

THE OPEN PAN SYSTEM

One Act

by

Maurice Rowdon

~~THE PROPERTY OF:~~

~~Portslade Productions Ltd
5 Tamworth Street
London SW 6
01.385.4003~~

CHARACTERS

ARTHUR

KATE, his wife

JOHN, their butler

N O T E

The play is set in 1901. Queen Victoria is not yet dead but it is a very different world from that of 1837 when she came to the throne as a girl of eighteen. Edward, her son, of whom it was said that he had diamonds grafted on to his penis for added gratification, really sets the tone. The times are amiably self-indulgent, flatulent and brutally direct in the matter of the division of people into rich and poor, wanted and unwanted. In some well-appointed people there is a dash of civilisation, soon to be surrendered to the money-battalions who are really keeping the 'aristocracy' alive, and of whom ARTHUR and KATE in this play are prominent captains.

For ARTHUR and KATE the civilised strain in the faltering 'aristocracy' is simply decadence, though ARTHUR has endowed enough charities to be on the waiting list of future knights; and some of his products have found their way into the palaces of Sandringham and Osborne. Having a 'knob' to your name is commercially useful.

This piece should be played with an unhesitating robustness which would be healthy were it not for the paralysing inhibitions, especially in the sexual area, that crave to expose themselves. These are never apparent in the course of the action of this play: the style of conversation between ARTHUR and KATE, the carefully formal relationship by means of which a brutally carnal sex-life is licenced and enhanced, cannot be allowed a moment of relaxation. A whole social order seems to depend on it. But this is not in the nature of an artificial self-control (the fictitious British 'self-control' was always in fact a matter of sex-perversion): it is a spontaneous function of the glands, so to speak, a concealment so artfully and totally practised that it excites and inflames the desires it purports to deny the existence of. When ARTHUR and KATE have sex together the room is dark, but not entirely, and they fall on each other in the clothed state, without a word said, and strip each other bare with furtive hands, as if the act were a bank-robbery, and no one else in the house must know. So in this piece there is a certain conspiratorial background to everything they say, whatever the subject. Their business adapts itself ideally to this mode of concealment. ARTHUR is apparently a straightforward man, brusque, flushed with good living and hard, excessively punctual and regular work which gives him his air of untroubled complacency, while KATE, the curator of their sexual archives, maintains a steady

moral front---in the way she speaks and moves and looks at things---which makes her actual hot carnality and her burrowing intelligence (far greater than her husband's) all the more exciting for herself and her husband to witness when, for the briefest of moments, like in a strip-tease act, they are exposed. Nothing of what ARTHUR and KATE really are should ever be overt, in the course of this play. It should all be deduction, hint, the smallest of movements and gestures (but even then these only refer to an inner state circumspectly, in a symbolism that the actor will have to discover slowly in his study of the character's powerful outer forms). JOHN, the servant, is almost a fellow-conspirator. In the bedroom ARTHUR and KATE never trouble to clear up after an act of sex, and, contradictory as it may seem, wet sheets are simply crumpled up and thrown in a corner for JOHN or the housekeeper to dispose of. ARTHUR and KATE are Edwardians, not puritans: business belongs to the evangelical, while desire belongs to subversion, conspiracy, assassination. The latter contains all the ecstasies which the former with its 'work leads to grace' forbids. Already in 1901 the evangelical part is giving way to the self-indulgent part, and the young gentleman sent abroad to administer history's biggest empire is now only just bright enough and energetic enough to follow his father's brief. The evangelicalism of the mid-nineteenth century looked on self-indulgence as leading to hell. But for ARTHUR and KATE things are different: the evangelicalism finances the self-indulgence, while on the surface nothing has changed at all and God still speaks in English. There are more rich than before---and more poor. Not that the poor are living in a greatly different style from the rich, except that they lack proper means. They work harder, and indulge themselves harder. There is no real health anywhere. The worst war ever to have hit humanity will in thirteen years prove this. Meanwhile the preacher-criminal ARTHUR and the preacher-whore KATE are indomitable.

The year is 1901. The place is London. The set may indicate the period and the prosperous status of the characters with a bombée side-board, a gilded table and a couple of bobbed easy chairs.

KATE is alone, seated. She is looking at what seems to be a collection of designs.

A lavatory is flushed, off. She looks up, gazes before her, returns to her collection.

The door is opened, and the butler JOHN is there.

JOHN: The young man from the works brought a large book long ma'am (pronounced almost like 'mum'). Ah, you have it.

KATE looks up slowly. She nods.

JOHN (cont.) Master's just in ma'am. I'm keeping the motor car at the front ma'am, is that right?

KATE: We shall leave at seven John.

JOHN (about to withdraw) Yes ma'am.

ARTHUR appears behind JOHN, in his overcoat.

JOHN (cont., aware of ARTHUR) Ah, there you are, sir. May I take your coat?

ARTHUR: If you let me get into my own sitting room first, yes. (Squeezing unceremonially past JOHN, who appears unruffled by this) Hullo my dear.

KATE rises.

ARTHUR (looking at the designs as they kiss) Are those the famous designs?

KATE: Yes. (To JOHN) Perhaps master would like some coffee.

ARTHUR: No.

KATE: Very well John.

JOHN takes ARTHUR'S hat and coat.

JOHN (leaving) Thank you ma'am.

KATE sits again while ARTHUR paces about in a rather agitated way.

KATE (turning a page of the designs) Some of these are very exciting.

ARTHUR: Yes, yes.

KATE (looking up) What's happened?

ARTHUR: It's hardly anything at all. But it's funny how it can get under your skin.

KATE: What?

ARTHUR: Something that happens in another company, and something quite ludicrous which is only going to do that company harm.

KATE: Arkwright's?

ARTHUR: No. Not Arkwright's! They can be relied to turn out sound goods, soundly designed. I can only benefit from competition of that kind.

KATE: Samson's?

ARTHUR: Wrong again! It's the one firm that can hold a candle to mine. And perhaps that's what troubles me. Shawcross and Brightstone!

KATE: Shawcross and Brightstone! But if they're going to harm themselves, that could only do you good surely!

ARTHUR: You see Kate it's rather like the ocean. If a storm comes up it isn't only one ship gets the buffeting. We all do.

KATE: And what's he done to create a storm?

ARTHUR (sitting down with a sigh) Perhaps I'm exaggerating. (Looking at her across the table) Partly it's a feeling in me that I could have got there first. Because I've had such a design in my mind for years. Only I kept quiet about it. I couldn't imagine---well, this is exaggerating too---but I couldn't imagine anyone daring to do it! And you know the

perversity of our world Kate, what's daring today is accepted practice tomorrow!

KATE: But you've got the most brilliant designer in the business---(tapping the designs) look at this!

ARTHUR: I rather fear that young Roberts is good for producing provocative designs with a minority appeal. They please you and they please me, and they're a joy for the foundries to work on, but something's astir in the Shawcross and Brightstone firm, some audacity if you want to put it like that, which can produce the provocative of wide appeal. They know the right mixture--- a touch of vulgarity, more than a touch!--- and just enough old line and finish to smooth over the vulgarity---because you know and I know that the new only appeals to the minority, and that the majority have to be given the illusion of something new, something based on yesterday's revolutions, yesterday's pioneers!

KATE (sitting back and closing the designs with some irritation) And now perhaps you will tell me, Arthur, what Shawcross and Brightstone have produced.

ARTHUR (jumping up and pacing again) Here's precisely their devilry--- the fact that I can't---not even to my own wife---least of all to her! Yet I'm aware that the very forbidden quality, the unmentionable nature of what they have done is the very thing that will give it worldwide success, even to the point of making young Roberts's projects---though you know and I know that they are real quality, the firstfruit of study and concentration and I might say quite a bit of dedication too, of a quiet sort---where was I?

KATE (coolly): You were saying that the Shawcross and Brightstone design could make young Roberts's projects---

ARTHUR: Yes---could drive them off the market---could even drive off our safe-selling lines, and Arkwright's too, not to say Samson's!

KATE: No! (Standing) Arthur, I must know what this is all about. I can't see you worried like this!

JOHN enters.

JOHN: You should be dressing sir. It's turning half past six.

ARTHUR (to KATE) We can't go. What do you say?

KATE (to JOHN) You may send the car to the garage, John.

Master has far too much on his mind for the theatre this evening.

JOHN: Yes ma'am. (To ARTHUR) I hope it's nothing affecting business sir?

ARTHUR: No, no---I mean, not my business---somebody else's, though I fear it will be my business very soon.

JOHN: May I prepare you a coffee with a dash of brandy sir? It helps the brain.

ARTHUR: No thank you John, it's very good of you but I'll keep my gastric juices free for dinner---which by the way (to KATE) we shall need earlier surely?

KATE (to JOHN) I'll be down in the kitchen in a few minutes. Very well.

JOHN: Thank you ma'am.

JOHN withdraws.

KATE: Now perhaps you'll talk.

ARTHUR (his back turned) How can I put it Kate?--- you know my awful habit of eating coffee beans--- call John back!

KATE: What are you saying Arthur?

She goes to the door and opens it.

KATE (cont., calling quietly) John! Come back please.

JOHN returns.

KATE (cont.) The master wants a word with you.

ARTHUR (to JOHN) Bring me a glass of water John.

JOHN: Isn't that rather heavy for the stomach sir? At least let me put a dash of Scotch!

ARTHUR: It isn't to drink.

JOHN (puzzled) Ah yes, sir.

JOHN withdraws.

ARTHUR (striding to the door and pulling it open again) And bring some coffee beans John! And an empty glass.

KATE: You're not going to eat coffee beans before my eyes Arthur!

ARTHUR (thoroughly irritated) They are not for eating!

KATE looks at him with the same
puzzlement as JOHN.

KATE: You've made me quite nervous.

ARTHUR: There are simply certain things that can't be
set out clearly for all to see, especially from
man to woman. I'm sorry Kate but you'll just
have to be patient! This is a bridge we shall
have to cross most carefully, and not at too quick
a pace. So just bear with me.

KATE: Very well, Arthur, I'm sure you do everything for
the best.

A lavatory is flushed again, off.

He stops, looks at her.

ARTHUR: Who might that be?

KATE: I can't imagine. The servants know very well
that they must never use a house-convenience.
And that applies to the housekeeper as well.

ARTHUR: Could it be John?

KATE: Impossible!

ARTHUR: Suppose you call him in and ask?

KATE: Isn't such a question rather indelicate, coming
from me? Suppose you ask him yourself---

ARTHUR: I will, don't worry!

KATE: And when you're dressing please, not here, in
front of me!

JOHN appears again and ARTHUR all
but grabs the two glasses he is
carrying, one of them full of
water, and the handfull of coffee
beans.

KATE (to JOHN) Very well John.

JOHN: Thank you ma'am.

JOHN withdraws.

ARTHUR quickly swallows a coffee
bean as he brings the glasses to
the table.

KATE: Arthur, the doctor forbade you ever to do that
again!

ARTHUR: Damn the doctor!

KATE: Well!

ARTHUR: I'm sorry my dear but this is a critical moment---now please listen to me---here is a coffee bean (holding it between his fingers)--- it has a certain aroma (putting it to this nose)--- now drop it into water (dropping it into the glass of water) and the aroma is at this instant, immediately on contact with the water, forgotten, a thing of the past! Water encapsulates, annihilates odour! Now (tipping a number of coffee beans into the empty glass) what happens when there is no water? The sight and the aroma remain!

KATE (staring) What?

ARTHUR: Exactly! That's how I looked, and what I said, when it was explained to me! (taking the glass of water again) Only afterwards, and how long afterwards depends on the client, comes the water, and only a small amount at that! (Tipping a little water into the empty glass so as just to cover the coffee beans). In full view, and with the aroma hardly influenced, the beans are swept away!

KATE: But it's barbarous! It's perverted! What clients exist who'd want such a thing?

ARTHUR: That's what I'm saying---the very fact that no one wants it, the very fact of its outrageousness, will make it desirable! You know that and I know that!

KATE (still staring that the glass) But in full view--- and entirely unsprinkled with water---!

She turns away. There is silence.

KATE (cont., quietly) How can David Shawcross conceive such a thing, allow a designer to so much as put the blueprint before him?

ARTHUR: Ah, thereby hangs a tale my dear---you have worked and I have worked for a certain quality, not for success at any price, a comfortable home and servants at any price! Our success has been the measure of our dedication, our obstinate attachment to form and style, with just that little touch of panache enough to give the form and style a contrasting background against which to set itself off all the better! What was I saying?

KATE: That our products are prestige products.

ARTHUR: Ah yes! And at one brutal stroke the business is set back a century, we may as well return to holes and---! Well, I won't go on.

Silence again, while they reflect.

KATE: And what leads you to believe, Arthur, that this is going to take the world by storm?

ARTHUR: General education, my dear, leads to a general decline in taste. Have you observed the new buildings along Victoria Street? Have you compared them with those from a century ago?

KATE: But I simply can't believe that clients are to be found who would wish to be seen to be wanting not to immediately annihilate sight and aroma! Who do we know who would shamelessly stand in a showroom and ask for such a specification?

ARTHUR: There'll be no need to ask. Shawcross and Brightstone aren't fools. They've given it a royal name. I think, the Hanoverian. And all you do is ask for that. It even has a crown above the title, in gold!

KATE: Then, Arthur (pausing to look at him)---what were you doing with this same project in your head? You said a moment ago that you had been wanting to develop this very thing for years and hadn't dared.

ARTHUR: Oh you know how it is Kate---the most frightful thoughts occur to one, at least to a man---if we had to account for every absurdity that came into our heads we'd be in trouble indeed!

KATE: But is it such an absurdity?

ARTHUR: What?

KATE: If Shawcross and Brightstone can produce that thing for a large market, can we rule it out as an absurdity? especially as, shameless and brutal as it is, and even just because of its open brutality, it's going to sell? How can we afford to sit like spectators and simply say it's absurd, and watch the market slipping from our hands?

ARTHUR: You know and I know Kate that absurdities don't last. They sell out in a week and then are never heard of again. Whereas quality, whether this year's or next year's, has staying power, and that's where we come in!

KATE: But suppose The Hanoverian doesn't sell out

in a week? Suppose it not only stays but becomes the most popular line on the market, making our designs look timid and old-fashioned? (Taking the coffee beans) Now how exactly is the receiving area designed? From which direction does the water do its work?

ARTHUR: From above. (Uncertainly) So I imagine.

KATE: But have you seen a design?

ARTHUR: More than a design. An actual life-drawing, from two aspects, sectionally and from above.

KATE: And the receiving area is conventionally round?

ARTHUR: And waterless. And only slightly concave at the base. In this way (taking the coffee beans from her, cupping his left hand slightly and then pouring the coffee beans into it).

KATE: Then the water acts normally, from all sides and above?

ARTHUR: Yes. The bean is shifted thus by the water--- (pushing the beans off his palm sideways on to the table). This area (pointing to where the beans have fallen) is a concealed area behind the receiving platform. There, so to speak, lies the normal and conventional service, which now disposes of the coffee bean, instead of temporarily annihilating and veiling it with water at once, as in all other designs.

KATE goes to the door. ARTHUR watches her with interest.

KATE (opening the door and calling) John! (to ARTHUR) I don't think we should give up this easily. I want to show you something that may well be an acceptable compromise, and more successful on the market than what Shawcross and Brightstone have done.

ARTHUR: Yes but Kate! Either you don't annihilate the aroma etc or you do, and---!

JOHN appears.

JOHN: Ma'am?

KATE (taking the glasses to him) I want you to get me my china jewel box and my powder bowl. And some more coffee beans. Empty the box and the bowl before you bring them.

He stares at her.

JOHN: Empty the powder ma'am?

KATE: Well just remove the powder puff.

JOHN: Yes ma'am. (Looking into one of the glasses he has taken, and then at her) Ma'am I had strict instructions not to put coffee beans where master might be tempted to eat them.

KATE: He isn't eating these. This is for business.

JOHN (looking at her then at ARTHUR, with a sniff) Yes ma'am. (On his way to the door but stopping) Your jewel box and your powder bowl ma'am: if ma'am would prefer to do her toilet here should I bring a mirror?

KATE: Try to understand that master and I are discussing business.

JOHN: Thank you ma'am. And I am to remove the puff.

KATE: Yes John.

JOHN leaves.

ARTHUR: I never thought to have my own servants spying on me!

KATE: Doctor's orders were very strict! You were eating dozens a day, Arthur, and I couldn't allow your health to deteriorate!

ARTHUR (with a sigh) I've never been able to account for that craving. Even now---I can see those few beans on the table which you've clearly forgotten---and it's all I can do not to cram them into my mouth!

KATE (taking the coffee beans) That's easily settled. And we shall use something else when discussing business in the future!

ARTHUR: But they are apt---and---life-like...

JOHN enters again with a china jewel box and a powder bowl.

JOHN (with a cautionary look at ARTHUR as he puts the objects on to the table and then fetches some more beans out of his pocket) Here you are ma'am. Might I suggest you examine master's pockets in case he's concealed some beans as I gave him considerably more than you seem to be able to account for ma'am.

KATE (showing the beans she has taken from the table) I overlooked these.

JOHN: Thank you ma'am. But a considerable number have disappeared just the same (with another look at ARTHUR).

KATE: Very well John.

JOHN: Thank you ma'am.

JOHN leaves.

ARTHUR: I'll have him taking my temperature next!

KATE (going to him and dipping into his pockets) You ought to be thankful that your man concerns himself about your health. You mustn't confuse devotion with interference Arthur. And look at all these (pulling out handfulls)!

ARTHUR (ashamed) I'm sorry.

KATE (putting the beans on the table) Arthur---perhaps Shawcross and Brightstone have hit on a truth--- look at your craving for beans, how you treasure sight and aroma and will do anything to have them on your person---could it be that in some of us there is a similar craving for other things?

ARTHUR (shocked) But Kate---! I eat them! You can't be suggesting---!

KATE: Let me show you this (going to the jewel box and powder bowl). Young Roberts can put the finishing touches. It occurred to me, Arthur, that we could produce an even bolder design!

ARTHUR: In what way bolder? Even more brutal you mean?

KATE: And we could mitigate its effects not with a royal title only but with the kind of perfect finish our firm is famous for.

She turns the jewel box upside down. It has a very slightly concave base. At its side she sets the powder bowl, the right way up, without its lid.

KATE (cont.) Now this is the receiving area (indicating the base of the china box)---

ARTHUR: What?

KATE: And this (indicating the powder bowl) is the water

bowl, as in conventional types. Shawcross and Brightstone, you tell me, have concealed the conventional water bowl behind the receiving platform, quite out of sight.

ARTHUR (still hushed with shock) But Kate--- You aren't suggesting that the receiving area should be raised and dry!

KATE: Yes I am. It should be absurdly near the sitting rim, absurdly close to the client! Now that's revolutionary! And perhaps only a woman could have dared to do it!

ARTHUR: I think---I think people have been arrested for less. And that you, Kate---! I can hardly recognise you!

KATE: So what's the master's suggestion? that Shawcross and Brightstone sweep us off the market? Because they'll follow this with another design, and another, until they reach my degree of boldness! Let us make them gape, as you gaped today at their design and thought to yourself secretly that it was a triumph and could win the biggest market ever! You never dared design such a thing but when someone else did you at once saw the selling possibilities! And now you won't dare this, you won't allow yourself to see the selling possibilities of this? (Pacing) I wish women could run a few businesses!

ARTHUR: But Kate, what your design does is to make boldness and brutality an--almost---ideal!

KATE: Thank you (making for the door)!

ARTHUR: No Kate, I mean---!

KATE: Am I to stay?

ARTHUR (taking her hands) Forgive me. I remember once how I rejected one of young Roberts's designs, and you made me adopt it, the one with the shallow shaft and the low-slung rim, and the line sold better than any other for a time. Should I be ungrateful and fail to listen to you now? Come (drawing KATE back to the table), how do you see the action of the water?

KATE: Not from above! Not from all sides! There too lies a little revolution. The water will thrust frontally---in this way! (pushing the beans sideways off the china box into the powder bowl) There!

ARTHUR considers this for some time, giving her glances of admiration.

ARTHUR: And stains? How are those eliminated?

KATE: Stains are inevitable with most bowls, and here they are in fact quite minimised, because the bean falls straight (dropping a bean straight on to the china box from above), without sliding as it usually does (taking the empty glass, tipping it slightly sideways, then sliding a coffee bean down to its base).

ARTHUR: Well (with a smile), we'd better talk to young Roberts. Won't he gib at the so to speak starkness of the idea?

KATE: Not if I present it to him, alone. I shan't be satisfied with a royal title like The Hanoverian. I shall call it The Regency---bring it into current life! And I shan't give it a crown, I shall give it flowers! (Taking the designs and showing him one of them) Here! Roberts already has an excellent flower-design!

ARTHUR: But how will the bean be seen perfectly on a design of flowers---I mean, since the strange objective is to have it seen?

KATE: The flowers won't be on the receiving platform. They'll be in the water bowl, glowing through the water! They'll be round the rim, and round the shaft! The receiving platform is going to be virgin clear.

He nods reflectively.

KATE (cont.) Well?

ARTHUR: I'm worried. I don't want to lie about that. What I mean is, Kate, I can see the possibilities of this, I agree they're far greater than those of the Shawcross and Brightstone design, and certainly art-wise your project puts theirs into the shade, by combining greater daring with greater ingenuity, and I'm sure the finished article will put us at the head of the market---but---(as she gazes at him and he seems unwilling to speak)--- is this why we came into the business? Didn't we always hold it as a principle to produce what we felt we ought to produce, in terms of quality, and not what we could produce in terms of the market? Didn't we always say that success is one thing, values another?

KATE: And didn't we say that with general education---

these words are your own Arthur---with general education we would have to be prepared for a lowering of taste, and to cater for that taste!

ARTHUR: We never said cater for it!

KATE: What else can we do? disregard it? when people like John are sending their sons to school and even to Oxford---even to Oxford, Arthur---I heard of a carpenter's son getting to Oxford only the other day! Shall we continue to cater for a small public which over the years will have less and less say in the conduct of the country's affairs?

ARTHUR: So we go down to the level of the carpenter's son, we don't bring him up to ours!

KATE: He'll come up of his own accord! There's no bigger snob than the humble-born one, you know that yourself! (He nods to this) Shawcross and Brightstone have read the writing on the wall. They know that if we don't seek access very soon to the humbler sections of the middle class, and even in the end to the mass of the people, we shall be swept out of the market by someone who does! The world's changing fast Arthur---women are asking for the vote, soon everyone will want a comfortable house and even a motor car---it's going to happen in the end, and we may as well be prepared for it!

ARTHUR: And what about all the talented young designers we pledge ourselves annually to encourage---are they going to feel happy at pur entering a mass market? What about Roberts? He's your protégé after all---in fact you seem to spend half your life with him!

KATE (with quiet control) I thought we'd exhausted that subject Arthur.

ARTHUR: Yes, yes---very well.

KATE: Do you think these designs would be here if it weren't for the hours I've spent listening to his troubles? And you haven't so much as glanced at them! I must repeat, Arthur, creative people go through a certain amount of inner anguish, we can't regard them as tools in a factory!

ARTHUR: I know, I know! And I accept that. I'm sorry I said what I did.

KATE: It won't be easy with young Roberts. And it may take time. He has a design here which is daring in the genuine sense, not simply provocative

and sensational. You won't like it---

ARTHUR: Oh! Thank you very much!

KATE: I didn't at first. The receiving platform is actually crenellated like a castle, and has various levels---

ARTHUR: But---

KATE: I told you you wouldn't like it!

ARTHUR: But the stains---the impossibility of cleaning---

KATE: There are no stains. The action of the water takes care of that, since there are outlets actually among the crenellations---

ARTHUR: What?

KATE: Now I told him it was going to be difficult if not impossible to persuade you to adopt it, and anyway I said we could only hope to sell a very small number which would barely pay for the initial foundry costs. He left here looking rather down, and a little rebellious. Now I can promise to let his design go through if he'll join us in this other enterprise, and help get it into the market quickly, before Shawcross and Brightstone. What do you say?

ARTHUR: You could try.

KATE: Very well then. You see, Arthur, I've been thinking for some time that you should finance the artistic side more liberally by way of producing more in the popular lines. That way we can enter the popular market with a bang, or rather create it, and finance young Roberts as much as he wants to be.

ARTHUR: A bang you say... I do dislike bangs. And then, what's the point of financing young Roberts and other bright designers like him if we are only interested in making as much money as quickly as possible?

KATE: I'm afraid it's a more critical situation than that. Shawcross and Brightstone are going to push us clean out of the market unless we do something drastic!

ARTHUR: You think so?

KATE: I heard the other day that ours was called the 'ivory tower' firm.

ARTHUR: Ivory tower? when our turnover has doubled in

the last year, and we are second in the country to Shawcross and Brightstone alone!

KATE: Most of our lines barely pay for themselves. Only our sales on the conventional bowl design, the cheapest and most obvious line of all, keeps us afloat and finances the ivory tower! So what I am suggesting is that we face this fact, and control the popular market before it starts controlling us!

ARTHUR: Be pulled into the whirlstream by Shawcross and Brightstone...

KATE: The whirlstream of bankruptcy is very much worse.

ARTHUR: Like all women you exaggerate. Which is why there's so much resistance to giving you the vote.

KATE: I may exaggerate. But David Shawcross's design was an exaggeration, and it made you sit up.

ARTHUR: I'll talk to our accountant about it.

KATE: Oh please don't do that! He only tells you to go on doing what you've been doing before! Left to him we'd still be crouching in the backyard!

ARTHUR: Kate!

KATE: I'm sorry---but sometimes it really---

The door opens and JOHN appears.

JOHN: It's half an hour to dinner time ma'am and cook only has leftovers to serve, as you planned previously to dine out and take only supper when you returned from the theatre.

KATE: Yes, yes, I'll be down. And clear away these things please.

JOHN approaches the table and begins collecting glasses, china box and powder bowl. He looks at the remaining coffee beans and then at ARTHUR. He pockets the remaining beans, shaking his head slightly.

JOHN (peering into the powder bowl) There appears to be coffee beans in the powder ma'am. Should I pick them out?

KATE: Yes!

He begins to do so.

KATE (cont.) Not here John. Outside.

JOHN: Thank you ma'am.

JOHN collects the articles and goes to the door.

JOHN (cont.) Er---ma'am, are the coffee beans to be returned to the kitchen for use?

KATE: I---I think not, John.

JOHN: Thank you ma'am.

He leaves.

ARTHUR: I shouldn't have to remind you Kate that accountants are very necessary people. You do the house accounts every day and you know very well that you have to apply a brake to spending at times, unless you want to go into deficit. It's the same with business only more so. I'm afraid the ivory tower's here, in this house, where so many grand schemes are hatched between you and young Roberts which come to nothing!

KATE: Then all my talking has been useless? and you'll let Shawcross and Brightstone run us out of the market? That's ivory tower, if anything is!

ARTHUR: No, I didn't mean that. You know very well that I listen carefully to everything you suggest, and in this case I know you're right. Painfully right! Right to the point of turning back progress and civilisation and common decency---

KATE: What?

ARTHUR: Isn't that what it means? when one firm can pull another firm into a popular market both of them despise? But you're right. I acknowledge that! If we refuse to be pulled we go bankrupt! There's young Roberts asking for a higher salary every week---

KATE: Doesn't he deserve it?

ARTHUR: 'Deserve it', 'deserve it'---I deserve a bigger house and better servants but I haven't got them. That's ivory tower thinking again. Young Roberts's work is phenomenal but in the cash register, that cold and relentless adjudicator, it doesn't justify even his present salary, let alone an increase!

KATE: But if we produce a really popular line we can afford to raise not only his salary but the

accountant's too! He's always grumbling.

ARTHUR: We pay him less than Shawcross's man, that's why.

KATE: So we must get on to Shawcross's level---we must compete---then we can---

A lavatory is flushed, off.

She stops. They look at each other.

ARTHUR: What the devil (going to the door)?

KATE: Arthur! I think it must be young Roberts.

ARTHUR: I thought he'd left in a rebellious state of mind?

KATE: He left this room, yes.

ARTHUR: I might have known it. And what's he doing in this house?

KATE: I said he could work in the attic room---on one of the designs you liked so much---

ARTHUR: Not the crenellations?

KATE: No. The new collapsible bowl. He's trying to make the action soundless.

ARTHUR: Yes, I did like that idea. But I didn't ask him to take up residence in my house. And why does he always have to try the house-conveniences?

KATE: Because he's so deep in his work, you know that yourself! And he's worried by the water flow---

ARTHUR: It sounds smooth enough to me!

KATE: But it wasn't a good design---it---

Another lavatory is flushed, off.

ARTHUR (between his teeth) And how long does this investigation under my own roof last, may I ask? I imagine you invited him to dinner too!

KATE: Well, it seemed the natural thing to do. As we were going out I said he could take dinner in the breakfast room, to make it convenient for the servants, and we could all discuss his design when we returned from the theatre.

ARTHUR (livid) And now we're not going to the theatre

he can stay and have a proper sit-up dinner with us, can't he, and I suppose I lend him a dinner jacket again? After all, it wouldn't be civilised to ask him to feed his own face would it?

KATE: Arthur!

ARTHUR: ' I'm sick and tired of seeing my employees whenever I open a bedroom door! I---

Another lavatory is flushed, off.

ARTHUR (cont., dashing to the door) This is an insult!

KATE: Arthur!

He pulls the door open and rushes out.

KATE stands there helplessly, about to rush after him but thinking better of it.

ARTHUR (off, yelling at the top of his voice) What the devil are you doing sir? Trying to flush us out of the house?

Sounds of bodily violence, raised voices.

JOHN dashes in.

JOHN: Ma'am it's Sir---

KATE: Can't you stop him?

JOHN: Stop him ma'am? Only you can do that!

A terrific crash of glass.

ARTHUR (off) Now get out this minute d'you hear? And see you never come back!

Another crash.

JOHN: I think that was your powder bowl ma'am.

A third crash.

JOHN: Followed by the jewel box. I left them on the hall table.

ARTHUR storms back.

ARTHUR (straight to JOHN) Go and get some grub on the table!

JOHN (entirely unruffled) At once sir. I understand you won't be dressing?

ARTHUR: I'll dress you if you don't disappear!

JOHN: Yes sir. Thank you ma'am.

JOHN leaves.

ARTHUR kicks the door closed after him.

ARTHUR: I've given young Roberts the boot! And now we can have some peace in the evenings! Damn him and all the cocky young arty cranks like him! I can do without him! (Yelling) I can do without him, d'you hear that?

KATE (quietly) Yes, Arthur, I heard.

ARTHUR: I'll develop this open pan system of yours alone! And without the flowers! And call John back! I have a little question to ask him!

KATE goes to the door and calls 'John!'

ARTHUR (to himself) Crenellated bowls my foot! No stains! The turrets would have got encrusted, (screaming) encrusted! And water-jets everywhere---to squirt into the client's sitting area I suppose! Jets! He's got jets on the brain! And little wonder if he spends half the day with you! Do you hear? There'll be no more of that! I'll hire a designer who designs and then goes home to his wife and a three-course dinner, not a drooping weak-kneed willowy bachelor no sane woman would look at twice in the street!

JOHN appears quietly at the door, and KATE indicates to him that ARTHUR wants him.

JOHN: You called for me sir.

ARTHUR: 'You called for me sir'! Yessir, I called for you sir---to enquire sir why the hell my lavatories are being flushed every three minutes of the day in every part of the house!

JOHN: I think sir the young designer sir---

ARTHUR: I know sir about the young designer sir but haven't I told you a hundred thousand times that the house-conveniences must not be used by others then the family or guests?

JOHN: But sir, Mister Roberts is surely a guest---!

ARTHUR: Mister Roberts is less than an animal! He's out of a job, and out of good dinners for the rest of his life as far as I'm concerned---so consider him below stairs, and if I see him in this house again I'll not only wring his neck but yours too! I've worked my hands to the bone for you people---to keep you all in shoe leather and the kind of meals that would make the royal family water at the mouth! (JOHN remains unperturbed) I rose from nothing, and houses like this one are due to men like myself who never spared themselves, who never enjoyed a youth because they had no other thought than duty and work, who were despised on their way up and then arselicked once they got there! Everything in this house is the fruit of my labour, and that goes for my house-conveniences too. I will have them respected! I will not have willowy run-down bachelors drifting all over this property from dawn to dusk testing my flushing systems! I will have my meals on time! And I will EAT AS MANY COFFEE BEANS AS I LIKE, do you hear! Because I own every brick of this place, my work and my brains buy every mouthful of food, and the carpets on the floor, and the motor car in the garage, and so I shall have my say as to who flushes and who doesn't flush my pans, do you hear? (JOHN still quite unperturbed) Crenellations! (Suddenly) Get out, go on, get out!

JOHN bows slightly and leaves without hurry, closing the door carefully behind him.

ARTHUR sits fuming to himself, glaring. He notices the designs on the table, snatches them up and races them to the door.

ARTHUR (pulling the door open and flinging the designs after JOHN) And take these with you! Burn them!

He slams the door again and returns to his chair to resume fuming.

KATE continues sitting, eyes cast down.

There is silence.

A lavatory is flushed, off.

They lift their eyes slowly and stare at each other with something

like shock. ARTHUR does not
move. He threatens to burst.

The door opens quietly. It is
JOHN.

JOHN (to KATE) I've disposed of the coffee beans ma'am.