) What a funny question!

ROSE: Is Bob still there?

AUDRY: No. He came back with the Captain. They're feeding the chickens. Elaine forgot. They haven't had a peck of food all day!

ROSE: (to MARTHA) Did you hear that? She even forgot to feed the chickens!

MARTHA: (suddenly listening) Who's that?

AUDRY: I heard something, too.

There is silence. Then the door slowly opens. It is ELAINE. Though she opened the door slowly she is out of breath. She must have been running across the garden. But she makes herself look as collected as possible.

Her face is flushed healthily from having been in the air all day, and at this moment she doesn't look at all like the mother of a growing family. They all watch her in silence.

She stares out into the night for a moment, as if someone had been pursuing her, then she closes the door quickly.

ELAINE: (coming slowly into the room) I'm sorry about tonight.

Walking past AUDRY and addressing her her daughters.

You had to cook for yourselves.

Putting out her hand in a strange gesture to MARTHA.

You, Martha ...

MARTHA: Where did you get that scarf?

ELAINE: Looking down at it as if she had forgotten it.

Bob put it round me this morning.

ROSE watches her closely, trying to divine her. She is fascinated by ELAINE's mannerisms, which always have something expert and alluring about them.

ELAINE looks towards the garden-door again, tense and still. They watch in puzzlement. Suddenly she clutches AUDRY's arm.

ELAINE: Go and get Dick, Audry!

AUDRY: Dick? He's over at the stables.

ELAINE: He's outside.

AUDRY: Where?

ELAINE: I don't know.

AUDRY: What's the matter?

ELAINE: He followed me back. Go and get him! He walked alongside me. He didn't utter a word. I said, "Are you tired after the race, Dick?" and still he didn't say anything!

ROSE: (concerned) Did he get a concussion?

ELAINE: I was there when he fell, darling - he's been cheerful enough all day. He frightened me, Audry!

AUDRY: (taking up her coat) I'll see what he's up to.

ROSE: Shall I come?

AUDRY: No.

She leaves.

ELAINE: He looked so terrible ....

ROSE: He must have got a concussion.

ELAINE: He must have done ...

ROSE: Where did you find him?

ELAINE: He came to get me - at the marquee.

ROSE: And what did he say?

ELAINE: I didn't see him at first, we were all standing round the table - you know how dark those lamps are - and he just took me by the arm and led me outside. It was so strange. I thought your father wanted me. But all the way across he didn't say a word.

MARTHA: Was Talbot at the marquee?

ELAINE: Yes.

MARTHA: Were you talking to him?

ELAINE: I - I hardly spoke to Talbot, darling.

ROSE: Her eyes narrowing a little - we feel her sympathy being cut off.

Was he standing next to you, then?

ELAINE: Who?

ROSE: Talbot.

ELAINE: Yes.

ROSE: (severely) Daddy told you never to talk to him again.

ELAINE: There was this Show, darling .... Everybody was there. But it wasn't that. Dick saw me talk with him long before. Talbot came up to me and said, 'Your son had a stroke of terrible bad luck there, Mrs. Betman. His filly -'

MARTHA: (with disgust) Oh, do shut up.

ELAINE: (starting) Is that them?

They all look towards the door. There is a pause. ELAINE steps back further towards the stove, as if for the protection of her daughters. She seems on the point of tears, with the suspense. Some time passes but the door does not open.

ROSE: What are you so frightened about?

ELAINE: You didn't see his eyes!

ROSE: Dick wouldn't -

MARTHA: He's probably as fed up as I am!

ELAINE: But I haven't done anything, darling!

MARTHA: What made you go out this morning, then?

ELAINE: It was a lovely day.

MARTHA: And we have to fend for ourselves! You didn't even do the shopping - you left all the breakfast things! Why didn't you tell me you'd -

The door opens. AUDRY comes in. Behind her is DICK, white with fury. He seems blind to everything except ELAINE.

He goes slowly across to her, staring her in the eyes all the time. She looks at him in fear but does not retreat, seeming paralysed. There is a very slight, unrelenting smile on his face. He catches hold of her roughly, so that she almost loses her footing.

DICK: I've been watching you at it all day, sidling up to him and showing him all your teeth - I've just about had enough of it!

AUDRY: Dick - !

DICK: Leave this to me!

ROSE and MARTHA come nearer, intrigued, and also frightened by the thought of what their mother might have done.

ROSE: (breathlessly, peering at ELAINE) What's she done, Dick?

DICK: (taking no notice of ROSE) But you didn't mention me, did you? You didn't get the rise I've been waiting eighteen months for!

Shaking her in his fury, so that her hair falls out of place. She seems quite limp in his grasp, offering no resistance at all.

I've been five years in those bloody stables and if you think I'm going to have him breathing down my neck you're mistaken! It's bad enough having him here all day!

Pulling her close to him and speaking quietly.

Listen to me, you're going back there first thing tomorrow morning, and you're going to tell him it's not on!  
(noticing her scarf) What are you doing with that?

He pulls it off roughly and throws it to the floor. AUDRY picks it up and puts it on the table.

AUDRY: (saucily) Are you all right now?

MARTHA: What happened, Dick?

DICK: (releasing ELAINE) She's been hanging round Talbot all day.

MARTHA: I thought so ...

DICK: (turning on her) Oh, you and your 'thought-so' - d'you think I give a damn what she does with Talbot? A fat lot your eyes can see! What do you think she went out last night for - exercise?

MARTHA: When?

DICK: (pointing a finger at AUDRY) With her.

ELAINE gives AUDRY a quick, betrayed look.

AUDRY: Dick -

DICK: Talbot was there!

MARTHA: (utterly shocked) What?

ROSE: (to ELAINE) You never said - !

AUDRY: (wearily) I'm sorry, Elaine ... I didn't know ...

MARTHA: (flatly, to ELAINE) How long had that been arranged?

ELAINE: (almost in a whisper) It hadn't.

ROSE: You mean to say you didn't know he'd be there?

ELAINE nods.

DICK: And he gave you a lift back, didn't he?

She nods again.

ROSE: You said it was someone from Lowley Gate!

AUDRY: What's wrong with Talbot? We only talked -

ELAINE: (on the verge of tears) They hate me! My children hate me!

DICK: Well, why don't you tell the truth, you fool, instead of standing there trying to look tragic! (to MARTHA) Look at her standing there! I tell you, she's as cunning as they come! You ought to have seen her showing Talbot all her teeth - she didn't leave his table for a split second!

Suddenly a thought occurs to him.

I say - she hasn't been over there at nights, has she?  
(gazing at MARTHA) Has she?

MARTHA: (with a shrug) Who knows what she gets up to ...

ELAINE: I'm here every night!

Turning to MARTHA with tears in her

eyes. DICK watches her with a kind of ruthless triumph.

You wicked little girl!

Outraged and sobbing she moves towards MARTHA to strike her, but DICK pulls her back.

DICK: Leave her alone!

She gasps with pain and clutches the place on her arm where he has just taken hold of her. Now he seems immensely powerful next to her, though that was not our impression this morning.

ELAINE:

Screaming at him, her head bent forward, the tears pouring down her face.

I haven't been out! I haven't been out!

AUDRY: (going towards DICK) You swine ...

DICK: (at once on the defensive) That's right - I'm the swine! It doesn't matter what she does! She knows how to cover herself up!

AUDRY: What's she done to hurt you?

DICK: Ask her yourself!

AUDRY: There's no need to shout! You spoilt fool ...

DICK: (dropping his voice, in contempt) She's rotten ...

AUDRY: Why is she rotten?

DICK: I know I've got no brains!

A remark that seems to burst out under great pressure.

She's always treated me like dirt!

- DICK: (to ELAINE) Bob! Bob! Bob! I'm sick of that name being pushed down my throat - ! Coming here and sleeping in my bed! But you wouldn't lift a finger for me, would you? Oh, no! Dick can always sleep on the camp bed upstairs! Dick won't mind having his kit pushed in the corner to collect the dust! He's used to is, isn't he?
- MARTHA: (quietly) What's Bob got to do with it?
- DICK: (still gazing at ELAINE) Go on. You heard what she said. What's Bob got to do with it?
- ELAINE makes no reply, only puts her hand up to her face.
- DICK: He's Talbot's agent ...
- ROSE and MARTHA stare at him.
- ROSE: Agent?
- MARTHA: When?
- DICK: When she likes. (pointing at ELAINE) When she likes - because Talbot's got no say. She knows how to smarm him up.
- MARTHA: (to ELAINE) Is it true? (ELAINE does not move) What's Bob got to do with you?
- DICK: Agent! He doesn't know the backside of a horse from the front!
- MARTHA: (to DICK) Who told you all this?
- DICK: Talbot! He said, 'You'll be having a new boss soon, and you're going to like him.' Not a word to me! Imagine that!
- AUDRY: (on DICK's side for the first time) What happened, Elaine? You can't expect him to work under Bob...
- MARTHA: She doesn't care about Dick.
- AUDRY: (persisting) What happened, Elaine?

They wait for her to speak. At last she does, sobbing a little.

ELAINE: He came in the marquee - we talked about the fruit crop - he asked about Dick - when was he riding? - we had some coffee -

But she bursts into tears again and cannot go on.

DICK: What's all that got to do with it?

AUDRY: How did it happen, darling?

ELAINE: I thought I'd help! It was silly of me ... (to DICK) I wanted you and Bob to be friends!

DICK: With him as my boss? You must be off your head!

ELAINE: (thrusting home) Talbot suggested it - not me.

DICK: Stunned by this, then furious again.

That's a lie!

ELAINE: Sharply, knowing she has got him on the raw.

It isn't a lie!

DICK: (not wanting the truth) You asked for the job! Talbot's close - he's not the man to say it first - !

ROSE (to ELAINE, with killing directness) Then why go to Show at all? You've never been before.

ELAINE: (turning to her slowly, weak and pale) I don't know ...

ROSE: You don't know?

DICK: She always knows what she's up to!

ELAINE: Bob asked me to go ...

ROSE: Exactly. That's what I mean.

ELAINE: I wanted to find him work on the farm up north.

DICK: (his eyes narrowed) Yes, but you regretted that little scheme, didn't you?

MARTHA: Who said he should work up north?

DICK: (defiantly) I did! Because I'm not having him in those stables!

ELAINE: Talbot said, 'Why doesn't he come as my agent?' And I thought how lovely ... He and Dick could work together ...

AUDRY: (to DICK) Would he really be your boss?

DICK: Of course he would.

AUDRY: But does an agent go near the stables?

DICK: (rather poutingly) He'd be there all day ...

AUDRY: But he can't even ride!

DICK: That'd be a joke, seeing him ride ...

AUDRY: Well, then, I don't see how he'd affect you.

DICK: And I say he would. So that's that.

There is a pause, during which ELAINE gazing at DICK, prepares to recover her position.

ELAINE: Is Bob the kind to breathe down your neck?

DICK: I tell you - I'm sick of his name!

AUDRY: You're jealous of him, aren't you?

DICK: Gazing at her in silence, realising that she has abandoned him.

No.

AUDRY: What's the trouble, then?

DICK: (quietly) I can't be myself when he's around. And if he was over there all day my work'd go to pot. (he adds, sadly) Like everything else I do ...

There is silence.

ELAINE: It isn't as if he asked for the job himself. Why, he doesn't even know he's been offered it!

DICK: (almost to himself) You're behind him all the time. Destroying me ...

ELAINE: Destroying you, my child? If Talbot had given me a chance to talk about your rise, don't you think I'd have done it? But he didn't. The moment I mentioned Bob he said, 'Do you know, I think that boy might do as my agent. I'll start him at a nominal wage, and I'll give him a year to learn'.

DICK: You and your lies ...

But he is convinced.

ELAINE: Those were his exact words.

DICK: On the edge of tears, it seems.

The bastard ... The bastard!

MARTHA: That's what you get for five years of drudgery. I'd expect it from Talbot.

DICK: All right.

As if the others had been waiting impatiently for this decision.

I'll leave. I'll clear out of here tomorrow.

AUDRY: Don't be a fool!

MARTHA: He is a fool! believing every word she says! (to DICK) Go and give Talbot a piece of your -

ROSE: Sssh!

There has been a noise at the garden-door. They all turn. The CAPTAIN enters, followed by BOB.

The CAPTAIN stops near the door, peering at the silent group before him. He sees ELAINE dishevelled and pale, with the trace of tears on her face. He looks at them all one by one.

CAPTAIN: (fascinated and tremulously expectant) What's up?

He comes slowly towards them, waiting for an answer.

What was all that shouting?

None of them will speak. At last AUDRY says something.

AUDRY: It's all about Bob.

BOB: Me?

CAPTAIN: (to DICK, savagely) Have you been upsetting your mother again?

DICK: Close to hysteria - the sound of father's voice is in itself enough to touch it off.

That's right! That's right! I'm upsetting her again!

CAPTAIN: Well, what's wrong with Bob?

BOB has meanwhile gone a little past ELAINE - glancing at her curiously towards the table. He sees his own scarf, picks it up, gazes at it, then puts it down again. He is calm, quite untroubled by all the menacing glances round him.

BOB: (to MARTHA) Do you know what's up?

She turns her head quickly away,  
and he shrugs.

AUDRY: Talbot wants Bob as his agent.

BOB: His what?

AUDRY: His agent.

She sees his look of utter bafflement,  
and despite the situation she bursts  
into a giggle.

Believe it or not.

BOB: Agent - for what, though?

AUDRY: You look after his accounts and pay the wages and all that

BOB: Staring at one, then the other

You're pulling my leg!

AUDRY: No. Talbot said so today.

BOB: Did he?

He gazes at her in silence.

The old fool ...

ROSE: (with a hint of a smile) That's what I thought!

BOB: (pointing at Dick) But what's he worried about?

AUDRY: He doesn't want you at the stables.

BOB: (staring at Dick) Stables?

The CAPTAIN, who has been gazing at  
BOB with admiration since AUDRY broke  
the news, now turns to DICK with a  
look of contempt.

CAPTAIN: You jealous fool!

DICK: It's nothing to do with Bob ...

BOB: (to DICK) I won't come near the stables!

DICK: (in embarrassment, shuffling) It isn't that ...

BOB: You don't think I'm taking the job, do you? It's just a joke!

CAPTAIN: (taken aback by this) What! You'd turn it down, Bob?

BOB: Can you see me working out accounts and paying out wages, then?

CAPTAIN: Why not?

ELAINE: (to the CAPTAIN) Talbot said he'd give him a year to learn - and a nominal wage at first.

CAPTAIN: That's right. It's a wonderful chance, Bob. I could give you a bit of a hand myself ...

ROSE: (to the CAPTAIN) How do you think Dick's going to feel?

CAPTAIN: After looking enquiringly at DICK for moment.

What's he got to do with it?

ROSE: He's been working over there five years. Then Bob comes along as his boss. It's ridiculous!

CAPTAIN: But he hasn't got the brains!

DICK: (bitterly, to ELAINE) It's working out nicely, isn't it?

CAPTAIN: (turning to him) Well, do you think you've got the brains?

DICK: No.

CAPTAIN: What's the trouble, then? It's a first-class opportunity for Bob.

DICK: She's the trouble.

BOB: I tell you, Dick - I'm not taking it!

CAPTAIN: Looking with enquiry at ELAINE - we see how painfully slow the working of his mind is.

Your mother?

DICK: Yes, my mother.

CAPTAIN: (to ELAINE) What's he talking about?

ELAINE: (gazing firmly at her son) He says he can't be himself when Bob's in the room. (making his argument very lame) And if Bob worked at the stables his whole life would go to pot.

BOB looks away in embarrassment.

CAPTAIN: What's that supposed to do with you?

ELAINE: He says I spoil Bob.

DICK: I didn't say that! (recklessly, to the CAPTAIN) She's been talking to Talbot! She got him the job!

At the mention of the name 'Talbot' both the girls start and look at their father. He changes at once.

CAPTAIN: What's that?

ELAINE: (quickly, lest any more should be said.) He's lying. Talbot saw me in the marquee and said, 'What about Bob being my agent?'

CAPTAIN: (to DICK) What about that?

DICK: She smarmed it out of him!

ELAINE: You mean you wish I had! You've been working there five years and Talbot passes you over for Bob! So of course you have to say it's me behind it!

CAPTAIN: (darkly, to ELAINE) How long was Talbot there?

DICK: All day.

Everyone is tense. The CAPTAIN's suspicion is mounting. But AUDRY saves the situation.

AUDRY: He just came up and offered the job and that was that.

CAPTAIN: (quickly) Were you there?

DICK: She wasn't -

AUDRY: (furiously, to DICK) I was standing by her all the time! Now shut up!

CAPTAIN: Why didn't he come to me?

AUDRY: You were in the stables, weren't you? He looked high and low for you. Ask any of the riders. (pointing to DICK) He's jealous - ! He's a spoilt boy!

The CAPTAIN is convinced.

AUDRY: (sure of her victory now) What has Bob ever done against you, Dick?

BOB: (quietly) Oh, leave him alone ...

CAPTAIN: That's right, leave him alone. (brutally) To hell with his whims!

DICK: (in an outburst, feeling caught) To hell with Dick, you mean! You can shove his kit in the corner - give him a camp bed to sleep on - ! It's only Dick!

At once he and his father are in the midst of a first-class row, clearly one of many.

CAPTAIN: And what about you - coming in at all hours and shooting your mouth off? Don't you think we've had enough of that? Camp bed! What else do you use this place for except a camping ground?

DICK: All right - let him have the job - I'm clearing out!

CAPTAIN: And good riddance! You walk round the place like a bloody scarecrow and then when somebody snaps up the job you've been too slack to get for yourself, you come crying to Mummy!

DICK: (childishly, at the edge of tears) And just you keep out of the stables in future!

CAPTAIN: Have they made you king of the stables now, then?

Smacking out his words with fine contempt.

At three pounds, seventeen shillings and threepence a week? Who gives a damn what you think? Do I? Does Talbot? Do you think your mother does? I heard your big mouth from the other side of the garden just now - and you can sling it somewhere else! - You and your preferences! A tuppenny-halfpenny groom who can't even jump a hurdle on the best little filly we've had in the stables for years!

DICK: Absolutely broken by this reference to his riding abilities.

I fell at the fence - I - !

CAPTAIN: Taking advantage of Dick's failure to find his words.

We saw you fall all right!

DICK: (with tears) The going was hard!

CAPTAIN: With rain last Monday?

DICK: I nearly got the cup - !

CAPTAIN: Three years ago - yes, we've heard about that!

DICK: (retreating towards the garden-door) You fool! You fool! (pointing at ELAINE) Who do you think she was with last week at the Metropole? Talbot was there! Ask Audry! Talbot was there!

There is a silence of shocked horror. The CAPTAIN is completely stunned. He stares at his son with a dark, beaten, lowering expression, like a great animal. Then he marches with sudden long strides straight up to him and delivers him a fearful punch on the chest which sends him reeling back to the floor.

AUDRY: (rushing to him) Dick!

DICK: (picking himself up and reaching feverishly for the door)  
She's Talbot's whore!

He opens the door. The CAPTAIN does not move towards him again. DICK repeats it just before he goes.

She's Talbot's whore, you fool!

He rushes out. AUDRY calls after him 'Dick!' then rushes out also. The CAPTAIN remains staring at the door, which is still half open, frowning, his feet astride and his shoulders bent forward. He has his back to the others. There is silence, and they all watch him fearfully. ELAINE moves a little towards the other side of the room, her fingers fumbling nervously for the table behind her.

The CAPTAIN goes slowly to the door and with a deliberate, final movement kicks it closed. Then he turns sharply.

CAPTAIN: (to ELAINE) Go upstairs.

ELAINE: Without conviction, knowing what must come.

Now, Harold ...

CAPTAIN: (with quiet menace) Get upstairs ...

She turns and goes slowly to the door on the left. He stands in the same spot, waiting until she had reached the door. Then he walks quickly after her. ROSE is fascinated and follows both of them with her eyes. There is no fear or regret in her face, but rather a look of expectancy and pleasure. When the CAPTAIN is out of the door she rushes across and stares after them as they go up the stairs. Then, when the door upstairs is slammed to, she leaves the room altogether presumably to steal up and eavesdrop.

BOB: (awed and troubled, almost in a whisper) Was she in love with Talbot.

MARTHA nods.

When?

MARTHA: After I was born. (passively) Rose was his child.

BOB: (his mouth open with astonishment) Rose?

MARTHA: What do I care if everybody knows? Let her look after herself ...

From upstairs there is the sound of raised voices. MARTHA and BOB listen tensely. Then there is the sound of something being moved - furniture, perhaps - the CAPTAIN striking her - steps across the floor - heavy, violent sounds which frighten BOB but do not seem to disturb MARTHA, who continues staring passively before her.

Unable to bear the sound any longer, BOB rushes to the door. MARTHA looks up at once.

MARTHA: Come back!

BOB: I'll go up and -

MARTHA: (shouting at him) Come back!

Then, quietly, as he turns back to her

It's none of your business ...

BOB: What's happening, Mart?

MARTHA: She's getting some medicine.

He stares at the door, tense and absolutely still, leaning forward in readiness, so to speak, while the noise of violence continues.

Suddenly there is the sound of feet rushing across the floor above, and then an incoherent yell from ELAINE. A door upstairs is flung open and we hear her scream out, 'Bob! Bob!'

A look of fear comes into MARTHA's face for the first time, when she hears her mother call his name. He rushes out of the room and up the stairs. She is too dazed to stop him now.

There is the sound of movement above, and of muffled voices. MARTHA stares at the open door, listening. Then a door upstairs slams, and there is quiet. We hear footsteps on the stairs again, and at last the two of them appear: ELAINE whimpering and pale, her hair dishevelled and the lapel of her jacket torn, and BOB holding her close to him.

BOB: He's mad!

MARTHA: What was he doing?

BOB: Punching her in the face - he might have killed her!

MARTHA: Gazing at ELAINE as BOB takes her to the settee and sits down at her side.

Where does it hurt?

ELAINE: (through her tears, hardly audible) Go to bed ...

MARTHA: (seeing the lapel of her jacket) Look. He tore her coat.

BOB: I'll see to her.

MARTHA: (to ELAINE) When are you coming up?

ELAINE: (convulsed, so that she can hardly speak) I'm sleeping down here.

MARTHA: Why?

ELAINE: I don't want to see you. You're all wicked.

MARTHA: (to BOB) Will you stay with her, then?

BOB: Yes. She's better down here.

MARTHA: (going to the door) Good night, then.

BOB: Not looking at her, only comforting ELAINE, drawing her head on to his shoulder.

Good night.

MARTHA gives them a curious look as she opens the door. She is just about to leave when she hesitates.

MARTHA: Where will she sleep?

BOB: Meaning the settee on which he and ELAINE are seated.

Here, of course.

MARTHA: What about blankets?

BOB: I'll see to that.

But MARTHA remains standing in the doorway, staring at them both with a kind of brooding fascination, trying to think of more questions to ask. Suddenly BOB looks up and she starts.

BOB: What's the matter?

MARTHA: I was only wondering ....

BOB: I know where they are. Go to bed.

MARTHA: All right, then. Good night.

She leaves the room, closing the door behind her. ELAINE remains shaking in his arms, her head hidden in his shoulder. For a long time he says nothing. The rest of the house is quiet.

BOB: It's all right now ...

She does not move, and he takes a handkerchief out of his pocket.

Stop crying. Here.

He leans her head back a little and dries her eyes with the handkerchief.

It's all right now.

He sees a place on her cheek.

He's given you a bruise.

ELAINE: He frightens me, Bob! Lock the door!

BOB: Don't be silly ... Has he done it before?

She opens her eyes for the first time, and, looking up at him, nods vehemently like a child after tears.

BOB: You never told me ...

ELAINE: They hate me. Even Martha hates me.

BOB: I've never seen him like that before - mad!

ELAINE: You haven't seen Dick. The same look ... (with absolute pessimism) There must be something wrong in me.

BOB: Why?

ELAINE. They all give me that terrible look ...

Giving him a sudden, close truth-demanding look.

Am I hateful to you?

BOB: No.

ELAINE: Never? Not for a single moment?

BOB: No.

ELAINE: (gazing at him tenderly) So she didn't put you against me.

BOB: Who?

ELAINE Martha. Could she?

BOB: (at a loss) Could she what?

ELAINE: Could she ever put you against me?

BOB: No.

ELAINE: If I hadn't called you, would you have come?

BOB: (warmly) Yes! I tried to. But - !

This appears to be a great relief to ELAINE. She leans against him more easily, staring at the floor in that strange peacefulness and reminiscence that come after tears.

ELAINE: How quiet it is ... I've always loved this house for its quiet.

There is a pause, during which they sit gazing before them.

BOB: Do you still love Talbot?

There is a long pause, during which she considers, in the great calm that has taken hold of the room, his question.

ELAINE: We were never really in love.

BOB: What was Dick saying about the other night, then - at the Metropole?

ELAINE: (with quiet scorn) Talbot happened to walk in the lounge. We talked about the weather.

Remembering the scene with her family.

The fools. We haven't touched each other for twenty years, - and they still can't think of anything else.

BOB: Talbot's in love with you. I saw it by his eyes this morning ... Is that why he never married?

ELAINE: Shrugging her shoulders carelessly, then going on to speak

And if I give him one glance back there's trouble for two days afterwards.

BOB: What happened today? You talked to him for hours!

ELAINE stares before her in silence, trying to recollect her motives.

ELAINE: I didn't care ...

Then she adds, after some thought,  
dreamily.

I wasn't going to let them send you away.

BOB: Me?

ELAINE: They want you sent away.

BOB: Who?

ELAINE: Rose and Dick.

BOB: What does Martha say?

ELAINE: Nothing ...

BOB: (after a pause) Where to?

ELAINE: To the north, where Talbot has another farm.

BOB: With a kind of shocked innocence -  
divining, perhaps for the first time  
in his life, the coldness that lay in  
others.

But why?

ELAINE: To make you a 'man' ...

BOB: I can look for a job myself.

ELAINE: (continuing with her thoughts) ... as if you aren't man  
enough.

BOB: They must hate me too!

There is a sound from upstairs. They  
both stop. She is terrified again  
and clings to him. Then they hear  
the CAPTAIN's voice. He is calling  
'Elaine' - rather quietly - down  
the stairs.

BOB jumps up, almost pushing ELAINE away from him, full of a pugnacious determination now, brought on by his discovery that they want to send him away. - He pulls the door roughly open and answers 'Yes?' in a sharp peremptory way.

CAPTAIN:

Faintly - even meekly - from the top of the stairs.

Is Elaine down there?

BOB: She's going to sleep here.

There is a pause.

CAPTAIN: All right.

BOB waits until the CAPTAIN has returned to his room, then he closes the door again.

BOB: He's quiet now. Shall I get the blankets?

She nods and he goes to the sideboard. She stirs herself. The crisis is over.

ELAINE: Bring me the mirror, Bob.

He takes out two blankets, then un-hooks the mirror from the wall. He throws the blankets on the settee and sits down at her side, in the same position as before. He holds the mirror up for her to see herself.

ELAINE: (examining her face) It's going to be a terrible bruise.

BOB: The fool! Fancy punching out like that!

ELAINE: He'll have to pay for the jacket, too. (looking up at him)  
Do I look awful?

BOB: (more cheerfully) No. Your face has had a watering - that's all. I shan't let them hurt you again!

ELAINE: Won't you? (pondering) I believe you won't ...

Looking in the mirror again.

Oh, my poor hair!

BOB: Let me do it.

He begins smoothing and parting her hair, carefully and professionally like a hairdresser.

ELAINE: I used to do yours once.

BOB: I remember. I used to cry for you at home.

ELAINE: Her head down, to make it easier for him.

You never did!

BOB: I used to ruffle my hair just before I got here - then you'd say, 'Let's go up to the barber's, shall we?' And you'd sit me down in front of the dressing table upstairs with a white cloth round my neck.

ELAINE: You remember ...

BOB: There.

He draws a little back from her, the better to judge her hair. She takes up the mirror again.

ELAINE: (as she scrutinises herself) That's lovely ...

After a pause, during which she puts the last touches to her hair.

Where do you want to work, then?

BOB: I haven't thought.

ELAINE: Wouldn't you love being agent here?

BOB: I could learn, I suppose ... But what about Dick?

ELAINE: He'd get used to it.

BOB: He never would. And it isn't right!

ELAINE: Dully, putting the mirror down, as if she feels the dead weight of all moral judgement in the world.

No, It isn't right. So let's stay as we are.

BOB: Feeling that he has somehow let her down.

I'd do it for you ...

ELAINE. Do it for yourself, silly! I shan't be working there!

BOB: They'd hate me even more, wouldn't they?

ELAINE: Move over to the big house, then! As agent you could do that.

BOB: Could I?

He thinks seriously about it for the first time.

But the work ....

ELAINE: Now don't be ridiculous, Bob!

BOB: Could I do it, do you think?

ELAINE: Of course you could.

BOB: I'd get the hang of it perhaps ... It might be exciting ..  
(pause) I like old Talbot. (in an easier vein) That nose makes him look funny.

Suddenly he laughs and jumps in his seat

So that's where she got it!

ELAINE: (scrutinising him, then guardedly) Who?

BOB: Rose of course!

ELAINE: Who told you?

BOB: A dickie-bird told me!

Quite indifferent to any displeasure  
he might cause her.

I was watching him today - she's got his trunk to a T!

ELAINE: At esse again, and touched by his  
lightness.

There's no blame in you at all ...

She puts her hand up to his face, re-  
flectively.

I've been followed all my life by blame... And you say it  
so nicely. It's better than being punched in the face!

BOB: Looking at her bruise, touching the  
skin round it.

Does it hurt?

ELAINE: It's beginning to sting.

BOB: Let me bathe it for you.

ELAINE: You can kiss it better.

BOB: (kissing her lightly on the cheek) Like that? I always  
used to kiss you there. And one there. (he kisses her  
on the other cheek.) You always laughed!

ELAINE: (smiling) Did I?

BOB: And tickled me! Like this!

He tickles her, and she struggles,  
laughing.

ELAINE: Bob! ... You're the same fool. You haven't changed!

BOB: I loved today at the Show. I'm glad I dragged you along.  
(thinking) She isn't like that.

ELAINE: Who?

BOB: Martha. She deadens everything ...

ELAINE: What would she say if she saw us here?

BOB: What?

There is a long pause. A look of revelation comes into his face.

BOB: (in a changed voice) You had a rhyme - 'One for the eyes, One for the brow, One for the lips, I'll teach you how!'

There is another silence between them, during which he gazes into her eyes intently, then he repeats it, kissing her lightly each time and pausing between each line.

One for the eyes - One for the brow - One for the lips  
- I'll teach you how ...

Neither of them move. The silence deepens. Then slowly he draws her to him and kisses her full on the lips. They remain like that, clasped together like lovers. Her eyes are closed.

Then, as if only now realising what has happened, she tries to struggle free. But he holds her fast. She struggles again and this time breaks free from him, breathing heavily, and stares down at him, while he remains on the settee, dazed and blinking.

At last she manages to speak, in a strained, hoarse voice.

ELAINE: Put those blankets back.

He takes up the blankets behind him and goes to the sideboard. When he has thrown them clumsily in he does not turn round to look at her again but stands facing the wall, where the mirror was, his hands on the sideboard

Now go to bed.

Without looking at her he goes across to his room and closes the door. He switches the light on inside and for a moment we see his silhouette pass across the glass panel of the door.

She stands there for some time, simply staring in the direction of his room. Then she turns. She is about to open the door on the left when she looks back, as if undecided. But then she opens the door and starts to go out. She stops again. She cannot face the world upstairs. Suddenly she draws back, closes the door again, and turns round, her decision made. Then she hurries across to BOB's room, opens the door, stands gazing in for a moment, and enters, switching out the light on the stage. We see her silhouette pass across the panel of the door as BOB's did.

The stage is now in darkness, save for the oblong of light from this panel.

Some time passes. The house is in silence.

The door on the left opens. The

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light comes in from the corridor, and silhouetted against it is the figure of the CAPTAIN. He looks about the room, then he walks silently in, without switching the light up.

In the middle of the room he suddenly stops as ELAINE's silhouette appears once more in the panel of BOB's door. He draws back, with a little gasp. A few seconds pass, and then we hear ELAINE's soft laughter, rather amorous and provocative, from the other room. Her silhouette disappears again.

He turns and walks slowly and blindly back to the door on the left, as if feeling his way, stunned.

He closes the door behind him.

C U R T A I N.

ACT THREE.

SCENE ONE.

A week later, about half-past noon on a Sunday. It is a bright, crisp day. BOB's door is standing open.

The room is empty. Then the garden door opens sharply and the CAPTAIN stamps in, puffing and blowing with the cold. He is dressed smartly, in a grey suit, with starched white collar. His smartness gives him a distinguished air, and we are reminded that years ago people looked up to him.

CAPTAIN: (at once, without looking round the room) You'll need your overcoat this morning, by God! (peering into BOB's room) Are you ready?

BOB: (from his room) Coming.

CAPTAIN: (turning back towards the window) I've been up on the Downs with the filly - you can drink the air this morning, drink it! There'll be ice on the pond tonight.

BOB enters from his room. He is getting into a jacket. He also is in his Sunday best. He is pale, and in his movements there is none of the abandon we have come to associate with him.

BOB: Is he back, then?

CAPTAIN: (looking at his watch) No. He'll be a few minutes yet. He likes a talk with the Vicar afterwards. Old-fashioned idea, the Church - but it's what people expect. They like him to play the Squire.

BOB: (about to return to his room, but stopping) When do I start - did he say?

CAPTAIN: You know what sort of man he is. One word's enough, two's two many.

BOB: But what's this interview for?

CAPTAIN: To get the agreement out. An agent's not like a groom, you know.

BOB: Does that mean a contract?

CAPTAIN: Of course. (peering at him) Why?

BOB: For how many years?

CAPTAIN: Well - a year to learn the ropes - the last man stayed two years - I'd say three years in all. He'll ask that as a minimum.

BOB: (staring before him) Three years ...

CAPTAIN: Why - (glancing at him hesitantly) does it seem a bit long to you?

BOB: Where would I live?

CAPTAIN: With an automatic gesture towards BOB's room, which he corrects at once.

Well, you could take a room at the house, if you felt too crowded here ... That's what the last man did. Depends on how things turn out.

BOB: Yes - on whether he likes me ... Is he going to like me?

CAPTAIN: (after a pause) Why shouldn't he?

BOB: Well, I didn't get the job. It seems a bit funny. He's only seen me twice.

CAPTAIN: Still, I think he knows what he's up to ...

BOB: I hope so. (suddenly remembering something) Have you seen my riding crop? It's a joke! (going to his room to fetch it) I can't even ride yet! (from his room) Like Dick said - I can't tell the backside of a horse from the front!

CAPTAIN: (contemptuously) Dick!

BOB: (coming back with the riding crop) Look. It's a present from Elaine.

CAPTAIN: (sharply) ELAINE?

BOB: (flushing) Aunt Elaine.

CAPTAIN: (angrily) And what the hell's the use of that? (flinging the crop on the sideboard) You start by punishing yourself, not the horse! (quietly again) So you'll be learning a bit about horseflesh, will you?

BOB: (indifferently) I suppose so.

CAPTAIN: What's got into you, Bob? Can't you make your own decisions any more?

BOB: (uneasily) How do you mean?

CAPTAIN: You're coming along with me and in six months from now you'll be sitting a horse like Talbot! By God - (taken away) I'll punch it into you! Look at this! (with a kind of angry humour indicating his bow-legs) In ten years from now you'll have stilts like mine! You'll walk along as if you'd got a horse between your legs. I call that my triumphal arch! And it's the trademark of a man, Bob!

Pausing, as if to recover from his anger

Well, here's the first lesson. (boring into Bob with his eyes) Are you listening?

BOB: (sensing something in his manner) Yes.

CAPTAIN: Speaking quietly, after a cautious glance at the door on left.

Talbot's going to like you all right. But he wants a simple young man - nothing flashy. So watch out for yourself. (musings) One of the finest young horsemen in the country once - though I say it myself. (looks up suddenly) He's not a happy man, you know.

BOB: Why?

CAPTAIN: That man could have had a wonderful big family, like his Dad before him. He never did. He never married. The ground we stand on's going to be sold up on his death and that'll be the end of the Talbots. (pausing) All because of a bloody fool of a woman.

BOB: What happened?

CAPTAIN: There's not a more generous man in the County. Never tried to do anybody any harm. Seen him walk?

BOB nods, and the CAPTAIN, his chin lifted high, gravely imitates Talbot's long, easy stride.

He took over both estates when he was eighteen, he loved the work, he was a strapping young chap, Bob. Master of the Hunt when I moved here - everybody loved him, nose and all.

Gazing at BOB fixedly, his lips rather tight, as if there is a hidden meaning in what he is saying.

It makes him look like an eagle sometimes. I've seen him on horseback at the edge of the woods staring down his beak like a sleepwalker. Snap your fingers in his ear and he wouldn't turn his head. Because he's eaten up with regrets.

BOB: (rather faltering under his gaze) Why?

CAPTAIN: A woman tripped him up.

There is silence between them.

BOB: (forcing himself to ask the question) When?

CAPTAIN: About the time he was Master of the Hunt.

BOB: Was she married?

CAPTAIN: She was married all right. (going on quickly) Now that's a thing you've got to avoid. A woman can twine herself round your life. You start by being a fine young chap, full of oats, and then something snaps. (slowly) He never could resist a woman, Bob. But that was one too many.

He stares at BOB in silence.

BOB does not know what to do with his face and he stands there until the CAPTAIN at last rescues him by a brisk change of tone.

But whatever you say about him he's a fine leader and a just man. So put yourself at his service, without reservation. Never tell him you're expected back home, or you want an evening in town. No family. Just Bob Runnel. Agent. (grimly, in military fashion) At your service, sir!

The garden door opens and AUDRY comes in, also muffled up.

AUDRY: My, it's cold!

The CAPTAIN turns swiftly, and subsides when he sees who it is.

CAPTAIN: Ah ... Hullo, Audry.

AUDRY: Hullo! Talbot's back!

CAPTAIN: We'd better go.

AUDRY: (going towards door on left) I'll tell Elaine! She'll be so excited!

CAPTAIN: There's no time, Audry -

AUDRY: (turning back to them) No, wait a minute! (opening the door) Elaine! (she turns to look at Bob) Where's your smile gone to these days? (laughing) I've never seen anybody look so frightened of a bit of work!

ELAINE is in the corridor.

Come and look at our new agent, Elaine! He's come to collect for the graveyard fund!

ELAINE enters. Her hair is well-groomed and she has made up her face carefully. Her woollen dress, with an unsoiled pinafore round her waist, is a little too smart for morning housework.

ELAINE: Hullo, Audry. (to BOB, walking across to him) Are you off, darling? (to AUDRY again) He's nervous, I expect.

AUDRY: He's not exactly sitting up and begging for it, is he?

ELAINE gives him a brief glance of concern and goes close to him, to put his clothes in final order. At this moment MARTHA enters from the left. Unlike her mother she has taken no trouble with her appearance at all. Her clothes are thrown on and her hair is untidy. She goes towards the stove

AUDRY: Hullo, Martha.

MARTHA: Hullo, Audry.

BOB follows her anxiously with his eyes. The CAPTAIN also watches her closely.

BOB: Why don't you walk us over to the house, Mart?

MARTHA: (after glancing at ELAINE) I'm not dressed or anything.

BOB: We can wait.

CAPTAIN: Slip a coat on, Mart. You look all right.

AUDRY: You need an overcoat this morning - there's little bits of ice on my path - !

MARTHA: (hesitantly) Shall I ... ?

ELAINE: (with a sigh) Don't take her away from me just at this moment, Bob.

MARTHA stops, offering no resistance.  
ELAINE turns round to her.

Do you really want to go, darling? (to BOB again) You know we're having lunch in the big room today - there are seven of us and the places aren't even laid yet. Rose hasn't come in from church.

AUDRY: I can give you a hand.

ELAINE: With a shrug and a puzzled sort of smile at BOB

All right, but -

MARTHA: (to the CAPTAIN) I'd better stay.

ELAINE: Darling, if you want to go -

CAPTAIN: (after a frowning glance at his wife) Well, make up your minds.

MARTHA: (passively) I'll stay here.

BOB: (unable to meet her eyes) Cheerio, then.

AUDRY: Good luck, Bob!

The CAPTAIN opens the door. MARTHA stands watching them.

ELAINE: (following them to the door) Good luck, darling.

She stands in the doorway for a moment, watching them go across the garden.

ELAINE: (turning back into the room - about her duties again) Sit next to the Captain this time, will you, Audry? He loves it so. (smiling at her) Would you mind?

AUDRY: Oh, I'm used to him now!

ELAINE: (going across left) Build the fire, will you Martha?  
(as she goes out) We must have a curtain put in front  
of that door - every time it's opened the room gets  
frozen again ...

MARTHA stands in the same place,  
gazing before her. When ELAINE  
has gone AUDRY speaks to her in  
a low, hurried voice.

AUDRY: Dick's driving me mad. Can't you talk to him, Martha?

MARTHA takes some time to absorb  
this as she stares before her, then  
she speaks slowly and flatly.

MARTHA: He's a fool. Bob's never done him any harm.

AUDRY goes quickly to the door on  
the left and closes it without a sound

AUDRY: He doesn't mind Bob. It's her.

MARTHA: (dreamily) It's always her ...

AUDRY: She makes too much fuss of him if you ask me!

MARTHA: (her curiosity darkly aroused) Who? Of Bob?

AUDRY: Yes.

MARTHA: Why?

As if she hadn't the energy to go  
on but still wanting to see what is  
in the other woman's mind.

Fuss?

AUDRY: Well, always walking out with him - going to Lowley Gate.

MARTHA: (trembling) They went to Lowley Gate?

AUDRY: What's the matter?

MARTHA: You said they went to Lowley Gate.

AUDRY: Yes. That's all right, isn't it? (staring at her)  
Isn't it?

MARTHA: Yes ... What did they do?

AUDRY: They had tea together. Why? You're all so funny here ..

MARTHA: subsiding from her tension and speaking with childlike helplessness.

I don't know ...

AUDRY watches her for a time in silence.

AUDRY: You behave as funny as Dick!

MARTHA: (half to herself) Dick doesn't like them being together ..

AUDRY: (doubtful whether she should go on) Well, she overdoes it. Just to spite him!

MARTHA: (alert) To what?

AUDRY: To spite Dick - it's so silly!

MARTHA: (with sudden light) Yes! She can't forget the row they had! Of course she's going to spite him! Of course she's going to make a big show with Bob!

AUDRY: (hotly) Yes, but it's me who suffers for it! And yesterday was the last straw! She came over at half-past twelve and said would I come and help her do the washing-up - with that sweet smile of hers. And when I got here there was Bob sprawling all over his bed and a tray of breakfast things on his table - half past twelve!

MARTHA: (hardly able to get out her words) And Dick?

AUDRY: Dick? What do you mean?

MARTHA: Wasn't he there too?

AUDRY: No. Just Bob. (In an outburst) Do you know, if she wasn't the age she was I'd think they were a couple of lovers, I would really!

MARTHA: Looking at her in a terrible beseeching way.

You wouldn't ...

AUDRY: (stopping) What? (gazing at her) What's the matter?

MARTHA: (on the verge of tears) Audry ...

At last she bursts into child-like sobs, standing quite still, her hands at her sides.

Audry ...

AUDRY: (going to her in astonishment) Martha! (stroking her hair) My little Martha! What did I say? ... What did I say, then?

MARTHA tries to speak, as a child will through its tears, but it is no use.

AUDRY: I'll get your mother!

MARTHA tries to stop her with a gesture, but she cannot make herself understood. AUDRY runs across to the door on the left and calls out 'Elaine! Elaine!' Then she returns to MARTHA, worried and frightened

Don't cry, Martha. What did I say? Please don't cry!

ELAINE appears.

ELAINE: Martha!

Hurrying across to her daughter.

ELAINE: What happened, darling? There, darling, come to your mother! (to AUDRY) All right. I'll take her. What happened?

AUDRY: I don't know. She just - She's upset.

ELAINE: I'll take her upstairs. She'll be all right.

Lowering her head and trying to look into MARTHA's eyes.

Darling, what's the matter. Tell me what's the matter!

ELAINE draws her close, comforting her in the warm, soothing tones that must be poignantly familiar to MARTHA from her childhood. This brings MARTHA's tears in a greater flood, and she breaks down in her mother's clutching her and crying out, 'MUMMY, oh, MUMMY!'

ELAINE: Come upstairs, there's a good girl. (To AUDRY) She'll be all right. Don't worry.

The garden door opens and ROSE enters. She is dressed rather demurely for church, and she has a Psalter in her hand.

ROSE: What's the matter?

AUDRY: I said something - I can't understand it.

ROSE: What happened, Mart?

ELAINE: (stopping) Rose, Audry: just take her up to her room, darlings. There's so much to do down here.

ROSE: Mart ...

ELAINE: Thank you, Audry.

ROSE and AUDRY leave with MARTHA.

ELAINE goes to the stove and takes up the kettle of water. As she starts to leave the room she happens to glance back at the window. She at once puts the kettle on the stove again, and hurries to the mirror, where she combs her hair and makes up her face. Then she takes off her pinafore.

The garden door opens and BOB comes in. Neither of them speaks at once. He stands near the door, not responding to her smile.

ELAINE: (softly) My darling ... What happened? (glancing out of the window) Where's the Captain?

BOB: He's still at the house.

She goes and closes the garden door, then turns to him more anxiously.

ELAINE: What happened, then? Did he take you on?

BOB: Yes.

ELAINE: (with great relief) How wonderful!

She gazes into his eyes and kisses him on both cheeks. Then she puts her arms slowly round his shoulders.

Don't I deserve a kiss this morning?

He draws her closer and kisses her on the lips - but awkwardly and without feeling. And he does so only after glancing at the window and at the door on the left.

ELAINE looks up into his eyes.

What a fine job to have, Bob!

Slowly she realises that he is not with her and takes her arms down - clearly a relief to him.

You don't seem very happy about it ...

BOB: Dick was over there.

ELAINE: Dick? At the interview?

BOB: Yes. Talbot asked me if I'd agree to a term of five years.

ELAINE: (elated) Five years, darling!

BOB: And I said yes. Then he said he wanted to be alone with Dick and the Captain.

ELAINE: Why?

BOB: (gloomily) Something's going on over there!

ELAINE pauses thoughtfully.

ELAINE: (with a shrug) He wants you to be friends ... (looking at his hesitantly) Couldn't it be that?

BOB: No. They're up to something!

ELAINE: (inwardly very still) But what, darling?

BOB: He seemed to know something. He hardly looked at me.

There is silence between them while they ponder this.

ELAINE: And what did he seem to know?

BOB: The truth. (with a trace of resentment) You know what I mean.

ELAINE: Then who told him?

BOB: He'd only have to use his eyes ...

ELAINE: But we never saw him once!

BOB: We saw the grooms though! And you know how they talk.  
We walked past the stables every day.

ELAINE: (nodding) Yes. (wearily) The grooms talk ...

BOB: We should have been more discreet.

ELAINE: But I was so happy ...

BOB: The Captain knows.

ELAINE: Did he say anything?

BOB: Nothing direct. Anybody could have found out ...

ELAINE: (quietly, looking down) I loved this house -

Helpless with her words as we have  
not seen her before.

I wanted to make the most of it. (pause) They frighten  
you, don't they?

BOB: Well, you can feel their hatred - "

ELAINE: Ah, I've had that fear in my throat, Bob - I'm used to  
it now. (matter-of-factly) Martha knows, - too.

BOB: How can I look her in the eyes!

ELAINE: Aren't you prepared to suffer a little, then? I've been  
in this prison for years!

BOB: We needn't suffer ....

ELAINE: We need, we need!

BOB: No, no ...

ELAINE: You fool - of course the Captain knows! He only has  
to look me in the eyes! Well, let them all find out,  
one by one - and gloat and pry and whisper as they've

ELAINE      been doing for thirty years - 'Where's she been? Who's  
(contd.) she been with? How long's she been away?' Let them!  
I didn't ask to fall in love! It happened! Well, let  
their hatred happen! (with a sweeping gesture) I don't  
see them any more! And if they suffer, let them! It's  
their turn now!

BOB:            (in a low voice) Even Martha?

The name seems to stun her. She is  
silent. Then she nods sadly and  
bitterly.

ELAINE:        Yes, my God, even Martha ... I can't bear seeing her  
cry ...

BOB:            You couldn't go on doing that ...

ELAINE:        Oh, I could. I could see her wither away before my eyes,  
if only I had you ...

BOB:            You couldn't ...

ELAINE:        Do I shock you, then? (with a trace of disgust) I shock  
all of them in time ... Should I just lie down and say,  
'All right, my life wasn't real like other people's. It  
was only to be used'?

BOB:            They'll have their revenge, Elaine.

ELAINE:        Oh, yes, but when I've had mine. All this week they've  
been staring at me like dead fish - every time I come  
in with my face made up, every time I put on a new dress.  
None of them speak to me now. Even Audry looks at me as  
if I'd gone mad.

BOB:            And that's what I can't bear - their silence - their  
staring all the time ...

ELAINE:        Why can't you be blind to their stares? I've tried it!  
(with a laugh) It works, you know! It's just your silly  
fears!

BOB:            (sadly) I expect it is ...

ELAINE: (putting her arms round his shoulders again)  
Defy them, Bob - just for me. You could come in tired  
in the evening, we could have dinner together - we  
could go to the Metropole on Sundays - we could walk -  
I could come across the fields and see you at work!  
They'll soon forget, Bob, really they will!

BOB: Perhaps it's silly, but -

ELAINE: 'But', 'but' ...

BOB: You never let me have a minute's peace! Every time I  
try and talk to Martha you interfere. I can't go to my  
room without you coming too. Whenever the others say  
my name you lift up your head. If Martha says, 'Have  
some tea, Bob,' you tell her 'It's all right, I'll be  
getting him some tea in a moment'. (he pauses) Did  
you follow me to Audry's yesterday?

ELAINE: Yes ...

BOB: (looking about the room) God, you're right - it's like  
a prison here!

ELAINE: Have I turned it into a prison for you?

BOB: You and them - (he looks at her with very clear eyes)  
You quarrel, yet you all belong together ....

ELAINE: No, Bob. Don't be like that ... Don't leave me alone  
with them!

MARTHA appears on the left.

BOB: (his eyes averted from ELAINE) Leave you alone ... ?

ELAINE: (murmuring to him, almost in tears) No, Bob, you  
mustn't, you mustn't!

Suddenly he catches sight of MARTHA  
and springs away from ELAINE at once,  
almost pushing her over in his panic.  
He stares at MARTHA with his mouth  
open. Then ELAINE turns swiftly,  
half bent forward, and sees her too.

She stands there, doomed and broken-  
looking, and none of them speaks for  
some time.

MARTHA: We're ready to serve.

ELAINE nods slowly, then walks, al-  
most stumbles, to the door on the left,  
past her. MARTHA remains standing  
in exactly the same position as before,  
simply gazing at BOB. He returns her  
gaze in a stupefied fashion after  
ELAINE has gone. Then, in a sudden  
determined movement, as if rushing to  
get air, he pulls open the garden door  
and leaves. The stage is empty save  
for MARTHA.

C U R T A I N .

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ACT THREE.

SCENE TWO.

About a week later, in the evening. There is a large bunch of pinks on the side-board, still wrapped in paper. The CAPTAIN is seated at the table near the stove, and ROSE is helping him off with his riding boots. Meanwhile MARTHA is sweeping out BOB's room; she collects the dust into a pan and takes it to empty in the stove. The CAPTAIN watches her as she comes across the stage.

CAPTAIN: What's the matter, Mart? You look washed-out.

ROSE: It's all this overtime.

CAPTAIN: You ought to cut it out for a bit.

MARTHA: (at the stove) It's better to work.

CAPTAIN: Oh, well - we'll be back to normal soon.

ROSE now helps him on with his bedroom slippers. These with riding breeches - a gap of brown sock between them - make a ridiculous combination, but they all appear used to it. ROSE pours him a cup of tea.

CAPTAIN: God knows how they'll get him out of bed in the morning. (pause) You never know, but he might wake up at dawn one day and look out of the window and think, now this is where I belong ... There's nothing like the first cold air in the morning - it never comes like that again. God knows if it's us and our kind, but the air's polluted after that - by the time you girls are up there's nothing to see.

ROSE: Seven o'clock's early enough for me, thank you.

MARTHA continues to go back and forth from BOB's room, bringing the waste-paper basket etc. ROSE goes to the flowers and unwraps them.

CAPTAIN: (noticing the flowers for the first time) Where did those come from?

ROSE: I bought them outside the office - to celebrate.

He gives her an enigmatic look, then returns to his own thoughts.

CAPTAIN: He's got the mark of a squire on him - no doubt about that.

ROSE: He'll never have the money to be a squire!

She lays out the flowers on the sideboard and takes a large vase down from the mantelpiece.

CAPTAIN There's a chance if he pulls his weight.

ROSE leaves the room, left, with the vase in her hand, presumably to get water.

Grand! Simply grand! A better life than I had - without a horse to my name, let alone a stable! There wasn't a man from here to Land's End could master a horse like me! The old Equerry said -

MARTHA; (quietly) All right, Daddy ...

He dreams on in silence, staring at the floor.

CAPTAIN: I could go up and see him. I'd get him up at dawn - shake a leg, Bob! (hitting the table with sudden conviction) I'm damned if he isn't a squire in the making!

ROSE comes back with her vase and takes it to the sideboard.

ROSE: (putting the flowers in) You and the squires! They're ancient history these days!

CAPTAIN: (still dreaming) By God - I can just see him with a bit of horseflesh between his legs -

Imitating the actions of a rider  
putting a horse at a jump.

down goes his neck - the bit nice and firm - horse  
and rider together in spirit - more important than  
all your style - and back

Pulling back as the horse descends  
to the turf again.

without a hair out of place, his hands nicely down

Gripping his hands against the horse's  
neck, as they would be in holding  
the reins.

and the landing as smooth as a piece of velvet! And in  
three months from now - by God, he wouldn't look out of  
place in the Lowley Hunt, I can tell you that!

ROSE: He'll never have Dick's touch with a horse - not after  
fifty years.

CAPTAIN: Dick? Bob's got the personality ...

ROSE: It's the way a boy's brought up, I suppose.

CAPTAIN: (fulminating to himself) Captain Whistle! They are  
all whistlers over there - I swear that chestnut's got  
a whistle like a factory-hooter, only they can't hear it.  
She landed fifth in the seven furlongs - and they swore  
she'd lead the field all round! (pause) Well, she  
didn't. And Captain Whistle was right.

ROSE: Putting the vase of flowers on the  
table before him.

You never could manage Mummy. That was the trouble.

CAPTAIN: She was always too clever for me. Too quick.

ROSE: And you let her see it.

CAPTAIN: Yet she stayed. She had her little fancies. But she  
always came back.

MARTHA: (in a tone of contempt) She ought to be ashamed of herself.

CAPTAIN: I've seen that woman cry tears over you because you've scratched your knee. She nursed Bob's grandfather down to his grave - you were children in arms at the time - she stayed by his bed day and night.

ROSE: Oh, don't exaggerate ...

CAPTAIN: That man was heaven and all creation to her. And he didn't so much as mention her name in his will. (half to himself) Sitting up there all day ... (to MARTHA) Has she eaten anything?

MARTHA: No.

ROSE: What does she do all day?

MARTHA: Just sits by the window, I suppose.

ROSE: That little episode's over. Like with that widow from Jacques's Field - a fortnight of her and he'd had enough. (to MARTHA) Do you remember?

MARTHA: Oh, shut up ...

CAPTAIN: (quietly, watching ROSE) They had a nasty row last week.

ROSE (all ears) A row?

CAPTAIN: In front of the grooms, too.

ROSE: What about?

CAPTAIN: She'd been following him round a bit too much, I suppose. The boy likes his freedom. And he said, so.

He pauses, and they wait for him to speak with fascinated attention.

Anyway, she walked straight into the house -

ROSE: Which house?

CAPTAIN: (jerking his head towards the window) Over there. She walked straight in, up the stairs to Talbot's study ...

ROSE: No!

CAPTAIN: But he wouldn't give way!

ROSE: What was she after?

CAPTAIN: She wanted him to keep the boy here. She saw what was coming. But he said, No: either Bob worked up north or he didn't get a job at all. And anyway, he said, Bob had made up his own mind. That finished her.

MARTHA: So she knows ...

ROSE: Who told you?

CAPTAIN: Talbot himself. (leaning forward and speaking more quietly) Now how do you think that woman feels?

ROSE: (with a defensive shrug) I don't know.

CAPTAIN: You went up to him in church, didn't you? That's what he told me. He took me aside. 'What's this going on at the house?' he said. 'We'll have to get the boy away. She'll fasten on him for life.'

ROSE: And wasn't it true what he said?

CAPTAIN: Every word he said was true.

ROSE: What did I do wrong, then?

CAPTAIN: It was family business.

ROSE: (bitterly) Talbot's been in the family, I think?

CAPTAIN: I don't like to see one of my daughters chastising her own mother - that's all.

MARTHA: What about the other way round?

CAPTAIN: (turning on her sharply) I know about that. I don't like it either way round. (he looks at his watch, then addresses ROSE) You'd better call Dick, it's nearly time. And bring your mother down. She'll catch her death of cold.

ROSE: (without moving) Oh, she's all right.

The CAPTAIN shows signs of anger.

MARTHA: Rose ...

ROSE: (rising) All right.

She leaves the room left. The CAPTAIN and MARTHA sit in silence for some time

CAPTAIN: Who cooked the meal tonight?

MARTHA: I did.

Another pause.

CAPTAIN: (hesitantly) Spoken to Bob?

She shakes her head without looking at him.

(awkwardly) You ought to say goodbye.

He pushes his cup and saucer towards her.

Got another one there?

She rises in silence and pours him another cup of tea, her face set and pale.

MARTHA: (in a low voice, bitterly) You used to keep us apart, remember?

CAPTAIN: (abashed) All right, Martha.

The door opens and ROSE enters. She is followed by ELAINE.

ROSE: Here she is.

ELAINE is pale and haggard. She stares about the room while the others watch her in suspense.

CAPTAIN: Come and sit down, Elaine.

He jumps up, pulling the chair nearer the fire. Absently she walks over to it and throws herself down, staring before her. He sits at another place, embarrassed

What's the point of going on like this? You'll get ill - there's the house to think about!

ROSE leans over and touches one of ELAINE's hands.

ROSE: (to the Captain) Good Lord! Feel this hand!

CAPTAIN: Get her a cup of tea.

MARTHA: I'll get a blanket.

ROSE goes to the stove while MARTHA leaves the room to fetch a blanket.

ELAINE: Where's Bob.

CAPTAIN: Over at the stables.

ELAINE: Where did he go for lunch?

CAPTAIN: To Audry's.

ELAINE: (alert, looking at him for the first time) With Audry again?

CAPTAIN: (mildly) What are you talking about? Dick took him across. ~~There wasn't~~ <sup>+</sup> much chance of lunch here, was there, with you upstairs all day?

ELAINE: (nodding) Mm. It's the end now ...

ROSE: Here. Drink this.

MARTHA returns with a blanket.

ELAINE: Will you let me see him?

CAPTAIN: 'Let' you, Elaine? He's in and out of the house all day.

ELAINE: He hasn't said hullo for nearly a week.

CAPTAIN: He's got a mind of his own.

ELAINE: You put him against me.

ROSE: What?

ELAINE: You went to Talbot. One of you did. That's why he's taking Bob away from me.

The others are silent. The CAPTAIN looks uncomfortable.

ROSE: I went to Talbot.

ELAINE: That's what I said. (to the CAPTAIN) You see how things are? His spirit's in her (jerking her head towards the window) They worked it out together - well, you'd expect it, wouldn't you, seeing that -

CAPTAIN: (sharply, for the first time) Shut up!

ROSE: What did she say?

MARTHA: (giving her mother a sobering look) Hadn't you better stop?

ELAINE: (with a bitter laugh, to MARTHA) You've got a tongue in your head, then!

CAPTAIN: Do you ever speak to us these days?

ELAINE: (with disgust) Us! Us! That's what he said - 'You're all together', he said. Like an obscene, sweating body - us - and I can't get away from it!

ROSE: She's going off her head ...

ELAINE: (to herself) How does anybody make love to an 'us' ...  
(to ROSE) Is it all fixed, then?

ROSE: What?

ELAINE: The contract.

ROSE: How do I know?

CAPTAIN: Of course it's fixed.

ELAINE: He's being sent away ... (to the CAPTAIN) And you never had a moment of pity for me?

CAPTAIN: Listen, Elaine - he signed the contract, not me.

ELAINE: You frightened him. You turned this house into a dark, shameful house. (Pointing at ROSE and MARTHA) Look at their eyes!

CAPTAIN: Rose spoke out of turn. That's all the wrong they've done.

ELAINE: And your talk helped.

CAPTAIN: My talk?

ELAINE: Weren't you out with him every day? And every day he came back looking more like a criminal ...

CAPTAIN: And what about the shouting he did at the stables last week? Did I ask him to shout at you?

ELAINE: (dreamily, as if dazed by the recollection) He didn't shout ...

CAPTAIN: I heard him myself.

ELAINE: Bob never shouts ... (she stares before her, nursing the blanket in her hands.)

CAPTAIN: Now get this into your head, Elaine - that boy's leaving of his own accord. Nobody forced his hand.

ELAINE: (pleading, as if she hadn't heard him) Tell him to live here the same as before, Harold! Talbot won't mind. Not if we want it.

CAPTAIN: It's too late now. And anyway - (he pauses) It's Martha as well.

ELAINE: (staring at the table) Ah ... Martha ... (nodding) Us.

CAPTAIN: He wants his freedom now.

ELAINE: And I was so much in love ...

ROSE: Aren't you ashamed?

ELAINE: (seeing the flowers) Whose are these?

Neither of the girls answer, so the CAPTAIN speaks.

CAPTAIN: Rose brought them home.

ELAINE: To make the house brighter?

She rises, letting the blanket fall to the floor.

But they're too many for the vase, my dear - you always did have a little vulgarity in your nature.

She takes some of them out.

Now a few in several places gives a much better effect.

She pulls the rest out with trembling fingers, then fetches a smaller vase from the mantelpiece.

Did you put some in his room?

ROSE simply stares at her.

No? Well, it would have been rather more gracious. I'll get some water.

She goes out left with the vase and flowers.

ROSE: (glancing at the door to make sure she has gone) You'd better tell her. It's time.

The CAPTAIN looks at his watch again. Then he rises and goes to the window, pulling the curtain back a little.

CAPTAIN: The garage light's on. He'll be here in a minute.

ROSE: She looks half-mad. Perhaps he'd better not come! She'll make a scene!

MARTHA: Let her, then.

ROSE: With Talbot waiting out there?

CAPTAIN: It's three minutes to eight. So he can't stay long. (with a sigh) And that'll be that.

ELAINE returns with the vase, leaving the door open behind her.

ELAINE: There. Now we'll put them on his table. And I'll tell him they're from Rose.

They stare after her as she walks towards BOB's door with the vase. She opens it, switches on the light, steps inside, then stops short with a gasp. The vase falls from her hands and smashes on the floor of his room. A moment passes and she turns towards them again, her expression ghastly.

He's gone! He's gone!

CAPTAIN: (jumping up and going towards her) Elaine ....

ELAINE: (screaming at the top of her voice) Don't touch me! (he stops) Where's he gone? Where's he gone? (breaking down) Won't you ever speak to me?

CAPTAIN: Elaine ... I - He's going away tonight.

ELAINE: (absolutely defeated) Tonight ...

CAPTAIN: Talbot's taking them up by car.

ELAINE: And you didn't tell me ...

CAPTAIN: It was only decided last night.

ELAINE: (to her daughters) Both of you knew! But no! I  
must be ashamed! (stamping her foot) Ashamed! Well  
be ashamed of this, then.

She goes nearer the table, leaning over them, while the CAPTAIN stands by watching, rather frightened.

This is what your mother does. This is what you can keep in your minds as long as you live.

She pauses, preparing her words.

We took a room at Lowley Gate -

CAPTAIN: Elaine!

ELAINE: It had a double bed. Do you hear what I say? We weren't disturbed. The street was very quiet. It was freer than here. Those hard-working daughters weren't coming in from the 6.13 bus. (with bitter ridicule) Why does it always have to come in at 6.13? Like a piece of clockwork! On Monday, look, they're stepping off the 6.13! Tuesday, but look, they're stepping off the 6.13 again! (almost in tears) And Wednesday - what a marvel - it's the 6.13 again! Are their minds made of clockwork as well as their feet? But then they bring in money, don't they? That's why they can sit and stare and plot and whisper and torment me - torment their mother every day, drive her misery deeper and deeper - till it kills her, it's going to kill her! My body's going to die very quickly. (turning to the CAPTAIN) Mark that, Captain Betman! The little pleasure you ever got won't be happening any more!

CAPTAIN: He's coming now, Elaine.

ELAINE: Throwing herself down on a chair, in tears, her head on the table.

But what can I do? Oh, what can I do?

Suddenly she looks up.

He's coming here now?

CAPTAIN: Yes.

ELAINE: He'll take pity - not like you - !

A car-horn, double-noted, suggesting a large car, sounds twice from the distance.

ELAINE: What's that?

ROSE goes to the door left. ELAINE watches everything.

ROSE: Dick! They're ready!

ELAINE: Looking at her husband with a dreadful sunken expression, her voice low.

You're lying to me ... He isn't coming!

Suddenly leaping up and rushing to the garden-door.

Bob! Bob!

The CAPTAIN stops her.

CAPTAIN: Now pull yourself together, Elaine!

ELAINE: (trying to claw at him with her nails) Let me see him!  
Please, please, please ...

CAPTAIN: (shouting above her cries) Now I've told you he's coming. Do you want Talbot over here? (to ROSE) What the hell's Dick up to?

MARTHA: Look at the state she's in ...

The car-horn sounds again. ELAINE looks up as if it were a sentence of death.

ROSE: Dick! Come on!

From upstairs Dick's voice is heard - 'All right.' We hear him coming down the stairs. He enters and goes straight over to BOB's room.

CAPTAIN: Go and get him quick!

DICK: Stopping in the doorway, as he sees the debris of the vase.

Hullo, what's this?

He looks back at ELAINE enquiringly, then after gazing at her for a moment shrugs it off.

More tantrums, I suppose!

He goes into BOB's room, then returns with a suitcase.

Is this all?

ROSE: Yes.

He goes out, slamming the door. There is silence.

CAPTAIN: (holding out a handkerchief) Here, wipe your eyes.

She takes the handkerchief absently, but does nothing with it.

Don't let him find you like that.

ELAINE: You're lying ... lying ...

There is silence. Again the car-horn sounds. The CAPTAIN goes to BOB's room and closes the door. Then he comes to the centre of the room again, in suspense. He grows more anxious. He goes to the window and pulls back the curtains a little, peeping out.

ELAINE puts out her hand in a sudden gesture of hope, towards him.

ELAINE: He's coming?

CAPTAIN: (letting the curtain fall again) Of course, Elaine.

Again they wait in silence. Then suddenly they hear a car start up and, after its engine has been running a little time, drive away.

ELAINE breaks into silent sobs, which shake her body.

CAPTAIN: (unable to believe it) No ...

He is stunned and turns helplessly to his wife.

Elaine ... You know what a stickler Talbot is for time.

ELAINE: My beloved! My beloved!

CAPTAIN: (glancing round desperately) Rose ...

ROSE remains standing quite still.

There is a knock on the door. ELAINE comes to life at once and rushes to the garden door. She pulls it open, peers into the darkness, then stops. AUDRY appears.

AUDRY: What's the matter? Elaine!

She comes in and closes the door,  
staring at ELAINE.

CAPTAIN: (sharply) Have they gone?

AUDRY: Yes. What's the matter with Elaine?

CAPTAIN: She's upset about Bob.

AUDRY: But he'll be back soon, darling! (ELAINE walks blindly  
away) Why didn't she come over? We were waiting!

MARTHA: (going to her mother) Mummy ...

AUDRY: (to ROSE, in astonishment) Just over Bob?

ROSE shrugs and takes up her knitting.

CAPTAIN: (staring at the floor for some time) He could have  
dropped in. (nodding to himself) He could have done  
that.

C U R T A I N.

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