

**TEXT FLY WITHIN
THE BOOK ONLY**

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_210011

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 822 D 887 Accession No. 27824

Author Mann

Title Years between

This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

THE YEARS BETWEEN

THE YEARS BETWEEN

A Play in Two Acts

by

DAPHNE DU MAURIER

LONDON

VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD

1946

First published October 1945
Second impression October 1946

Copyright 1944 by Daphne du Maurier

All rights in this play are reserved by the Author. When amateur rights become available applications should be addressed to Curtis Brown Ltd. of 6 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.2.

TO MY
FATHER
GERALD DU MAURIER

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY RICHARD CLAY AND COMPANY-LTD.,
BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.

THE YEARS BETWEEN was first produced at the Opera House, Manchester, by IRENE HENTSGHEL, on 20th November 1944, with the following cast:

CHARACTERS AND SCENES

DIANA WENTWORTH	Nora Swinburne
MICHAEL WENTWORTH	Clive Brook
RICHARD LLEWELLYN	Ronald Ward
ROBIN	John Gilpin
NANNY	Henrietta Watson
SIR ERNEST FOSTER	Allan Jeayes
THE VICAR	Geoffrey Morris
THE VICAR'S WIFE	Lilian Christine
VENNING	Arthur Chesney
Miss JAMESON	Audrey Alan

The action of the play takes place in the Library of The Old Manor, the Wentworths' country house.

ACT I.

SCENE I. Late afternoon, Winter 1942.

SCENE II. Saturday afternoon, April 1945.

SCENE III. Early evening, the following Monday.

ACT II.

SCENE I. Morning a month later.

SCENE II. That afternoon.

SCENE III. Early evening.

ACT I

SCENE I

SCENE : *The Library of the Old Manor. A lovely old room, musty with books, and at the back C.R. are long windows leading on to a terrace or garden. There is a door to hall on the L., and when open we can see the hall. Books line the walls to the L. Large open fireplace on the R. Sofa R.C., chair D.R., armchair L.C., a table against wall U.L.C. The room must suggest rest, repose, a place to browse in. We feel that a man has lived here. It has been his room.*

There are five people that matter in the play. The first we see is ROBIN, aged about ten. He is lying on the floor when the curtain rises, with a large atlas spread in front of him. He is a nice, rather original little boy. It's a misty afternoon in late autumn, and rain has been falling all the day.

ROBIN is alone. Presently NANNY comes in. She is any age, plain and thin, and very capable. She has been with the family ever since ROBIN was born, and has stayed on since he went to school.

The other people we shall see later are DIANA, RICHARD and MICHAEL. DIANA is ROBIN'S mother, aged about thirty-five. When we first see her she is quiet and subdued, because of recent sorrow, but she will become different as the play proceeds, with a strength and efficiency that her good looks belie. RICHARD is the quiet, steady, pipe-smoking fellow that every woman depends on, and quite often ends by marrying. We must feel an affection for RICHARD from the start.

MICHAEL, DIANA'S husband and ROBIN'S father, has a tenseness about him that gives us uneasiness and pain directly we know he has come home. No repose—at least, not the repose that RICHARD has. Whenever MICHAEL is present there must be an atmosphere of strain, something must surely happen, and we are afraid.

The curtain rises with ROBIN lying on floor a little to R. of chair L.C. looking at atlas. There is also a globe on his L. NANNY enters with tray, crosses to sofa, puts tray on sofa. Cross L. to small table D.L. Wheels it across to front of sofa.

WARN LIGHTS

NANNY: You'll strain your eyes in that dark corner, Robin. Put away your book, there's a good boy, and do the black-out, while I lay the tea. *(She speaks gently, as though she doesn't wish to show authority.)*

ROBIN : It's too early to do the black-out yet. (*He still looks at his atlas, but moves to a crouching position.*) Nan?

NANNY: Yes, Robin? (*She puts the cloth on the table.*)

ROBIN : Is the Mediterranean really as big as it looks on the map?

[NANNY *U.L. of sofa to cabinet, takes cloth from drawer.*

NANNY: I don't know. You're still at school. You should know better than me. (*She glances at him furtively, and goes on laying tea-things.*)

[NANNY *D.C. with cloth puts it on sofa.*

ROBIN : It looks so frightfully big here. I don't see that an aeroplane would have much chance of being found, once it was forced down.

[NANNY *does not answer.*

Has the post been?

LIGHTS I

WARN DOG BARK

NANNY (*quietly*): Not yet. (*Fussily.*) You know the postman doesn't get here until nearly six. Come on, Robin, you'll get your clothes all dirty on the floor.

[ROBIN *gets up, picks up atlas, puts it on table L.C. and in doing so knocks down fishing-rod which is leaning against table.*

Careful now, Robin—Daddy's fishing-rod.

[*She speaks sharply. ROBIN looks scared. He waits a moment, and then picks it up quickly.*

ROBIN (*relieved*): It's not broken.

[NANNY *stares a moment, then glances away.*

(*Takes step C. Slowly—rather nervously.*) It wouldn't have mattered actually, if it had been broken, would it, Nan? (*He has the queer callousness of childhood still.*) Not any more?

NANNY (*upset*): That's not the way to talk, Robin. You wouldn't like Mummy to hear you.

[ROBIN *puts rod against table D.S. and picks up globe, puts it on U.S. end of table. Then goes to L. of tea-table and helps with tea-things.*

Come on now, help me set the tea. I've managed to get some honey for a treat. Careful of the scones, the plate's hot.

DOG BARK

[RICHARD'S *voice off, saying: "No, Sandy, go off, old boy, not indoors with all that mud on you. Lie down, lie down ... lie down. . . . Good boy.*

[ROBIN *U.L. of sofa, opens window.* NANNY *puts scones in fireplace*
ROBIN (*smiling*): There's Uncle Richard.

[*He darts to the long window, and runs into RICHARD, wearing rain-coat.*

Hullo, Uncle Richard.

RICHARD : Hullo, Robin. What've you been doing?

[RICHARD *to above L. end of sofa, takes off coat.* ROBIN *closes windows and comes to L. of RICHARD.*

ROBIN : I've had a cold. Nanny wouldn't let me go out, otherwise I'd have come and looked you up. Have you come to tea?

RICHARD : Yes, if Nanny has any to spare.

NANNY (*smiling, like us she is fond of RICHARD*) : Of course, Mr. Lewellyn. Go along, Robin, and wash your hands.

RICHARD : Like to take my coat, Robin?

[ROBIN *takes coat and runs off through door.*

RICHARD (*D.C.*) : Mrs. Wentworth not back yet?

NANNY: No, sir. She said she would catch the 3.10 and trust to getting a taxi at the station.

RICHARD : No news, I suppose?

NANNY (*moves between tea-table and sofa to below L. end of sofa*): No, sir.

RICHARD: Did she expect to hear anything in London?

NANNY : I don't know, sir. She has said so little to me. You know how she has been all along, so quiet, and shut up in herself. When I think how she lived for the Colonel, all these years! he came first in everything, sir, and now—sometimes I think it would be better if she broke down.

WARN LIGHTS

[NANNY *breaks down, at least her voice does, and turns U.S. She grabs for a handkerchief.*

RICHARD (*pats her shoulder and crosses N. below sofa to fire*): Yes, I know exactly how you feel, Nanny, but you mustn't be the one to give way. Why, the house would fall to pieces but for you.

[NANNY *smiles through her tears, and blows her nose.*

NANNY : It's the way it happened that made it seem so dreadful—just the plane crashing and no trace found. I remember when my father died, somehow we all felt better after the funeral—that sounds a queer, heartless thing to say, but now, . . . the shock has been such a strain on Mrs. Wentworth, and the boy's a bundle of nerves.

RICHARD : I wish to heaven I could do more to help.

NANNY : Oh, but you do help, sir. Just to know you are so close means a lot to Mrs. Wentworth. She was saying so the day before she went to London.

RICHARD : Was she?

NANNY : You'll forgive me—it sounds forward of me, perhaps, but you are a gentleman that is always the same. People know where they are with you. And that makes for confidence, you know.

RICHARD (*smiling*): Thank you, Nanny.

NANNY : When you first came down here to live, and bought up old Mr. Rawlin's farm, I remember thinking, "He won't stay long", even though you were a friend of the family.

LIGHTS 2

RICHARD : Just another idler come down to play at farming, eh?

NANNY (*admitting*): Well, I suppose so. But I soon learnt different. And so did the village. (*Moves to door.*) I must get your tea, sir.

RICHARD: Nanny?

NANNY (*turning*): Yes?

RICHARD : I want you to feel that—if you are ever worried about Mrs. Wentworth, or the boy, you can come to me. (*Pause.*) Just that.

NANNY: Thank you, Mr. Llewellyn. (*Moves back to C.*) Do you know, the Colonel never spoke to me that way all the time I'd been with them. (*She adds slowly.*) But being so clever and all that—he was a gentleman of moods. (*Turns to table L.C., picks up photo of MICHAEL which is on D.S. end.*)

[RICHARD does not answer, and at that moment ROBIN comes in. He glances at them suspiciously.

WARN LIGHTS

ROBIN: What are you two talking about?

RICHARD : Nanny was telling me what a packet of trouble you are.

[ROBIN crosses below sofa to RICHARD.

Let's have a look at your hands. (*He examines them jokingly.*) I thought so. They haven't used up much of the soap ration.

NANNY (*reproachfully*): Oh, Robin.

ROBIN (*imperious*): Don't be such an old fuss-pot, Nan. Go along and get the tea. Uncle Richard is starving.

[NANNY and RICHARD smile.

[NANNY *exits.*

[RICHARD *sits down on chair D.L. and ROBIN sits L. arm of sofa.*

ROBIN: Was Nanny crying?

RICHARD : I don't think so.

ROBIN : I believe she was, all the same.

[Silence for a moment.

Uncle Richard, there's a chap called Dawson at school. *His father was killed last term.*

RICHARD: Bad luck. ... I say, it's getting a bit dark, isn't it? What about the black-out? You do that one and I'll do this one here.

[RICHARD *rises, goes U.R. of sofa, switches on table-lamp above fireplace, draws curtains windows R. ROBIN U.L. of sofa draws C. curtains.*

LIGHTS 3

[ROBIN *jumps up, and goes and pulls curtains. NANNY brings in the tea-pot and raisin cake.*

NANNY : I can easily make fresh when Mrs. Wentworth gets back. Here's a raisin cake. I know you'll like that.

RICHARD (*above R. end sofa*): One of these days, Nanny, I shall have to report you to Lord Woolton.

ROBIN (*coming back to sofa*): Pooh, that's nothing. You ought to see the store cupboard, Uncle Richard, it's positively groaning.

NANNY : Never mind my store cupboard. You enjoy your tea.

[NANNY *shakes her head, and exits.*

ROBIN (*sits C. sofa*) (*with importance*): I shall pour out. I'm host.

RICHARD : All right.

ROBIN: Funny, isn't it?

RICHARD: What's funny?

ROBIN : I've never been host in this house before.

[RICHARD *picks up scones from hearth, glances up, but ROBIN does not notice, and copes with tea.*

You know, Uncle Richard, I've decided not to go into the Army, after all.

RICHARD (*sits R. end of sofa*): Oh, really? How's that?

ROBIN. Well, you see—actually I never did want to much. But Daddy, being in the Regiment, was so keen that I felt I had to. Now of course I can do as I like. (*Drinks his tea.*)

RICHARD: You're not eleven yet, old boy; there's plenty of time to decide these things. Better wait and see how the war goes first. Have a scone?

ROBIN: Thank you. (*Helps himself to honey.*) I don't suppose Mummy would mind what I did. Of course she used to agree with Daddy. She had to. Have some honey? There's heaps of things I'd like to do. I've never had a chance to up **till** now.

[Forgets he is host and hands his cup to RICHARD.]

Can I have some more tea, please?

RICHARD: I thought you were going to be host? Where's your saucer?

ROBIN (*hands the saucer*): I think I'll probably farm, like you. It's very convenient that you live so close, because you'll be handy for showing me the ropes.

[He is rather superior. RICHARD is amused.]

RICHARD: Delighted, at any time.

ROBIN (*leans back on sofa*): Daddy wasn't very interested in farming, was he? I suppose, when a person writes books, and is a Member of Parliament, and a soldier as well, he hasn't much time for cows, and pigs and things.

RICHARD: No, I don't suppose he has.

ROBIN: I'm glad your leg kept you out of the Army, Uncle Richard.

RICHARD (*doubtfully*): Thanks. (*Eating scone.*) Jolly good scones, these.

ROBIN: Yes. (*Patronising.*) Nanny says you do a very good job of work with your farming, and every bit as useful to the country as being in one of the Services.

WARN LIGHTS

RICHARD: Nanny is very kind.

ROBIN: Of course, you'll probably feel a bit flat when it's all over. If you ever marry and have children, it would be rather dull telling them you just had a farm in the war, wouldn't it?

RICHARD: Yes, Robin, I think it would. Can I have a piece of Nanny's cake?

ROBIN: Yes, do.

[Rises, cuts cake, hands RICHARD slice, takes one himself. Quickly, afraid he has hurt RICHARD'S feelings.]

Mind you, I don't suppose they'd really care, because you're a jolly good farmer. But it does make a difference at school if a

chap has a father who's well known. (*Sits L. arm sofa.*) All car masters read Daddy's books, and Mr. Wilmot went *up* to the House to hear his Maiden speech. Do you know—(*impressed*)—he said it was supposed to be the best Maiden speech for years and years.

RICHARD : I'm sure it was.

[ROBIN gets up—goes to table L.C. and switches on table lamp.

LIGHTS 4

ROBIN (*munching*): The post's awfully late this afternoon. It must be ages after five. (*He stares once more at fishing-rod and touches it.*)

RICHARD (*gently*): Better not handle it, Robin. They're fragile things.

[RICHARD rises to fireplace for pipe. ROBIN sits armchair L.C.

[*Pause.*

If Nanny lets you out tomorrow, you must come over and see my new tractor. It only arrived this morning, and poor old Jim's scared stiff of it. "What did you buy a thing like that for?" he said. "Haven't we got enough to do already?"

ROBIN : I don't like tractors. They're much too slow. What's the fastest you've ever driven in a car, Uncle Richard?

RICHARD: Oh, I don't know. I suppose my old Alvis used to touch eighty.

ROBIN : Dawson told me their Bentley used to do ninety. (*Pause.*) Dawson wore a black band on his arm last term when his father was killed. (*Glances down at left arm.*) I wonder whether Nanny would make one for me?

[*There is a pause. Then the sound of voices from hall.*

(*Excitedly*): Here's Mums. (*Rises and runs off through door.*) **Hullo, Mums, you're awfully late.**

[RICHARD looks towards the door. His face changes. We know how much he loves DIANA now. The door opens. DIANA comes in, looks white and tired, but very lovely, with R. arm round ROBIN.

DIANA : Darling. (*She holds him, and kisses him.*) Is your old cold a bit better?

ROBIN : It's absolutely gone, but Nanny doesn't believe me.

RICHARD : **Hullo, Diana.**

[DIANA to C. ROBIN sits R. arm-chair.

DIANA (*coming forward*): Richard, how lovely and thoughtful! I was hoping you would come in. (*She glances round room.*) (*Goes to table, puts down cake-box and paper.*) No post?

NANNY : No, no post yet. (*Crosses to table for teapot and ROBIN'S cup and saucer.*)

DIANA : Just tea, please, Nanny. I don't want anything to eat.

[*DIANA D.C. to sofa, sits C. sofa. NANNY goes to door.*]

Oh dear, how I hate train journeys nowadays.

NANNY (*calling over shoulder*): Robin, you come along and help me get Mummy's tea.

[*Exit NANNY.*]

[*ROBIN has risen, picked up cake-box and now watches NANNY until she has gone off. He then puts box back on table and leans over back of sofa.*]

ROBIN: Tell me what you did, Mums? Were there any bombs when you were up in London?

[*DIANA takes off her gloves—ROBIN comes round to front of sofa, sits next to DIANA L. end.*]

Did you see lots of people you knew? Did you go to the House at all, and hear any debates? The postman is a great one for politics, you know. (*Gets up on L. arm.*) He says nothing **will** ever be the same again, when the war is over. Everyone **will** have lost so much, and gained so **little**.

[*DIANA says nothing. She takes off her hat.*]

RICHARD : I say, Robin, old fellow, would you like to take Sandy into the kitchen and give him a rub down? He's too filthy to bring in here, and he hates sitting outside in the dark.

ROBIN: Does he eat raisin cake? (*Rises, takes piece of cake off with him.*)

RICHARD : He eats anything.

ROBIN: All right, I'll give him a good feed. And I'll make him as sleek as a panther for you.

RICHARD : Thank you.

[*Exit ROBIN. He runs off, glad of something to do.*]

[*DIANA sits up and smiles wistfully at RICHARD.*]

DIANA: I think the postman was right, don't you? Nothing **will** ever be the same again. (*Pause.*) But he puts it in such a depressing way.

RICHARD : The postman is a depressing sort of chap. It can't be much fun living with a stone-deaf wife!

DIANA (*smiling*): Poor postman! . . . I suppose we shall *all* get a little harder and more bitter as the war goes on. Already people

have altered, since last year. There's not the defiant gaiety there used to be, when the bombs were falling every night. Things have become less grim, and yet more grey. We're letting the war become a kind of drab routine.

RICHARD : It's inclined to happen, you know. Danger is a great stimulus.

DIANA : We shouldn't need stimulus. We ought to feel proud and inspired all the time.

RICHARD : Did anything happen while you were in London?

DIANA: Why do you ask?

RICHARD : When you went away last Friday you were lost and helpless. For the past three months you've been like that, ever since you had that telegram. And now, tonight, although I know you're dog-tired, there's a different look about you.

[NANNY comes in with the tea.

[DIANA rises, takes off coat. RICHARD takes hat and coat U.R. of sofa , puts them on chair at desk.

NANNY : Tea, Mummy.

DIANA : Thank you, Nan.

NANNY : Drink it while it's hot.

DIANA : Yes, Nan, I will. Thank you.

[NANNY exits.

[DIANA sits staring in front of her.

You're right, Richard. I feel different. *(She looks at him a moment.)* I've decided to do something . . .

RICHARD: Do?

DIANA : . . . which I believe to be right; for me, for everyone. *(Sits sofa.)* But chiefly because I am certain it is what Michael would have wanted me to do.

RICHARD : What is it?

DIANA *(sitting up straight, as though challenged in some way):* I'm going to stand for North Arlsea in Michael's place.

[RICHARD crosses to fireplace below sofa.

Is that rather a shock to you?

RICHARD : It is.

DIANA; You don't think I'm capable of doing it, do you? It's so utterly unlike me, in every way.

RICHARD : Not that, exactly.

DIANA : Ernest Foster and the others are very keen for me to do it. They say I'm practically certain to be returned unopposed. You remember Michael's fantastic majority?

RICHARD : I don't think you'll find the slightest difficulty in being returned. And you'll do it very well, Diana, and be a great success.

DIANA : What is it, then? Why do you look like that? It's not very encouraging.

RICHARD : Are you sure that Michael would have approved ?

[*There is a pause. DIANA looks suddenly uncertain, when before she had been so sure.*

WARN TELEPHONE

DIANA : But—of course——That's what decided me. I shall be doing it for Michael's sake.

RICHARD (*sits chair R.*): I know what he meant to you, Diana, what he **will** always mean. I've lived here long enough to know you never thought about yourself, or even Robin very much, but only of Michael. When he wanted quiet, you gave it to him. When he wanted quiet while he wrote his books, you saw that he had it in this house. When he wanted enthusiasm when he stood for Parliament, you saw that he had that too. In fact, he was the centre of the world you made for him, and now that world has crashed—so you really want to take his place? Isn't that something he might have resented, or possibly—misunderstood?

DIANA : Michael resented nothing and no one. He was the most generous man that ever lived.

RICHARD : I know that.

DIANA : Of course the place revolved round him, he was that sort of person. And I don't grudge one day in all the years we had together, not one hour. I was glad and proud that he needed me. You think I've suddenly become ambitious, don't you? That I want some sort of reflected glory for myself?

RICHARD (*rises and sits R. end sofa*): Oh, no, of course not. . . .

DIANA: You're absolutely and entirely wrong, Richard. I've never had any kind of personal ambition. I never wanted to be anything more than a background for Michael, ever. As for taking his place, that would be impossible. I wouldn't even try. But don't you see that what I can do is to follow his views, his ideals, as closely as possible, so that his work won't be forgotten? I've thought of nothing else all this week I've been in London, I've gone over it in my mind a thousand times. It's not the sudden reckless impulse that you imagine it to be, or a kind of dope to

stop me from thinking. There! You don't believe me, I can see it in your face, you think . . .

TELEPHONE

Oh, answer it for me, would you?

[RICHARD rises, goes below sofa to phone.

RICHARD (*his voice is very quiet*): **Hullo.** Yes. Mrs. Wentworth is back. Do you want to speak to her? (*He turns to DIANA.*) Who is it, please? . . . Hold on and I'll get her. Ernest Foster.

DIANA (*rises*): Oh, heavens, what shall I say? Tell me, Richard, quickly. Shall I say I must have longer to think it over? . . . or I've changed my mind, or what?

RICHARD: It's a big thing, you know. I can't advise you, Diana. It's something you'll have to decide for yourself.

[RICHARD holds out receiver to her. She goes in front of him and takes it. She waits a moment looking at MICHAEL'S photograph.

DIANA (*lifting receiver*): **Hullo.** Yes, Ernest. Good evening. Er—yes, I stand by everything we agreed upon yesterday. . . .

[RICHARD goes above sofa fireplace.

(*Nervous laugh.*) That's very sweet of you. . . . Well, I suppose I could come up again after the week-end. . . . Yes, naturally . . . there's a lot to talk about. But we mustn't count on my being unopposed, must we? . . . You can say that, if you like. . . . The Press—oh dear . . . well, perhaps you could cope with them for me. . . . Yes, I understand. . . . Thank you very much, . . . Good night.

[*She replaces receiver slowly. Suddenly she begins to cry.*

RICHARD (*pours out cup of tea*): Diana, my dear, you're so damned tired.

DIANA (*leans back against table*): It was true, what you said. I'm not doing *this* for Michael's sake. I'm doing it for myself.

RICHARD: No, my dear, no. (*Brings her cup of tea.*)

DIANA: I am . . . I am . . . (*Sits armchair L.C.*) You were right about Michael; he's been everything to me. These last weeks have been hell. . . . (*Her voice changes.*)

[RICHARD sits arm of sofa.

And then, up in London, I suddenly realised my life doesn't belong to him any more; it's mine; I can do what I like with it. And oh, Richard, that sudden sense of freedom—almost as though the years had rolled away and I was young again. (*She is calmer now.*) Do you think Michael would understand?

RICHARD (*he rises, below sofa to fireplace—very quietly*): I don't know.

DIANA : You know what he was like. So alive. When he came into a room nobody else counted. His personality was so strong it seemed to put out the light in other people. (*Rises, to sofa, sits.*) You felt that, didn't you?

RICHARD : I know he thought I was a dull stick, but then he was probably right.

DIANA : No, Richard, never dull—very, very dear. But Michael, with his head in the clouds, his vision, his enthusiasm—his queer sort of childishness at times—he needed so much love, and understanding.

RICHARD (*with conviction*): You were happy with him, weren't you?

DIANA: Happy? (*She thinks a little, puzzled.*) I don't know. I've never thought. There wasn't time. What I was feeling, what I was thinking, never seemed to matter. It was just Michael, Michael. His needs, his comforts. (*She smiles a little?*) I was thinking, when Nanny brought in the tea just now, how he would hate our pigsty way of living. We still had a sort of staff, you remember, when he went away. And now Nanny cooking, and Robin in to all meals, and me making the beds—he would think it so incredibly uncomfortable. He wouldn't understand.

RICHARD : You won't be able to make the beds when you're a Member of Parliament.

DIANA : Oh yes, I shall. And if I can't I shall ring up the farm, and ask you to leave your old pigs, and do them for me. You're going to help me a lot, Richard, in the future.

RICHARD (*leans over R. arm of sofa—smiling*): Am I?

DIANA : You know I've no head for business, or anything like that. You must look after all my money affairs, while I make my speeches. And if the toughs throw dead cats, you'll have to rescue me.

RICHARD (*laughing*): What a future!

[DIANA rises, puts tea-things together, and she and RICHARD wheel table to D.L.]

DIANA : You heard what Ernest Foster said? They want me to go up to London as soon as possible. I shall go up next week and look for a small flat at the same time. Nanny can look after things here, and I shall try and get back for week-ends. I'd like to get the car licensed again.

[RICHARD goes to hall, gets coat.]

She's been laid up since the summer. You could see about that for me, Richard. I suppose I shall be allowed petrol.

[RICHARD enters with coat.

Oh, no, you're not going. There's so much to discuss, and I've no one to turn to but you. Stay to supper!

RICHARD : Nanny will fuss.

DIANA (takes coat from him and goes out into hall): Nanny never fusses, where you're concerned. You're so easy. Nan?

[She comes back into room, finishes putting the tea-things together, putting muffin dish and cake on lower shelf of table.

[NANNY enters.

NANNY: Yes, Mummy?

[RICHARD to table L.C. gets evening paper, comes D.C.

WARN CURTAIN

WARN DOOR-KNOCKER

DIANA: Nan, Mr. Llewellyn will be staying for supper. What is there?

NANNY (grimly): Spam.

[RICHARD and DIANA laugh.

But I believe I can find a tin of sardines.

RICHARD (urgently): For the lord's sake don't do that.

[ROBIN comes running in. NANNY takes up tray. DIANA takes cloth off table.

ROBIN : I've given Sandy the grooming of his life, Uncle Richard, and what do you think his lordship is doing now?

[DIANA folds cloth and goes U.C., puts it back in cabinet drawer.

RICHARD : I haven't the faintest idea.

ROBIN (triumphantly): He's curled up asleep on Nanny's bed!

NANNY : Oh, Robin!

[Exits with tray.

RICHARD: No hope of sardines now. (To fireplace.)

DIANA : (not meaning it): Robin, you're impossible.

ROBIN (to RICHARD) : I stay up to supper now, you know. It makes the work easier. I've started doing all sorts of things since—since quite a long time.

[His voice trails off. He looks uncertainly from one to the other. They both know what he means.

KNOCKER

[*There is the sound of the front-door knocker. They all listen instinctively.*

DIANA (*slowly*): There's the post. (*Corner D.C.*)

[*They can hear NANNY'S footsteps in the hall going to the front door. ROBIN waits a moment, watching his mother's face, then runs quickly out of the room. RICHARD and DIANA don't look at one another. A constraint has come upon them.*

ROBIN (*off*): I'll take them, Nan. (*Coming back.*) One for you, Mums—a printed one. It says "Official Paid".

[*DIANA comes to above chair L.C. ROBIN watches her with anxiety.*

[*DIANA opens letter mechanically, and reads.*

DIANA (*the strain lifting again, seeing its the telephone account*): It's nothing, darling——(*Sighs.*) Look, nothing at all.

[*We feel them all relax once more.*

CURTAIN

WARN CURTAIN

WARN TELEPHONE

SCENE 2

SCENE: *The same. It is now Easter 1945, three years afterwards. The time is about six o'clock. The scene is the same, but the Library somehow has a different air. It is no longer a man's room, where he would browse among his books. Furniture has been moved, the old cabinet has gone that once stood against the wall, and the table has been shifted to behind the sofa, and a small table stands in its place with sherry glasses set out. The room looks brighter, yet a little lacking in personality. The long windows to the terrace are open and we see a crowd of people.*

There is cheering as the curtain rises and the sound of the telephone, which has obviously been ringing for some time and no one has heard it.

DIANA (*of stage*): So you will remember, won't you, that this Salvage drive is, and will continue to be, enormously important. I won't keep you any longer, except to say thank you very much for coming and listening to me this afternoon. And to those of you who have sons and husbands fighting, may you see them soon. And I wish to all of them a speedy and a safe return.

[*There is loud applause, cheering, then singing of "For she's a jolly*

good fellow". Sound of goodbyes and people moving away. Then some laughter and talking.

[ROBIN comes in dancing on his toes to below the sherry table. He is followed by DIANA, the VICAR, SIR ERNEST FOSTER, the VICAR'S WIFE, and RICHARD. They are all talking at once.

VICAR (*on DIANA'S R.*): Well done, well done.

DIANA (*to above sofa*): Thank you. I hope it was better than the first speech I made three years ago.

VICAR : Well, you've got them moving again. And I tell you, Sir Ernest, we take some shifting in this part of the world.

[SIR ERNEST FOSTER is grey-haired, middle-aged, intellectual, with an air of refinement about him. As a matter of fact he is "in the Government", but we don't quite know in what capacity. Possibly Minister Without Portfolio, whatever that really means.

SIR ERNEST : Diana always strikes the right note, and I know from painful experience that she'll get exactly what she wants out of all of you.

[He takes coat from DIANA'S shoulders and takes it into hall. DIANA laughs.

DIANA : Now then, Ernest.

VICAR'S WIFE (*on DIANA'S L.*): I loved the bit early on about the unnecessary railings. I did not dare to look at Mrs. Harrison. I'm not looking forward to the Institute tonight.

RICHARD (*at sherry table*): What about me? Diana's been round my farm with a pick-axe, wanting to break up my second tractor for scrap.

DIANA : Hurry up with the drinks, Richard. Come and sit down, Ethel.

[VICAR'S WIFE D.L. of sofa—sits sofa—DIANA sits L. arm, VICAR D.R.

VICAR'S WIFE : Well, anyway, she's a splendid speaker. I only wish there were more like you in Parliament, Diana. Things might get a move on, then. (*Seeing SIR ERNEST and giggling.*) Oh, I beg your pardon.

SIR ERNEST : I couldn't agree more. (*Sits armchair L.C.*)

ROBIN (*takes two glasses, one to VICAR'S WIFE and one to DIANA*) :

For she's a jolly good fellow.

For she's a jolly good fellow.

[DIANA puts her hands over her ears, everyone laughs.

RICHARD (*good-naturedly*): Dry up, Robin.

DIANA : Cigarettes, Robin,

[RoBiN takes box off coffee table L. of sofa, hands one to SIR ERNEST and then behind sofa to VICAR. Puts box down on table behind sofa.]

WARN LIGHTS

VICAR: I can recommend the sherry here. Sir Ernest. I don't know how Diana manages it, but I sometimes suspect her of evil dealings. (*Shakes his head in mock reproof.*)

SIR ERNEST : She and I run a black market together, didn't you know?

DIANA: We supply all the sherry to the House of Lords. Hadn't you noticed the Bishops—how sparkling they are lately?

VICAR'S WIFE : I wish you'd sell a case to James.

VICAR: You know Diana preached a sermon for me last week? The church was packed. Just like the cinema on Saturday night.

SIR ERNEST : Matins at eleven, featuring Diana Wentworth!

VICAR : The trouble is that she's gone and spoilt the form for me. No one will ever listen to a word I say again.

ROBIN : That's just what the postman said to Nanny.

[EVERYONE laughs.]

VICAR: Out of the mouths of babes. . . . Come on, Ethel, I've a choir practice in exactly ten minutes' time. (*Finishes drink. Putting glass on mantelpiece.*)

[Crosses below sofa, shakes hands with SIR ERNEST, who has risen, goes to door. RICHARD drops down to armchair.]

[VICAR'S WIFE rises—DIANA rises too.]

VICAR'S WIFE : And I've got to cook the supper and bicycle down to the Institution all within the hour. Still without help, I suppose, Diana?

DIANA (*gaily*): Oh, heavens, yes. Nanny does everything; we couldn't exist without her.

ROBIN : And Uncle Richard and I bring in the coal and chop the wood.

[VICAR'S WIFE crosses L. below sofa.]

RICHARD : When we remember!

LIGHTS 5

[RICHARD escorts VICAR and WIFE out of the room into hall. ROBIN stands looking out of the window. He wears long flannel trousers now, his hair is parted on one side, instead of flopping anyhow. He is growing.]

ROBIN : I bet the trout are rising.

SIR ERNEST: Are you a fisherman, young man?

ROBIN: Rather!

DIANA (*sits sofa*): He's become so keen. Richard has been very patient with him.

ROBIN (*D.R.*): I think I shall run down now, Mums, and try my luck.

DIANA : All right, darling.

ROBIN (*goes U.S. then D.C., shakes hands*): Good-bye, sir.

SIR ERNEST : Good-bye.

[ROBIN *darts out of window*.

They grow up fast, don't they?

DIANA : Terrible. Thirteen last month.

WARN TELEPHONE

SIR ERNEST: Amazing to think you have a son of thirteen. I suppose that's why you put in so much work on the Education Bill—pangs of conscience.

DIANA: I'd hoped you hadn't guessed. Help yourself to another glass of sherry.

SIR ERNEST: Thank you. (*Helps himself to another glass.*) The Vicar's good lady is perfectly right, you know I wish there were one or two more as decorative as you at Westminster.

DIANA (*smiling*): Now, now, Ernest. . . .

SIR ERNEST: No, I'm serious, but when old Gresham gets up and makes one of his really boring speeches, it would be so much pleasanter for all of us if there were several counter-attractions.

DIANA : I am shocked.

SIR ERNEST: No more meetings for a month, what?

DIANA : If you are sure you can manage without me.

SIR ERNEST: We can't, but we shall have to. That Richard Llewellyn of yours is a lucky man. What exactly are the plans?

DIANA : We're going to be married very quietly in London, and then just have a fortnight up in Scotland. Richard can't leave the farm any longer, and I must be back for the conference on the 29th.

SIR ERNEST : I do congratulate you both so much, Diana, and all my very best wishes for the future.

DIANA: Thank you, Ernest.

SIR ERNEST: Is Robin happy about it?

DIANA : We haven't really told anyone until to-day, but he knows there's something in the air. He adores Richard.

[Telephone rings.

SIR ERNEST *(puts glass on sherry table) (laughing)*: No escape for the famous. Will Mrs. Wentworth open the new hostel for Paralytic Persons the day after tomorrow?

DIANA: Mrs. Wentworth will not. *(Lifts receiver, smiling at him.)* Hullo? Yes . . . I'll find out. *(Laughing, puts hand over receiver.)* So much for your back-chat. Will Sir Ernest Foster take a personal call?

SIR ERNEST *(playing up)*: I've told that damn woman not to ring me up in business hours.

DIANA : It's a man. Go on, Ernest, you'd better speak on the extension in the study. I don't want to listen to your guilty secrets!

SIR ERNEST : If every Cabinet Minister led as blameless a life as I do ... *(At door.)* Which way?

DIANA : First on right.

[ERNEST exits leaving door open.

(Calling after him.) Shut your door!

[DIANA listens for a moment until she hears he has picked up receiver. She then replaces her own. Rises, takes VICAR'S WIFE'S glass from coffee table L. of sofa. Puts it on sherry table. Goes to desk, collects packet of letters. Brings them down with her, and sits on L. arm of sofa, and is looking through them when—

[RICHARD comes in. Shuts door. He smiles, suddenly remembering something, and puts his hand in his pocket.

RICHARD *(looks round)*: Where's Sir Ernest?

DIANA : Someone wanted him on the telephone! Pour me out a tiny drop more sherry.

RICHARD : Shut your eyes first.

DIANA: What for?

RICHARD : You'll see.

[RICHARD pins clip on her lapel.

Present for a clever **girl**.

[DIANA opens eyes. Gives a cry of pleasure.

[RICHARD takes her glass and pours her out another glass of sherry.

DIANA : Oh, Rikky, how lovely! But how naughty of you ! Where did you find it?

RICHARD : Little shop—you know.

DIANA: Why do you spoil me so?

RICHARD (*lightly*): Because I happen to love you.

DIANA: Thank you.

[She puts her face up and they kiss.]

Oh, it will be heavenly to get to Scotland. But I give you fair warning, none of your five-mile walks before breakfast.

RICHARD : You shall have your breakfast in bed every morning, I promise you. I'll even spread the butter on your toast!

DIANA : Oh dear. (*Picks up letters.*)

RICHARD : You're not going to write a single letter for a month, or open any either. Give 'em to me. (*He takes them from her and puts them on desk.*) What's the use of paying a fat salary to that secretary of yours? I'll see she deals with this lot.

[DIANA smiles at him, rises and sits in armchair L.C. RICHARD takes cigarette box from sherry table and offers her one and lights it for her.]

DIANA: How did it really go this afternoon? Do you think the locals were bored stiff?

RICHARD: Bored? They lapped it up, like strawberries and cream. You've got the knack, darling. (*Crosses R. below sofa to fire.*)

DIANA; It's funny. It all comes so easily these days. Do you remember the first time I spoke, and you had to give me a nip from your flask?

RICHARD : Yes, and your hat got cock-eyed, and you called old General Bradshaw General Brandy by mistake!

DIANA (*laughing*): Oh, Rikky, I didn't!

RICHARD : You did !

[There are distant shouts off.]

ROBIN (*offstage*): Uncle Richard . . . Uncle Richard!

RICHARD : What's that brat of yours hollering for ?

DIANA : He went down to the river.

RICHARD (*U.R. of sofa*) (*Goes to the window—shouts*): What's the matter?

ROBIN (*from river*): I've hooked a whopper; come quick, come quick!

RICHARD: Why did I teach that boy to fish? (*Coming D.C.*)

DIANA : He's adored you ever since, anyway.

RICHARD : I suppose I'd better go and see what he's up to.

DIANA : Ernest's a long time. (*Rises.*) I ought to go and cope with my packing.

RICHARD : Won't Nanny do that for you?

DIANA : Poor Nan! I couldn't possibly ask her.

RICHARD : Leave it **till** the morning, darling. No sense in getting worn out. You've had a busy day.

DIANA : Oh, there's not much to do really. I shall live in trousers, you know, and my oldest and most threadbare shirts. No glad rags for you, Richard Llewellyn.

[*They smile at each other with understanding. We feel they are in love. ROBIN calls from river in agony: "Uncle—are you coming !"*

[RICHARD kisses her and goes off C. windows.

[DIANA rises, goes U.L. of sofa, puts her cigarette out in ashtray on table behind sofa. Goes D.R. of sofa, takes VICAR'S glass off mantel-piece.

[SIR ERNEST comes in and shuts door. DIANA doesn't look round at him.

That you, Ernest? I was getting quite anxious about you. You've had considerably longer than six minutes. (*Looks round and sees his face.*) Why, my dear?

[SIR ERNEST looks shaken, queer.

[DIANA goes below sofa, puts her glass and VICAR'S glass on sherry table.

Has something happened? Not bad news?

SIR ERNEST (*comes forward, to above chair*): It seems they've been trying to get through to us for hours. The telephone must have rung while we were all outside at the fete and nobody heard. My dear, you've got to keep very calm and brave, I'm going to give you a great shock.

DIANA: What do you mean? Is there a Government crisis?

SIR ERNEST: Not a political crisis, Diana. A personal one. I'm afraid you and Richard won't be able to go away.

DIANA : But, Ernest . . . ?

SIR ERNEST : Listen, dear. . . . You know my brother John who is in command of the destroyer *Valiant*?

DIANA : Yes.

SIR ERNEST: It was he I spoke to on the telephone. He was speaking from Portsmouth. They docked there about five hours ago. They've just returned from the North Sea, and have with them on board somebody who must see you. ... I will take you down there myself tonight.

DIANA (*moves away to below R. end sofa*): Oh, but, Ernest, I can't possibly. . . . What does the man want?

SIR ERNEST (*to her*): John could not say very much on the telephone except that this—man—was picked up by his ship from an isolated spot, somewhere in Northern waters. He has lived through a series of adventures. John said they are staggering, and almost beyond belief. But they are all quite true. For three and a half years he has been making his way through the occupied countries ... for three and a half years you and I and the world believed him dead. . . .

[DIANA *stares at him. We must see realisation on her face.*

DIANA : Michael. . . .

SIR ERNEST (*gently*): Yes.

[DIANA *sits R. end sofa.*

(*Sits L. end sofa*) John says he was not hurt, not wounded in any way—just that he was very exhausted, very tired. The only thing in the world he craved was sleep. He was still asleep when they docked at Portsmouth this morning. Later he woke. It was then he asked immediately for you.

DIANA (*still whispering*): Michael.

SIR ERNEST : John has got Michael ashore now, with the C.-in-C. at Portsmouth. Already he seems rested, more himself. He wants us to motor down to him tonight.

DIANA (*still dazed*): Ernest. . . .

SIR ERNEST: My dear ... I wish I knew what to say to you. (*Pause—rises, moves to above L. end sofa.*) You know I'm a very old friend of you both. (*Pause.*) The thing to cling to at the moment is that Michael is alive and well. . . .

DIANA : Yes. . . .

SIR ERNEST: You would rather be alone, wouldn't you? Just for these first few minutes?

DIANA : Please.

SIR ERNEST (*moves to door, is stopped below chair by voices off*): We'll go quite quietly and take our time. No need to start for an hour or so.

[They -hear laughter and voices outside. DIANA looks with sudden horror and realisation at ERNEST.

(Understanding.) Do you want me to tell him?

DIANA : No. . . . No. . . . (She is very white and shaken now.)

SIR ERNEST (he realises there is nothing he can say): Ill go and see the car's ready by seven o'clock.

[Exit SIR ERNEST.

[DIANA rises, goes to fire, and leans on mantelpiece.

[RICHARD and ROBIN come in laughing. ROBIN D.R., RICHARD D.C.

ROBIN : Come and look what I've caught, Mums.

RICHARD : I say, the young blighter has landed a three-pounder at least. I shouldn't be surprised if...

[DIANA does not move.

ROBIN (anxiously): What's the matter? What's happened?

RICHARD (sharply, for the first time): Go along, Robin. Do as I tell you.

[ROBIN goes away C. window, looking back over his shoulder. (To her. Very quietly.) What is it?

[She can't speak.

Darling . . .

DIANA (she turns): It's Michael. . . . He's alive . . . he's come back. The telephone . . . it was Ernest's brother . . . the one who commands a destroyer . . . he's been trying to get through to us all day. . . . (She can't speak. She goes and sits chair D. R.) They landed at Portsmouth this morning. . . . They found Michael somewhere near the German coast. . . . He's not wounded or anything. Not hurt. He's come right through Europe from . . . I don't know. . . . I didn't understand. . . .

RICHARD : Darling. . . .

[He fetches her drink from sherry table—he thinks only of her.

DIANA: Oh, Richard, what are we going to do? They want me to go down to Portsmouth with Ernest tonight.

RICHARD: Yes. Yes, of course.

[We should see the difference in their minds. On his face the knowledge that his world has crashed, for ever; on hers the inevitable swing back to the past.

WARN LIGHTS

DIANA: He **will** come back, Richard, expecting to find everything the same. He **will** want his home again, all the things he loved. He **will** want me.

RICHARD (*very softly*): And you . . . you **will** want him, too.

DIANA: Ernest's brother says he's very exhausted . . . very tired after all he's been through. He **will** want peace and quiet. He mustn't be worried about anything. (*She rises.*) Richard, we must keep it from him about you—about us. He must come back and find his home unchanged, mustn't he?

RICHARD: Yes, if you think that's for the best.

DIANA: I can't go through this alone: you've got to help me. We must face it together, Rikky, please . . . please. . . .

RICHARD: Of course.

[But she doesn't see the hopelessness of it as he does. Already she makes plans to find a way out.]

DIANA (*goes U.R. of sofa*): You'll have to be at the farm, of course, for the time being, until—until we can make plans. It's not as though you were a stranger. He **will** expect to find you here, about the place. He **will** think it natural and neighbourly that you've been helping me. He'll be grateful and pleased. (*Comes D.C.*) I can explain how wonderful you've been to me. About business things, about everything. How you've helped with Robin . . . (*She breaks off, she looks at him with a new gesture of despair.*) Robin—one of us has got to tell Robin—oh, my God! (*Sits chair L.C.*)

LIGHTS 6

[NANNY comes into the room from the hall.]

NANNY (*puzzled*): Is that right? You are motoring up to town, Mummy? I heard Sir Ernest say something to his chauffeur. . . . (*Breaks off—sees their faces.*) I'm sorry. . . . I didn't know. . . . (*Moves to leave the room.*)

RICHARD: Nanny, Sir Ernest's brother, Commander Foster, has just rung up, with very wonderful news. The Colonel is alive and well. He landed in England this morning.

NANNY. The Colonel? (*Long pause.*) Oh, Madam. . . .

[No one speaks.]

Will—will he be coming home?

WARN CURTAIN

WARN TELEPHONE

RICHARD: Yes. We expect so. Mrs. Wentworth is going down to Portsmouth with Sir Ernest this evening. He understands he is

quite all right, but very tired. He has been through a terrible time.

NANNY (*slowly*): Yes, sir.

[They are all quiet a moment.]

DIANA : Nanny, I think you are the best person to tell Robin. I—I don't know how to do it. (*Her voice trails off.*)

NANNY: It's—not going to be very easy. But I'll do my best.

DIANA : You must make him understand that Mr. Llewellyn and I—that there's no question now. . . . (*She rises and goes U.C.*)

RICHARD : Mrs. Wentworth is anxious, Nanny, that the Colonel should come home to find nothing changed. She doesn't want him to be worried about anything.

NANNY : Yes, sir, I understand.

RICHARD : I think Robin is old enough to realise what has happened. I'll try to talk to him myself.

DIANA : Oh, Richard. . . . (*She realises what he is going through.*)

NANNY (*half to herself*): There'll be a lot to do. There'll be the Colonel's room to get ready, and he'll expect everything as it used to be. (*Moves U.C.*) There'll be several things we shall need. . . . (*As she realises what it will mean to them.*) Oh, Mr. Llewellyn . . . madam . . .

[They know what she is trying to tell them.]

I'll do everything I can to help you, everything.

[Suddenly the telephone rings. It strikes a jarring note. NANNY looks from one to the other, then she answers it.]

NANNY : Hullo. . . . Hullo. . . . (*Her voice is ratherfussy and anxious on the telephone.*) Who is it? Please speak up, I can't hear you. Yes? (*Turns round.*) It's a trunk call, madam.

[DIANA stares at RICHARD.]

Hullo . . . yes. (*Pause.*) One moment, sir ... it's the Colonel.

[DIANA stands very still. NANNY exits from door. RICHARD goes slowly out of the window into the garden without looking back. DIANA goes to the telephone. She is very white. Her hands are trembling. She kneels down by the telephone, and lifts the receiver.]

DIANA : Michael . . . Michael darling. . . .

CURTAIN

END OF SCENE 2

WARN CURTAIN

WARN CLOCK STRIKE

SCENE 3

SCENE : *The following Monday. Early evening. About six o'clock.*

The room is empty. There has been an effort to restore the room to its original state in Scene 1, but this has not been entirely successful. Perhaps NANNY and DIANA have forgotten where everything stood. The room has neither the leisurely, haphazard comfort of Scene 1, nor the methodical brightness of Scene 2. A grandfather clock in the hall strikes six. Sound of voices in the hall.

DIANA: Thank you, Venning. What else is there in the car?

VENNING: Cigarettes, madam, and the box of groceries, and another large package.

[DIANA enters, carrying beauty case, and box of cigarettes, followed by SOLDIER SERVANT, with case and overcoat. DIANA looks tired and strained. She is in travelling clothes.

DIANA : Oh yes, that's for the kitchen. Cigarettes in here. And I think the other box is mine. This coat can go in the hall, and the suitcase upstairs. First room on the left at the top of the stairs.

[Exit VENNING.

[DIANA to table L., puts down beauty case and cigarettes.

[NANNY enters.

DIANA (D.C.): Ah, there you are, Nan. Is everything all right? Where's Robin?

NANNY: I think he's over at the farm. *(She looks enquiringly at DIANA.)*

DIANA : We left the Colonel at the gate. He wanted to walk up through the woods, though I tried to persuade him not to. The doctor wanted him to stay, but he insisted on coming home, at once.

NANNY: That's natural, isn't it?

[There is a small restraint between them.

DIANA : Oh, Nan. . . . He looks so strained and tired. I've brought down some extra groceries and I managed to get some wine.

NANNY : I tried to get the room right, but somehow I'm not quite sure. . . . *(She glances, half-frowning, round the room.)*

DIANA *(to below sofa R., looks about her)*: Oh, Nan, how good of you. . . . *(Sits sofa.)* He hasn't asked any questions, Nan, about his home, about us—about anything at all. The doctor at Portsmouth said he was suffering terribly from reaction. More than anything else he must have peace, and quiet.

NANNY (*comes to L. end sofa*): He won't be worried from the village. I've seen to that. Everyone has been most understanding, and I believe the Vicar said a word in church yesterday. Of course, the London people are different. I thought the telephone would never stop yesterday, after the news came on the wireless. I told them all the same. That you were away with the Colonel, and I had no idea when you would be coming back.

DIANA : Poor Nan! I'm sorry to have left you with all this.

NANNY : It's been no trouble. I'm only hoping that you haven't got too tired, two long journeys so quickly.

DIANA (*rises U.L. of sofa to table*): No. I'm all right.

NANNY (*pause, lowers voice*): Mr. Llewellyn was here this morning. He said if there was anything you wanted him for, anything special, he would come over, but that he would not be coming otherwise.

DIANA: Thank you, Nan. (*Pause.*) He didn't leave a letter?

NANNY: No'm.

[DIANA *sees the pile of correspondence on the desk. She moves up to desk, NANNY following her.*

Yes, these came this morning. Poor postman could hardly walk up the drive. They're mostly for you, but there's a good few for the Colonel too.

DIANA (*picking them up, coming D.C.*): Messages of congratulation from all our friends. They'll all have to be answered too.

NANNY: You'll have to have Miss Jameson down from London to do that.

DIANA: Miss Jameson? Yes—I suppose so. (*She sounds uncertain and very weary.*) I'd forgotten for the moment that I had such a thing as a secretary. (*Puts letters on table.*)

[VENNING *enters again.*

VENNING: Is this box to go to the kitchen, madam?

DIANA: Yes, please. Nanny, this is venning, the Colonel's new servant. He joined us today.

NANNY : Good evening.

VENNING: Good evening.

NANNY : We shall be able to manage all right then. I have Mrs. Willis coming in every morning, and she has promised to come in during the evening for an hour, to help with the washing-up, but I don't suppose she *will* come.

DIANA: I daresay venning will help with that, too?

VENNING: Yes, madam.

DIANA : Well, come along, then. Nanny will show you to your room, than we can open the groceries and the wine afterwards.

[She leads the way to the hall, followed by NANNY and VENNING.]

[Presently we see someone standing at the open window. He has his hand on the frame, leaning a little, and he looks thin and worn. It is MICHAEL. He stands there looking in upon the room with a queer half-smile on his face. After a moment he enters room. We must feel that to see all this again is a dream he has long had, but difficult at first sight to absorb. He stares into the corner where the cabinet once stood, which is no longer there. He is puzzled at this. He looks at table L., where the white flower bowl is full of marigolds. Comes D.C., then crosses L., takes book out of bookcase, looks at it, puts it back again. Then goes C. stands looking U.S.]

[DIANA enters the room. MICHAEL puts out his right hand to her.]

DIANA *(very gently, the voice one uses to a sick person) (taking his hand):* All right? Not too tired?

MICHAEL: Where's the old cabinet?

DIANA *(following his glance):* The old cabinet? We had it moved out of the way, upstairs. It seemed to take up so much space.

[They both walk U.C. Turn to look at table.]

MICHAEL: It's altered the room, somehow. Funny. . . . And the table has been shifted too, hasn't it?

DIANA: Has it? I don't think so. *(She frowns—she is not sure.)*

MICHAEL *(still looking about room and moving away from DIANA to above sofa):* I used to try and imagine this, when I was—out there. And it was strange, because the picture I made of it was so distinct and clear. There were always roses in a white bowl. *(He smiles a little.)* There's the white bowl, but alas! no roses. *(He goes to window up R.)*

DIANA: I expect that was all Nancy could find. I'm afraid I've had to let the garden go. Thompson was called up. *(She is worried.)* I'll have the old cabinet moved down again in the morning.

MICHAEL: Good.

DIANA: And now I come to think of it, that table isn't right. We used to have the flap up. *(She is so anxious to please, she puts the heavy flap up herself.)*

MICHAEL : No. . . . No . . . don't bother, it doesn't matter.

[He is rather nervy, and suddenly tired. Comes D.R. of sofa, and sits down on sofa.]

DIANA (*going to above sofa*): Walking up through the woods was too much for you. You've overdone it. Lie down and relax a little. Would you like your dinner in bed?

MICHAEL : God, no! I'm not a blasted invalid!

DIANA: The doctor said you needed all the rest you could get, remember.

MICHAEL: Doctors are a bunch of hypocrites. They prescribe Rest in Capital Letters, to be taken three times a day after meals. Where's venning ? (*Rises, rings bell below fireplace and comes back and sits again.*)

DIANA (*to L. end of sofa*): Unpacking your things. Do you want him?

MICHAEL: I thought he might open the case of drink we brought down with us.

DIANA : Nanny and I can do that.

MICHAEL : Lord, I was forgetting Nanny. I shall have to face up to her. Will she cry on my shoulder?

DIANA : No, of course not. She's been so splendid all along.

MICHAEL (*smiling up at her*): My poor sweet, you've had a hell of a time, haven't you? I don't understand this servant business. Why don't you pay them more?

DIANA : Alas—it's not a question of money, darling. They've all been called up.

MICHAEL: Well, Venning can do the dirty work. venning? (*He shouts loudly.*)

NANNY (*opening door*): Venning is upstairs. Can I do anything?

MICHAEL : Nanny!

NANNY : Good evening, sir. Welcome home. (*She is nervous.*)

MICHAEL: Return of the soldier—and all the trumpets had sounded for him on the other side. . . . (*Makes move to rise.*)

NANNY : Don't get up, sir.

MICHAEL (*rises and goes to her*): How are you, Nanny?

NANNY (*shaking hands—DIANA above sofa pats cushions D.R. of sofa to D.R.*): Very well, thank you, sir. He hasn't changed much, has he, madam? A little thinner perhaps, but otherwise—just the same.

DIANA : Yes, just the same. (*Her voice is wistful.*)

MICHAEL (*goes to sofa, sits*): Only rather more difficult than before. You can't be a fugitive for three years, at my age, and get away with it entirely.

NANNY : No, sir.

MICHAEL : Half starved most of the time, and practically naked.

DIANA : Michael. . . . *(She looks at him in great distress)*

MICHAEL : Don't worry. I'm not going to unfold my lurid tales upon you. I'll keep them for the House of Commons.

[NANNY and DIANA exchange a glance. We realise that MICHAEL does not yet know that his wife is now M.P. in his place.]

As Colonel Wentworth walked into the Strangers' Galley cheers echoed from end to end of the historic building! *(He pauses.)* Or didn't they?

[He looks mischievously at them both, and the look is vaguely disconcerting. Then he leans back on sofa.]

All right, Nanny. Go and break open that box of booze in the kitchen.

[NANNY exits.]

[DIANA crosses below sofa to table L., arranges things on the now-opened table.]

Poor Nanny! She's never been at her ease with me since the day I told her that Robin was the worst-mannered child in the kingdom.

DIANA *(in defence)*: She's very devoted to—all of us.

MICHAEL : Fidelity is always touching.

[DIANA turns away to letters on the table. Picks them up.]

MICHAEL: You've a hell of a lot of correspondence there. What's it all about? The conquering hero?

DIANA *(lightly)*: I expect so.

MICHAEL : You're turning them over with the set, grim expression of the type of woman who sits on committees and runs things with dire efficiency.

DIANA: Perhaps I do.

MICHAEL : You'll have to drop it then, now I'm home. Come and sit down. *(Pats sofa beside him.)*

[DIANA seems restless and on edge.]

DIANA : I will—directly. I must go and give Nanny a hand with that box first.

[She picks up her bag and beauty case and exits rather hurriedly.]

MICHAEL *(calling after her)*: Venning can do that. What's the damn fellow for?

[But she does not hear.]

[MICHAEL lies still on the sofa and doses his eyes. ROBIN comes to the garden entrance and looks in. He does not see MICHAEL lying on the sofa. He has the fishing-rod in his hand. He has a queer, rather resentful expression on his face. He goes slowly to the old corner and places the rod against the wall. Then he stares at it. MICHAEL has been watching him all the time.]

What are you doing with my rod?

[ROBIN whips round, guilty and startled. He doesn't know what to say.]

ROBIN : I—didn't know you were there. I never heard the car.

MICHAEL: Never mind the rod. Let's have a look at you. *(Holds out his hands to him)*

[ROBIN comes forward self-consciously and shakes hands, then kisses MICHAEL.]

ROBIN : I hope you are quite well.

MICHAEL: That's very considerate of you. I might be worse
And what of yourself?

ROBIN : Oh, I'm all right, thank you.

MICHAEL: How's school?

ROBIN : Oh, all right, thanks. *(He is very nervous)*

MICHAEL: Good.

[There is a long pause.]

ROBIN : I expect you're feeling jolly tired. You'd like to rest a bit.
I'll go and see what Mummy's doing.

MICHAEL : Don't run away. We've got a good many gaps to fill
up, haven't we?

[ROBIN smiles politely. He doesn't know what MICHAEL means.]

[MICHAEL pulls ROBIN down by his side.]

MICHAEL : You were a little chap in breeches when I went away.
You look so different.

ROBIN : I'm thirteen.

MICHAEL: Are you? Perhaps that's it. ... *(Pause)* Do you still
take the golliwog to bed with you?

ROBIN *(insulted)*: Good lord, no! Nanny gave it to an evacuee
ages ago.

MICHAEL: Did she? She'd better not try that game on me. *(He
feels in an inside pocket, and brings out a tiny teddy-bear.)* Do you
remember Ted?

ROBIN (*staring*): It's the one you used to keep in your dressing-room. I'd forgotten all about it. Do you mean to say you took it to the war, and didn't lose it?

MICHAEL: He didn't leave my side, did you, Ted? (*Kisses bear solemnly and puts back in pocket.*)

[ROBIN looks very embarrassed.

ROBIN: I suppose—actually—it's a sort of mascot.

MICHAEL : Mascot be blowed! He's my greatest friend.

[Pause.

ROBIN: The war news is very good, isn't it? We seem to be absolutely rushing ahead everywhere. And we're bombing the Germans to blazes.

MICHAEL (*yawning*): Are we? Were the rhododendrons good this year?

ROBIN: The rhododendrons? I didn't notice.

MICHAEL : What's happened to the old iron gates at the entrance to the woods?

ROBIN : Oh, Mummy gave them for salvage.

MICHAEL: Salvage?

ROBIN : Why, of course. Don't you know? Iron railings were melted down everywhere and turned into bombs. Mummy made a speech about it, only the day before yesterday.

MICHAEL: Mummy did what?

ROBIN (*disconcerted*): Oh, I forgot. I wasn't to speak about that.

MICHAEL: Why, was the speech such a rotten one?

ROBIN : No, it was jolly good.

MICHAEL: You astound me. Does she often make speeches?

ROBIN : Yes. . . . No ... I don't really know. (*He looks very uncomfortable.*)

MICHAEL: What's the mystery?

ROBIN : Nothing. . . . I— I expect you saw an awful lot of chaps killed where you've been, didn't you?

MICHAEL : I saw a hell of a lot who would have been happier killed. But tell me more about the iron gates; that's much more important.

ROBIN : I don't know any more, except that they went. (*Pause—rises.*) I think I'll just go and see what Mummy is doing.

MICHAEL (*rather bitterly*): Mummy went to see what Nanny was doing.

ROBIN (*backing towards door*): I expect they're seeing about supper. It's made a bit extra work, you see, your coming home. (*Bumps into armchair, turns and darts out.*)

MICHAEL: I'm sorry. (*He looks at ROBIN half sadly-, half amused.*)

[ROBIN exits.

[MICHAEL gets up slowly, picks up fishing-rod, and frowning a little examines it. Moves to above sofa, and tries rod.

(VENNING comes in with tray of drinks. Looks uncertainly at MICHAEL. Oh, stick 'em anywhere. Clear all that junk off the table.

[VENNING lays down tray on table, moving all DIANA'S correspondence to one side.

Have you come across an old brown velvet jacket hanging in the wardrobe upstairs?

VENNING : No, sir.

MICHAEL: Wardrobe on the left. As you go into the room?

VENNING : There is nothing hanging in any of the wardrobes, sir.

[MICHAEL stares a moment.

MICHAEL (*slowly*): No—no, I suppose there wouldn't be. (*Pauses.*) You might ask Nanny, Venning, if all my clothes were given away.

VENNING : Yes, sir.

[Exits.

And Lazarus came forth from the tomb. . . .

[MICHAEL puts rod back and pours himself out a drink—swallows drink, picks up letters—glances idly through them.

Mrs. Wentworth, M.P. Mrs. Wentworth, M.P.

[He stands there staring at the letter in his hands. His expression is curious, baffled. He looks over his shoulder.

(*Coming D.C.*) Diana? (*There is no answer.*) Diana!

[She comes in.

DIANA: I'm so sorry about your brown jacket. . . . Venning has just asked me. You see, we never thought . . . and then all those bombed people . . .

MICHAEL : Never mind the jacket.

DIANA: What is it?

MICHAEL (*holds out letter*): Is this true?

DIANA (*takes it*): Yes . . . Michael.

MICHAEL: That's what Robin meant . . . about your making speeches.

DIANA (*anxiously*): You don't mind?

MICHAEL: I can't tell. . . . (*He stares at her.*) You—of all women. You don't know the first thing about it. It's not your line of country. (*Suddenly he bursts out laughing—sits sofa.*) Oh, my God, how damned funny!

[But we feel that she is not quite so amused.]

How long have you been one of His Majesty's Faithful Commons?

DIANA: Ever since you—you went. (*To L. end of sofa.*) Oh, don't you see, Michael, that it was for your sake I did it? And they pressed me to it, Lord Gresham, Ernest Foster, and the others. It sounds silly and conceited, I know, but I've worked very hard.

MICHAEL: What was your majority?

DIANA: I was unopposed.

MICHAEL (*looking at her*): Sob stuff, I suppose? Widow's weeds and so on. That's what got 'em.

DIANA (*she is hurt*): Perhaps.

MICHAEL (*mocking*): My husband gave his life for his country sort of thing. And to those of you who hold his memory dear. . . .

DIANA: Michael . . .

MICHAEL: Well, isn't that the line you took? It never fails, you know.

DIANA: You're angry. . . . Oh, I didn't want you to feel this way. (*She is really upset.*)

MICHAEL: Angry? Why should I be angry? It makes me rock with laughter, that's all. Give me another drink.

[DIANA puts letter down on table, pours out second glass.]

I told you, when you were glancing at those letters, that you had the face of a woman who sits on committees, didn't I? What a shot in the dark!

DIANA (*gives him drink and sits beside him*): Michael, darling ... of course, it's a surprise to you. I was always so much the one at home, wasn't I? Ordering the meals, arranging flowers; it's been a revelation to me too. I never realised for a moment I was capable of carrying out the work I do to-day.

MICHAEL: What else have you achieved besides giving away my gates for salvage?

DIANA (*puzzled*): The gates? Salvage? Oh, that was just a little local affair. No—real work, I mean, in the House. We got the Education Bill passed. I was on the Committee and they used one or two of my suggestions. It will have a tremendous effect in the schools. A form of National Service for everyone is being considered, too. Naturally, there is some opposition and bitterness to this, but what does that matter when it's for the good of the coming generation?

MICHAEL (*raising glass*): What indeed?

DIANA : We're hoping to get the Housing Bill through during the next session. I've had a *little* to do with that too, but, of course, it's not really my baby. Heavens—what one has learnt, Michael! We're all of us to blame for having permitted such living conditions all these years. And yet we call this a civilised country.

MICHAEL : So it is—compared to the countries I've come from.

DIANA : Ah, but that's" different.

MICHAEL: Is it? Go on—tell me more about your Housing Bill.

DIANA: I have the report, somewhere. You shall read it after supper. There won't be a house anywhere, after the war, Michael, or a flat, or a tiny cottage, without a bathroom. That's just one small step.

MICHAEL: Supposing people don't want baths?

DIANA: They won't get away with it. Inspectors will go'round to see that the baths are used.

[MICHAEL *shouts with laughter*. DIANA *looks at him strangely*.

You don't take it seriously? You think it's a waste of time—what we've done?

MICHAEL : Not a waste of time if it keeps you all happy in your monkey-house.

DIANA (*really hurt*): Michael. . . .

MICHAEL : Forgive me—I've been rude, and unkind. It's only that I've been living all these months in such a different world.

DIANA: I know. I understand.

MICHAEL: No, that's where you're wrong. You don't understand. I told you, just now, that when I was out there I used to make pictures of this house, this room. I saw nothing changed. And I'm not the only one. Thousands of us. All the fellows who, in peacetime, ask nothing better than a pint of beer on their way home and the pictures on Saturday night. They want the life they know—the woman they love: they don't want to come home to

Conscription Bills and Compulsory Baths. (*Rises, crosses L. to bookcase.*)

DIANA : I've described it all so badly.

MICHAEL : No . . . too well.

DIANA : But, Michael—you wouldn't have us put back the clock, and return to where we were before?

MICHAEL: Why not? (*Goes to armchair, sits.*)

DIANA : I thought we were fighting for a new world.

MICHAEL : Was the old one so very bad?

DIANA : Well—I don't know . . . but I think we all feel rather differently about it, here at home.

WARN LIGHTS

MICHAEL : Safe in an English churchyard snore
The business men who won the war,
While by the foreign seas they crossed, it
Happens lie the men who lost it.

DIANA : Bitter, twisted words of a generation ago.

MICHAEL : Generations don't change as much as you think. Poets are bitter, twisted people. And so are soldiers—sometimes.

DIANA (*rises, kneels R. of armchair*): Michael ... I wanted your home-coming to be peaceful, happy. And now, on the very first evening, I've spoilt it for you.

MICHAEL: You haven't spoilt it for me. I'm to blame. (*Glances round room.*) I might have known the picture could not come quite true. The iron gates gone—roses gone—Robin a schoolboy in long trousers—let's forget all about it, shall we? (*Kisses her hand.*)

DIANA (*rises*): Will you also forget that I am a Member of Parliament?

MICHAEL : That's something that I shall never remember. (*Smiles. Then looks at her curiously.*) You enjoy it, don't you?

DIANA : Why—yes—I do.

[*vENNING enters.*

vENNING : The nurse wishes to know about the time for dinner, madam.

[*MICHAEL rises, moves U.C., stretches himself and yawns.*

DIANA: Do you mind seven o'clock, Michael? It means Nanny can get cleared away and washed up sooner. She has so much to do.

MICHAEL: I don't mind.

DIANA : Perhaps we had better say half-past seven, Venning.

[VENNING *exits.*

LIGHTS 7

MICHAEL: Do Nanny and Venning have to eat with us in this Brave New World you've been creating?

DIANA: No, of course not. (*Moves to table*)

MICHAEL : Thank God for that!

[Comes down to her, takes her slowly in his arms and kisses her. slowly lets her go, and goes to sofa and sits.

I want so terribly to be alone with you.

DIANA (*gently*) : Yes, **darling**. (*She turns away, a look of strain on her face, and goes to table.*) You won't mind Robin, though, will you?

MICHAEL : Not if he goes to bed directly afterwards.

DIANA (*moving to desk*): He generally stays for the nine o'clock news.

MICHAEL: The news?

[She doesn't see the gesture as much as to say " What about me? I'm the news".

What have we got for dinner?

DIANA: I think Nanny said there was a chicken from the farm. (*Gets box of cigarettes from table.*)

MICHAEL: Old Richard still in charge? How is he?

DIANA: Very well. (*Goes behind sofa—fills box on table R. of sofa.*)

MICHAEL: Not married or anything?

DIANA : No.

WARN CURTAIN

[DIANA goes behind sofa, puts box down on table.

MICHAEL: What does he think about you gadding round the country as a Member of Parliament?

DIANA: Oh, I don't know. I think he's used to it. (*To armchair, straightens it, takes knitting-bag from behind cushion.*)

MICHAEL : Must you go on flitting round the room tidying everything?

DIANA : Sorry. ... It always did irritate you, didn't it? (*Sits down on sofa beside him.*) Nanny's been extravagant for once, and lighted up the boiler. That means we can have baths before dinner.

MICHAEL: Are there restrictions on water too?

DIANA : No, but we have to save fuel.

[MICHAEL *watches her busy hands.*

MICHAEL : Where's that tapestry work you used to do ?

DIANA : I gave that up a long while ago.

MICHAEL : It was quiet and restful.

DIANA : Yes, but it wasn't any use to anyone. This is a Balaclava helmet. . . . I have a working party in the village and everything goes up to a Central Depot.

[MICHAEL *leans forward and puts his head in his hands.*

Lie back and be comfortable. There, that's better, isn't it? I wish you'd let me give you your dinner in bed.

MICHAEL : No. I'd rather be down here. With you and Robin.

[*Another pause.*

What do you think about, as you knit? The Committee stage of the Housing Bill?

DIANA : No. . . . No, I was thinking how funny it was, you and I, sitting here together. Just like it used to be. Almost—almost as though nothing had ever happened.

MICHAEL (*dreamily*): Has—anything happened ?

DIANA (*sensitive*): No—no, of course not. (*She looks in front of her, still knitting, and then very slowly.*) Only—the war.

CURTAIN

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE I

A month later. Morning, about midday. The room has been restored to its former state. The cabinet is back in the corner, and there are roses in 'the white bowl.

Miss JAMESON, *the secretary, sits at the table with her typewriter in front of her. DIANA stands by the mantelpiece, her hands behind her back. Miss JAMESON is typing as the curtain rises. She looks up inquiringly at DIANA as she finishes her page.*

DIANA : That's all, I think. Leave a space in case I should want to add anything. Now the next.

[Miss JAMESON *puts fresh paper into machine.*

(Below sofa, to C. Then U.L. of sofa to above table.) This is to the Chairman of the British Women's Council. Dear Madam. I am most grateful for your message of congratulation on the miraculous return of my husband from the Continent. I am, at present, rather uncertain of my movements, and under the circumstances I feel it is best to refuse your very kind invitation to speak at the annual meeting of the Council. Yours sincerely. . . . Did you do anything about that luncheon on the 20th?

Miss JAMESON: Yes, Mrs. Wentworth. I sent the Secretary a telegram in your name. Here is a copy of it. *(Hands DIANA a piece of paper.)* And I also cancelled your engagement to dinner with the Mayor of North Arlsea on that day, giving the same reason, of course.

DIANA *(frowning, trying to think of a hundred things at once):* Was there anything else?

Miss JAMESON : Miss Gower asked you down on Wednesday week, if you remember, to an inspection. I left it open because I thought you might be especially interested.

WARN GRAMOPHONE

DIANA *(signing the letters):* I am—but I don't see how I can manage it. *(She stops, because at that moment MICHAEL calls her from the garden.)*

MICHAEL: Diana?

[MICHAEL *enters room. He has four books in his hands.*

(Above sofa.) How much longer are you going to be? Look, it's too bad; these books are absolutely green with mildew. My precious first editions. And where the devil do you think I found them? In an old box in the garage, beside a lot of junk. (*D.R. of sofa, sits, puts books on floor.*)

DIANA : Darling, I'm terribly sorry. I promise you I'll go through all of them directly. But I must just get through these letters first.

MICHAEL: You say that every morning, and yesterday you weren't through until lunch-time, and then dashed off to some perfectly unnecessary meeting in the afternoon.

DIANA : It wasn't unnecessary, Michael. It was very important.

MICHAEL : Important, my foot. A lot of women yattering about nothing at all.

[Miss JAMESON *looks very disapproving.*

Miss JAMESON : Your wife is a very busy person, Colonel Wentworth.

MICHAEL : You've said it. So damned busy she hasn't time to look after her home, or her husband. Go ahead, both of you. Don't mind me. I won't listen to your fireworks. (*Throws himself on sofa. Lights cigarette.*)

DIANA (*comes D.C., making sign at MICHAEL as if to say "Not before the secretary"*). *Sits R. of armchair*: Where were we, Miss Jameson?

Miss JAMESON : About that letter to Miss Gower.

DIANA : I think I'd better ring her up personally.

Miss JAMESON : Then there's only that message to be sent to the big rally of the G.T.C. at Westminster. You remember you were to have spoken, but the date clashed with the meeting of the British Women's Council, and so you promised you would send a message instead.

[MICHAEL *puts his feet up on sofa.*

DIANA: Oh, yes . . . how far had I got?

Miss JAMESON (*picking up paper and reading*): To those of you who are about to enter one of the services I would say a special word. Your schooldays lie behind you, the stern realities of life are ahead.

DIANA: Yes. . . . (*Bites end of pencil, thinks.*)

[MICHAEL *lies on sofa, blowing cigarette smoke in the air.*

Nothing will matter to you any more now but your duty to your country. Just as once you played for the side in hockey or cricket, and thought only of your school team,

{MICHAEL yawns. DIANA rises U.C.

so now you **will** put aside all thought of personal selfishness or individuality, and become one small unit in a magnificent army of women, the great army that is helping in so large a measure to win this war.

[Miss JAMESON rattles away on typewriter. MICHAEL rises, U.R. of sofa, looks at books on table above fireplace, puts on radiogram—Grieg Concerto—then wanders D.R.

The girls of today are the women, and the mothers, of tomorrow. Much of the responsibility for the future peace of the world **will** rest upon your shoulders. We none of us want to return to the dreary, slack, go-as-you-please Britain that existed before the war; but side by side with our men-folk . . . (*She breaks off*) Michael, please, it's impossible to concentrate.

[MICHAEL turns off gramophone.

(*Very strained.*) Repeat that, Miss Jameson.

Miss JAMESON (*reading*) : Side by side with our men-folk . . .

[MICHAEL tiptoes to sofa, sits.

DIANA : We shall build a saner, stronger Britain, where slackness and inefficiency **will** not be tolerated; where everyone **will** work for the community, and our children shall be brought up to service, duty, and obedience to the State.

MICHAEL : Christ! What an outlook !

[DIANA and Miss JAMESON stare at him with hostility.

MICHAEL: Who do you say is going to listen to all that tripe?

DIANA: The Westminster Division of the Girls' Training Corps.

MICHAEL : And is that the sort of stuff you're handing out at all your meetings?

DIANA: Yes. Of course.

MICHAEL : Do you mean to tell me that a fastidious fellow like old Gresham, and our old friend Ernest Foster, and the rest of the bunch, talk that language too?

DIANA: Why not? What have you against it?

MICHAEL : Before I left this country I remember making a speech in the House of Commons about freedom. The right for every man to think for himself, to choose for himself, to do as he bloody well pleased. I understood that that was what we fellows were fighting for.

DIANA : So it is.

MICHAEL : Then I'm afraid you put it in a very complicated way, likely to be misunderstood by simple soldiers like myself. *

[There is a pause. NO one looks at anyone. Miss JAMESON sits very stiffly.]

DIANA: I think. Miss Jameson, we had better leave this until tomorrow.

Miss JAMESON: Yes, Mrs. Wentworth.

MICHAEL: I've spoilt your train of thought. How very unfeeling of me!

DIANA: It doesn't matter. *(Up to desk, takes duster out of drawer)*

MICHAEL : Oh, but it does ! The girls of the G.T.C. are the women and the mothers of tomorrow. You mustn't keep them waiting.

[Miss JAMESON gathers papers together, and typewriter.]

How many words to the minute, Miss Jameson ?

Miss JAMESON: Sixty-five.

MICHAEL : Admirable efficiency 1

[Miss JAMESON exits.]

Well, what about your duty to your husband, and cleaning some of the mildew off his books ?

[DIANA comes forward. D.R. of sofa, drops on knees beside books.]

DIANA *(her voice flat)*: I'm afraid they are spoilt. I'm terribly sorry. *(Tries to dust them ineffectively.)*

MICHAEL : Seeing that you are so great on service and efficiency in the country, it's a pity you don't exercise it a bit more in your own home. Did you put these to moulder in the garage?

DIANA : As a matter of fact I put them there for salvage, but the first editions must have got mixed up with the other books. That was Nanny's fault. It's so difficult to see to everything myself. We had this Salvage Drive, and the village promised to give five hundred books.

MICHAEL: My dear girl, do you honestly believe that if all the books in the house were boiled down to pulp, they would help the war effort in the very slightest?

DIANA *(unhappy)*: Wouldn't they?

[MICHAEL makes exasperated face, rise X.L. There is a long pause.]

DIANA still on the floor beside the books.

Michael . . . what's happened to you?

MICHAEL: Nothing. Why do you ask?

WARN TELEPHONE

DIANA: You've changed so. . . Three years ago you had so much enthusiasm and drive and vision. You believed in this war as a crusade, a fight for good against evil. And now, when at last it's nearly over, and an Armistice seems only a question of days, perhaps of hours—you make a mockery of everything. . . .

MICHAEL (*comes back to sofa, sits, leaning towards her*): You say I've changed. What about you? Three years ago you were quiet and gentle, you had a quality of stillness that was the thing I loved about you most. Out there—where I lived like a hunted rat month after month—I would think of that stillness, and long for it.

[*Rises, flings cushion from Miss JAMESON'S chair back into armchair, then replaces chair at desk.*

I came home to find you had grown another personality. One of those managing, restless women, always writing letters, going to meetings, arguing about ridiculous questions, having interminable conversations on the telephone, and it's no use pretending that patriotism has driven you to it. It's become your life. You are that sort of woman.

DIANA : It's not true. (*Rises, picks up books, puts them on chair D.R.*)

MICHAEL (*to below sofa*): It is true. The woman I married died with me when I crashed into the sea in '42.

DIANA (*quietly*) : I've tried, very hard, to be the woman you remembered.

MICHAEL: I know that. I've seen you, this last month, day after day, forcing yourself to play a part you had forgotten. Trying to pick up the threads of our old routine. Not only you, but Robin, Nanny, the very house itself, plunging back into a past that none of you wanted, a past that isn't with us any more.

DIANA (*stricken*): Michael. . . .

MICHAEL (*sits sofa*): I'm not blaming you, or anyone. You believed me dead. Now I know that the dead must not return.

DIANA (*sits beside him*): You can't say that. Oh, Michael, darling, we were happy once.

MICHAEL: And we're not happy now. Are we? Not your fault. Nor mine. The years between.

[*The telephone rings. MICHAEL half rises, as if to answer it, then sits again, with gesture to DIANA to answer it. DIANA goes and lifts receiver. Puts duster down on table.*

DIANA: Hullo. Yes. Yes, speaking. I'm very well, thank you,

Ernest. Yes, he's here with me now. He's very much better. Whenever you like. *(She claps her hand over the receiver.)* Ernest. He wants to come down and see you to-day.

MICHAEL : Tell him to go to hell.

DIANA *(on telephone)*: He'll be delighted to see you. There must be heaps of things you want to discuss. I want to see you, too. I feel my political position at the moment is absolutely unique. No, we haven't talked about it much. As far as I'm concerned there's only one thing to be done. I must stand down for Michael. But surely there's no question about it. . . . Yes, well, if it's as important as that, come right away—to lunch. We shall be here. . . . The news is wonderful, isn't it? It seems impossible that it can be really true. Very well, Ernest. . . . See you later. Good-bye, *(She replaces the receiver.)*

MICHAEL: What exactly were you saying to Ernest?

DIANA : Only something that I feel is right and just. *(Moves to below sofa.)* There can't be two members for North Arsea, can there? You must go back to the House where you belong. I shall return to the home that I seem to have neglected. *(Stands with her back to MICHAEL.)*

MICHAEL : When did you first think about this?

DIANA *(turns to him)*: Directly we came back. No, I'm lying. Before I went to Portsmouth. That first evening, when Ernest told me you were safe.

[He looks at her strangely.]

MICHAEL: This Parliament stuff means a lot to you, doesn't it?

DIANA *(sits chair, dully)*: I thought it did. I'm not so sure, now.

MICHAEL: I've made you doubtful, haven't I? *(Rises to above chair.)* You were certain of yourself before I returned. And here I am, like an evil ghost, peering at you over your shoulder, breaking your new world to pieces.

DIANA *(wearily)*: I don't want a new world. I only want the men and women who live in it to be happy.

MICHAEL: Compulsory baths—compulsory babies—is that how you propose to do it?

DIANA: You deliberately misunderstand everything I try to tell you.

MICHAEL *(moves to table, leans against it)*: Perhaps I do. Perhaps I misunderstand because I want you still and quiet like you were before. I want it to be winter and the curtains drawn, with you lying there, on that sofa, doing some tapestry and Robin a child

asleep upstairs. I want the old world that we knew and loved—the old world for which I fought and—did not die.

DIANA: I've failed you, Michael, when you needed me so much.

MICHAEL (*to R. of armchair*): Would you really stand down for me? Chuck politics aside, put back the clock, and be the one I knew?

DIANA: I would do anything, if it would only make you happy.

MICHAEL: Yes . . . but would it make you happy too?

[There is a step outside on the terrace.

[RICHARD stands by the window. MICHAEL turns his head and sees him.

MICHAEL (*rises U.C., shakes hands*): Greetings, Richard Coeur de Lion. You find us in a moment of high drama ill-suited to the hour. Why the devil haven't you been to see me before? I'm seriously offended.

RICHARD (*not looking at DIANA*): I've been pretty busy, I'm afraid. The fact is, Robin was over at the farm and fell into the stream. I've made him take a bath and wrap himself in my dressing-gown, and I've come over for a change of clothes. I couldn't find Nanny in the kitchen.

MICHAEL: Your excuses are elaborate and entirely unnecessary. Have a glass of beer. (*D.C. below sofa. Rings bell.*) Don't look so disapproving (*to DIANA*). Can't the honest farmer have a drink after pulling your son out of the river?

DIANA (*rises*): Is Robin quite all right?

RICHARD: Oh, completely. He got soaked through, that's all. It wasn't deep.

DIANA: I'll see about his clothes, and I'll tell Venning you want some beer.

[Exit.

[We feel she has gone out of the room purposely.

MICHAEL: Four weeks I've been back, and not a sign of you, although I've walked to the farm once or twice. I was saying to Diana only yesterday, you were keeping yourself very aloof.

RICHARD (*L. end sofa*): I didn't think you'd want outsiders butting in on your first few weeks at home.

MICHAEL: Who said you were an outsider? You're one of the family to Robin, at any rate. He spends all his time at the farm.

[VENNING enters with beer, puts tray table L. and exits.

Richard, Diana tells me you've given her a hand with her money matters, and helped her in a hundred ways. That was good of you. My very grateful thanks.

[RICHARD *looks wretched and uncomfortable*. MICHAEL *crosses below sofa, to table, pours out drinks, and gives RICHARD one*. There is a pause. They never did have much to say to each other.

MICHAEL : You're a fortunate fellow, Richard. I suppose this war hasn't touched you at all?

RICHARD : Only—indirectly.

MICHAEL : Like all conscientious chaps, you have an inferiority complex because a game leg kept you from Active Service. But don't let that worry you. We're nearly through now, anyway.

(To table L.C. for cigarettes.)

RICHARD : You really think that's true?

MICHAEL: Cigarette? (*handing him box*).

RICHARD : No, thank you.

MICHAEL : Only a question of hours, my dear fellow . . . we'll be caught napping of course. Unready for peace, just as we were unready for war. And it's going to take a devil of a time clearing up the mess. (*Lights his cigarette*.)

RICHARD : I suppose you know more about that part of it than anyone over here. Our people will listen to you, won't they?

MICHAEL: The soldiers have done so already. They're the only ones that matter. I don't care a damn about the politicians. Won't you take a pew? (*He puts cigarette box back on table and sits armchair L.C.*)

RICHARD (*sits sofa*): The thing that impressed me most about the whole business has been the work of the Underground movements. Did you come across many of them? The Resistance chaps, I mean.

MICHAEL (*smiles*): Only lived with them day and night, for the best part of three years.

RICHARD: It must have been pretty difficult evading capture, wasn't it?

MICHAEL : Oh, not so bad when the thing got organised, and I could get my reports through to this country.

RICHARD: Reports?

MICHAEL (*smiling*): Every day by wireless, from my extremely mobile H.Q.

RICHARD (*puzzled*): I don't quite follow. You talk as though you'd been on some official job.

MICHAEL : I was. Somebody had to do the spade-work, hadn't they? Somebody who knew the countries, spoke the languages, and who was supposed to have gone to glory when his plane crashed in the Mediterranean?

RICHARD (*rises, staring at MICHAEL*) : Do you mean—it was all planned from the start before you left here? The crash and everything?

MICHAEL (*softly*): Yes.

RICHARD : You did it deliberately, knowing that Diana, and the world, would believe you dead?

MICHAEL : There was no choice, to my mind. One weak link and the scheme would have failed.

[*There is a pause; the two nun stare at one another.*

RICHARD (*sits again*) (*slowly*) : I suppose you're the most courageous man I've ever known.

MICHAEL: Not courageous, Richard. Only filled with a sublime conceit.

RICHARD: Does—Diana know?

MICHAEL: Not yet.

RICHARD : I don't think I should tell her—if I were you.

MICHAEL: No? You think a woman wouldn't understand.

RICHARD : She might find it difficult—I mean, so many months of unnecessary anguish.

[MICHAEL *looks at him, half-curiously.*

MICHAEL: I don't know why I told you. Strange. A sort of impulse, when you came into the room. We've never known each other particularly well, have we?

RICHARD: No. (*Takes a drink.*)

MICHAEL: Here's to our closer friendship, then, from this day forward. (*He lifts tankard.*)

RICHARD : I'm afraid that's not very likely.

MICHAEL: What do you mean? (*Rises, puts out cigarette.*)

RICHARD : I'm going away in a few days.

MICHAEL: Leaving the farm?

RICHARD: Yes. I've taken a small holding in Wales. I've always had a love for the place, And if this war is really packing up, as

you say, there will be plenty, of work for me to do in my part of the world.

MICHAEL (*sits R. of armchair*) (*Impulsive*): I say, I am sorry. Diana and Robin will miss you so much.

RICHARD: I think not. You see—they've got you home again.

WARN CONCERTO

MICHAEL: Yes. . . . But Robin spends all his days with you, and Diana dictating letters to her secretary. It's been a funny sort of home-coming, you know.

RICHARD (*quietly*): You took a risk, didn't you, when you crashed into the sea?

MICHAEL: Yes. Sometimes—I wondered, out there, what I should feel like if I came home and found that Diana had married again. (*Laughs.*) God, it was one of my worst nightmares. And instead of that bogey to haunt me night and day, I return to a blasted politician. (*Rises, and puts his tankard down on table.*) Have some more beer?

RICHARD (*rises*): No, thank you. I must get back to the farm.

[DIANA comes in with clothes.

DIANA: He's so untidy. Things all over the place. Here's a sweater and a pair of shorts.

MICHAEL: This fellow is going to leave us.

DIANA: Leave us? What do you mean?

MICHAEL: Going back to the Land of his Fathers. Takes a farm in Wales. I think he's crazy, myself.

DIANA (*forgetting caution, a world of fear in her voice*): Richard. . . .

[RICHARD does nothing. Just stands dumbly. MICHAEL catches the inflection in her voice, looks from one to the other. DIANA recovers.

(*Steadily*): That's a very sudden decision, isn't it?

WARN CURTAIN

RICHARD: Not so very sudden.

[MICHAEL continues to watch them. Whistles to himself.

DIANA: When do you propose to go?

[MICHAEL moves over to the radiogram.

RICHARD: In a few days. . . . (*Up to table, puts tankard down*) I've been settling things during the past weeks. The war will be over any time now. I'd like to be in Wales when the aftermath begins and help straighten the muddle.

[MICHAEL switches on Greig Concerto.

DIANA (*crosses to sofa, sits. With bitterness*): The aftermath. . . . That goes for all of us, I suppose. It will take us the rest of our lives to straighten out the muddle that this war has made.

MICHAEL (*softly, leaning over back of sofa*): Who's being bitter—now? (*Turns to RICHARD.*) Why don't you stay to lunch? Yenning can take Robin's clothes across. (*D.R. of sofa to door.*)

DIANA (*still bitter*): Yes, why not? If we're not going to see much of you in the future. (*She is overstrained, hurt, and bewildered.*)

RICHARD : Thank you. I'd like to very much.

MICHAEL: venning?

[vENNING appears at door.

Mr. Llewellyn will be staying for lunch. Will you go across to the farm with these clothes for Master Robin?

vENNING: Sir. (*Takes clothes from DIANA, and exits windows.*)

[MICHAEL goes below sofa to radiogram. DIANA and RICHARD stare at one another in misery. DIANA takes cigarette from table R. of sofa. RICHARD lights it for her. A look passes between them which MICHAEL catches.

MICHAEL: Shall we go forward to reality?

[Switches over to radio. The voice of the announcer says:

ANNOUNCER: Yesterday at 2.41 Grand Admiral Doenitz, designated head of the German State, signed an act of unconditional surrender of all German land, sea and air forces in Europe. Hostilities will end officially at one minute after midnight tonight.

His Majesty the King will broadcast to the Nation and to the World this evening at nine o'clock.

[MICHAEL switches off.

MICHAEL : Peace finds us ill-prepared.

END OF SCENE I

ACT II

WARN CURTAIN

WARN DOORBELL

SCENE 2

That afternoon.

The WENTWORTHS and RICHARD are still at lunch. We can see VENNING in the hall carrying a tray from the dining-room. There is the sound of a bell, and VENNING, after taking a tray through to the dining-room, calls to NANNY.

VENNING : There's the front-door bell, Nurse.

NANNY (*from kitchen*): Well, goodness me, you can answer it, can't you? You can see I'm busy with the coffee.

[VENNING goes to the door, off L. Voice of SIR ERNEST off.

SIR ERNEST: I'm rather early. I expect the Colonel is still having lunch.

VENNING : They're just finishing, sir. Perhaps you'd care to go straight in to the dining-room?

SIR ERNEST: No. I'll wait in the library.

[*Enters, followed by VENNING.*

VENNING: What name shall I say, sir?

SIR ERNEST: Sir Ernest Foster. They're expecting me. Don't disturb them.

VENNING : I'll tell the Colonel, sir.

[VENNING exits.

[SIR ERNEST looks about the room in slight curiosity. Goes U.C. and sees table has been moved from behind sofa to its old place against the wall.

MICHAEL (*from dining-room*): Why the devil doesn't he come in here? (*He crosses the hall, and enters room, with table napkin still in his hand.*) My dear Ernest—why the Gestapo entrance? Come along and have some cheese and coffee. (*Meets ERNEST C. and shakes hands*)

SIR ERNEST : Cheese and coffee be damned—don't you know the war's over?

MICHAEL: So I gather. Come along and have some cheese and coffee,

SIR ERNEST : No, thank you. Besides, I want to talk to you before seeing Diana.

[MICHAEL shuts door and comes slowly forward.

(*Moves to fire*): Well, you're looking better, More like your old self again.

MICHAEL : Perhaps to you. Not to others.

SIR ERNEST : The war has been a strain on all of us, but to you it must have been unbearable.

MICHAEL : On the contrary. Responsibility sat very lightly on my shoulders. (*Puts napkin down on table and picks up cigarette box.*)

SIR ERNEST (*sits sofa*): I was only told the whole history of what you did a few weeks ago. At first I did not believe it.

MICHAEL (*offers cigarette over back of sofa*): Very sensible of you. It was a crazy thing to do.

SIR ERNEST : Crazy, perhaps—but your work has helped to give us victory six months before we expected it.

MICHAEL (*puts back cigarette box and sits armchair L.C.*): And now, it's only a question of putting out the flags.

SIR ERNEST : But for those who *really* know—the work has only just begun.

MICHAEL : Perhaps. But that doesn't interest me.

SIR ERNEST (*quietly*): Doesn't it? You surprise me.

[*They both smoke. There is a pause.*]

MICHAEL (*rises to above L. and sofa*): Well? What do you want to see me about? The reward for my labours? Aren't you going to hand it to me on a silver salver?

SIR ERNEST : You know perfectly well why I've come.

MICHAEL : Yes. . . . Damn you. It's no use, Ernest, I'm not going back again. I've done what I set myself to do. Now it's the turn of somebody younger.

SIR ERNEST : You know what's needed in Europe, Michael, better than anyone over here. You've had nearly three years of it, living close to the people, looking at the world with their eyes. You're not the man to shrug your shoulder and leave them alone, now that the fighting is over.

MICHAEL: Aren't I? That's where you're wrong. I've lost three years, Ernest, because of the people of Europe—three years that they can't give back to me. And it hasn't all been funny and amusing. I've had my share of the blood, and sweat, and tears. This country has had its pound of flesh from me. (*To R. of arm-chair.*) Now I'm going to make up for the time I lost. I want to get to know my wife and son, all over again. I want to rebuild my home, just like the destitute, the bombed.

[SIR ERNEST *watches him closely.*]

SIR ERNEST (*lightly*): Of course, if you feel as strongly as that, then there's no more to be said. I had hoped—so had we all that your response would have been different. But God knows, after what you've been through, you have a right to put your family first, before your country.

[MICHAEL gives him a little bow.

[Pause.

(*Rise to fire*): How did you find Diana?

MICHAEL : Very much the politician. Full of meetings and good works. I understand she plays her part remarkably well.

SIR ERNEST : Yes. She is a darling. She has worked very hard. (*Another pause, and then quietly*) Three years was a long time to lie dead, Michael.

MICHAEL (*softly*): Isn't that just what I've been trying to tell you?

[Enter DIANA.

DIANA (*crosses to him, shakes hands*): Ernest, why didn't you come into the dining-room? What are you two discussing in secrecy?

SIR ERNEST : As a matter of fact I came on a matter of—national importance. It has been badly received.

DIANA: You sound very solemn. Do I come into it? (*She looks bewildered, and rather hostile*)

MICHAEL (*to below L. and sofa, puts his arm round DIANA'S shoulder*): My beloved wife, Ernest, feels the safe seat of North Arlsea rock from under her. As she observed to you on the telephone this morning, her political position is unique. Who is the legal member for North Arlsea?

[Enter ROBIN and RICHARD.

Colonel Wentworth, believed by the constituents for many months to be lying peacefully under foreign waters—or the charming and able wife who succeeded him?

[DIANA sits sofa.

What is your opinion, Richard, as one completely unbiased? By the way—do you two know each other?

SIR ERNEST (*rather embarrassed*): Yes. Yes, rather, we have often met.

RICHARD (*stiffly*): How are you?

[ROBIN crosses to SIR ERNEST and shakes hands. MICHAEL to U.L. end of sofa.

ROBIN (*precocious*): The last time you were here was when Mummy made the speech at the Salvage Drive, wasn't it? The village did awfully well. We considerably overshot our target.

SIR ERNEST: That was clever of you.

ROBIN : And we were runners-up for the Shield, and would have won it, only the judge favoured his own village.

SIR ERNEST (*gravely playing up to ROBIN*) : Local politics are so difficult.

MICHAEL: When I was your age "Little boys were seen and not heard".

[ROBIN looks offended, and sits R. end sofa next to DIANA.

Richard, you haven't volunteered an opinion whether Diana or myself should represent North Arlsea?

RICHARD : Surely that's a matter for you and Diana to discuss together.

MICHAEL : What a model of discretion! No taking of sides. You must be a very restful companion.

[*There is an uncomfortable pause.*

Ernest, perhaps we had better continue our unprofitable conversation in the garden. But you've had my answer.

SIR ERNEST: I shall see you later, Diana? (*U.R. of sofa*)

DIANA: Yes—of course.

[THEY exit to garden.

[*Silence in the library.*

RICHARD: Thank you for lunch. I must be getting back to the farm.

ROBIN (*rises; to him eagerly*): Can I come with you?

DIANA (*not looking at either*): Robin, I want to talk to Uncle Richard. Will you leave us for a little while?

ROBIN (*awkward*): Yes, Mums.

[*Hesitates a moment, then runs off.*

DIANA (*head away*): Do you grudge even five minutes alone with me?

RICHARD (*in great pain—to L. end sofa*): Diana. . . .

DIANA: You haven't been near me once—not once in the past month. And when I sink to sending you messages by Robin you don't even answer them. And now you're going away. (*Her voice breaks.*)

RICHARD : What else can I do?

DIANA (*rises*): Don't you love me any more?

RICHARD: Love you? (*Goes towards her.*) Do you want me to tell you what it's been like for me, these nights and days?

DIANA: Rikky. . . . (*She goes to him.*)

ROBIN (*off*): Daddy, are you going fishing tomorrow?

MICHAEL (*off*): Yes, but bring your own rod.

RICHARD (*quietly*): You see?

[She moves away to L.

That's why I have to go away, isn't it? (*Pause.*) Don't let's pretend to one another. Do you want me to come to your house secretly, and linger in the woods, and wait for the sound of a car driving away down the avenue? Do you want me to be that sort of man?

DIANA: I can't go on like this any longer. I'm so terribly unhappy.

(Sits armchair L.C.)

RICHARD: My dear one. (*To C.*)

DIANA: I've tried so hard to be the same to him, the one he wants, the one he used to know. But it's no use. I'm not that woman any more. None of our interests are the same, none of our thoughts. And it's not his fault or mine, as he said this morning--it's the years between.

RICHARD (*gently*): He loves you still.

DIANA: I'm not sure, even of that. He's so different, Rikky, so bitter and twisted, and strange. Oh, I know he's been through hell, and it's cruel and hard of me to criticise, but any companionship we had seems to have gone. Our hearts and our minds are not in tune.

[There is a long pause.

RICHARD: Well, what are we going to do? Are you thinking of telling him everything that's happened?

DIANA: I don't know.

RICHARD (*to her*): Would you really do that, and come away with me to Wales?

DIANA (*torn to pieces*): Oh, Rikky. . . .

RICHARD (*sits R. of chair and puts his arms round her shoulders*): Shall I tell you what would happen if you did? We'd find a little happiness together, yes, for a time. We'd build a cottage in the wilds and think only of ourselves. And then, gradually, his shadow would come between us, and there'd be no peace in the mountains any more, darling, only doubt and anxiety. I'm right, aren't I?

[She does not answer.]

DIANA : And if it's to be the other way, he and I that stay together, and you that are alone, do you think I shall have peace in my heart?

RICHARD *(rises to R. of chair and takes her hands. Softly):* I don't know. But he is your husband. And you have Robin. There'll always be that bond between you.

DIANA: We were going to be very happy, you and I.

RICHARD : I know. *(Moves U.C. to table.)*

DIANA: Do you realise, that if Michael had not come back, we should have been together now?

RICHARD: Yes. . . . *(To L. end sofa.)*

DIANA : It's the little things that I've missed so much. You going through my speeches with me—correcting the bad grammar; doing my income tax; mending the wireless; our funny suppers on a tray. Other people have snatched happiness and found a middle way. It wouldn't be difficult for us, living so close.

RICHARD: We're not "other people". . . . We'd find deceit a bitter, hopeless thing. *(Takes her hands.)* I love you too well to snatch at happiness. That's why I'm going away. *(Below chair to L.)*

[She knows now that this is final.]

DIANA: Richard, perhaps this is the last time we shall be alone together. I want you to kiss me.

[RICHARD comes forward, and kisses her, as she sits there on the chair.]

RICHARD: Do you know how much I love you now?

DIANA *(in a whisper):* Yes.

[RICHARD turns and goes out of the room, into the hall, closes door behind him.]

[DIANA hears it, and realises the finality.]

(Rises.) Rikky . . . Rikky. . . .

[She looks after him. Then comes slowly C. She turns and sees MICHAEL standing looking at her from the terrace.]

MICHAEL: Is anything the matter?

DIANA: No—why should there be? *(To fire.)*

MICHAEL: You look so white and strange. Where's Richard?

DIANA : He's gone.

MICHAEL : Elusive fellow.

[SIR ERNEST comes on the terrace behind MICHAEL. They enter library together. MICHAEL to C. ERNEST to above sofa.

I was just telling Ernest about your tremendous message to the Girls' Training Corps. He was very much impressed, weren't you, Ernest?

DIANA : Wouldn't it be kinder if you kept your mockery to yourself? My sense of humour is rather lacking these days. (*She takes a cigarette from the box on mantelpiece.*)

MICHAEL: Amongst other new habits, Ernest, Diana has taken to smoking like a chimney.

SIR ERNEST: Don't nag the woman. Why shouldn't she smoke? But you're looking a bit pale, Diana.

MICHAEL : The result of my coming home. It makes so much work, as Robin informed me the evening I arrived. Here we are, Ernest, the excellent Miss Jameson has left behind her carbon copy. (*Picks up paper from table.*) The climax of the speech about the stronger, saner Britain—"Our children shall be brought up to service, duty and obedience to the State ".

SIR ERNEST: A damn good thing too.

DIANA : Thank you, Ernest.

MICHAEL : Yes, the girls of the G.T.G. will come away bursting with enthusiasm. (*Softly.*) But does Diana really mean it? Are any of us here prepared to sacrifice ourselves to service, duty and obedience?

DIANA : Sometimes—there is no alternative.

MICHAEL (*sits on table*): There's always an alternative. We can throw our caps over the mills and run away and say "To hell with this". Isn't that so, Diana?

DIANA : I don't know.

MICHAEL: Wouldn't you like to try—just as an experiment?

[*The atmosphere is dangerous. SIR ERNEST sees it, looking from one to the other.*

SIR ERNEST: (*D.R. of sofa. Puts arm round DIANA'S shoulders. Lightly*): For months I've tried to persuade Diana to run away with me. But alas!—she will insist that members of Parliament mustn't do these things.

DIANA : But I don't intend to be a member of Parliament much longer. Now Michael is home, he will go back to the constituency. (*Sits sofa.*) I've no right to the seat at all. There'll be a General Election in a few weeks anyway.

MICHAEL : You know, Ernest, her face alone is good for a couple of thousand votes.

DIANA : No, Michael. I'm serious about **this**. Ernest, you believe me?

SIR ERNEST (*sits chair D.R.*): My dear, of course I do. But I assure you that the people of North Arlsea would far rather be looked after by you than by this madman. (*Nods in MICHAEL'S -direction.*) Anyway, he tells me he is going to forsake public life, and take his ease. He turned down my suggestion before I'd even made it.

DIANA : And what was your suggestion?

MICHAEL (*rises, goes below chair to D.L. looks at book-shelves. Lightly*): Ernest and his fellow-conspirators want me out of the way again. I know their filthy plots. Ernest has come down to offer me a job which I decline to take.

DIANA: What kind of a job?

MICHAEL: A sort of benefactor-cum-policeman. Not a very attractive role.

DIANA: Won't you tell me the truth, Ernest? Michael has talked in riddles ever since he came back. You'll hardly believe me.

[MICHAEL to U.C.

But even now I know nothing of his life these past three years, except what I read in the newspapers. What he did—what he saw—how he lived. He doesn't want to tell me.

MICHAEL (*lightly*): Too many ghosts looking over my shoulder.

DIANA : I know he lay hidden for months in Europe, and made a miraculous escape. But he hasn't added to the story.

MICHAEL: There's nothing to add. (*D.C. to U.L. of armchair, looking at books in shelves behind chair.*)

SIR ERNEST (*quietly*): Perhaps Michael wants to spare you the history of his three years, Diana, just as you might want to spare him—yours?

[MICHAEL'S hand grips chair-back. THEY look at each other—SIR ERNEST and DIANA. Both are thinking the same thought.

(*All very light*): At any rate, you can take it from me, that your husband is one of the bravest men alive today.

MICHAEL (*turns*): Oh no, he's not. He's an almighty coward. He's so afraid of being hurt that he would like to walk the world blindfold, with his fingers in his ears.

[*His voice is suddenly savage, and they both stare at him in wonder.*

DIANA (*suddenly afraid*): Michael.

[ROBIN appears at the window. MICHAEL catches sight of him.

MICHAEL (*U.C. brings ROBIN to above sofa*): There's the poor devil I'm sorry for. He's the one who'll have to pay for all the mistakes we make. Come in here, Robin—you're the chap that matters now.

[ROBIN enters, looking rather frightened.

Ever drunk champagne, Robin?

ROBIN : No, Daddy, I don't think so.

MICHAEL: You're going to drink it now. We've got much to celebrate. (*Goes to door.*) venning! (*To above armchair.*) Champagne at three o'clock in the afternoon. That's the proper way to bring in the peace, isn't it?

[Enter vENNING.

vENNING: Sir.

MICHAEL: venning, I found a bottle of champagne in the cellar, and I stuck it in the study. You'll recognise it by the gold cap and the thick layer of dust. Bring glasses for us, and for yourself and Nanny.

vENNING : Sir.

[Exit.

ROBIN: Why is everybody going to drink champagne?

MICHAEL : Because we've won the war, Robin, and I shan't have to work any more. (*To L. of Robin, claps him on shoulder.*)

SIR ERNEST: We're going to drink to the future, Robin, and rejoice that your father is safe amongst us once again, and your mother as first woman Prime Minister. You'd like that, wouldn't you?

ROBIN (*not certain*): I don't know. (*Turns to DIANA.*) Where's Uncle Richard?

WARN CURTAIN

[MICHAEL moves to armchair and sits.

DIANA : He went back to the farm.

ROBIN : He ought to be here, to drink to the future too.

[No one says anything. vENNING enters with bottle and glasses.

vENNING: Is this right, sir? Bolinger '28.

MICHAEL: Thank you, venning. (*Takes bottle, goes U.C. to top end of table, takes cork out of bottle.*)

SIR ERNEST (*rises*): Lovely sound.

[VENNING *puts tray on table. NANNY appears from hall.*

NANNY : Venning said you asked me to come, sir.

MICHAEL: You heard the news, Nanny?

NANNY: Yes, indeed.

MICHAEL: I know you're a teetotaller, Nanny, but I want you and Venning to join us in a glass of champagne in honour of the occasion.

NANNY : Thank you, sir.

[MICHAEL *pours champagne into glasses. ROBIN takes two glasses, gives both to DIANA, who passes one to Ernest, then goes back for his own. MICHAEL has given VENNING a glass for NANNY and for himself.*

ROBIN (*to below L. and sofa*) : I've seen his before. It's the stuff people drink at weddings, isn't it, Mums?

DIANA : Yes, darling.

MICHAEL (*D.C.*): And occasionally at funerals, Robin—

[ROBIN *turns facing U.S.*

of the rather better sort, when the deceased is really safe beneath the ground. Has everyone got a glass?

[*Murmurs of "yes". The SERVANTS are a little embarrassed. MICHAEL raises his glass and looks across at his wife, who lifts hers at the same time and rises.*

To your brave new world, Diana.

CURTAIN

END OF SCENE 2

SCENE 3

The same.

That evening, about 8 o' clock. Supper is over.

[DIANA *is sitting on the sofa. She is making coffee. MICHAEL is half-way up a step-ladder with books in his hand, while ROBIN hands more up to him from below. SIR ERNEST is seated D.R.*

MICHAEL : Not that one, fathead! We can't have William Butler Yeats alongside George Moore. They didn't agree.

ROBIN : They've both got red bindings.

MICHAEL (*laughing*): Listen to the rising generation! He only knows books by their bindings. That's the result of Diana's Higher Education.

DIANA : Do you want any coffee, Michael ?

MICHAEL: Not until I've finished this job. Now the big one, Robin. The plays of J. M. Barrie. Did you ever see "Mary Rose", Ernest?

SIR ERNEST : Did I not! Cried my eyes out. Had to be supported from the theatre.

MICHAEL: She came back after twenty years, didn't she? But she never did find what she had lost.

ROBIN : What did she do?

MICHAEL: She died, Robin—and her pale ghost haunted the shadows. . . .

[ROBIN *treads on book behind chair.*

Don't stamp on Bernard Shaw; he wouldn't appreciate the compliment.

[ROBIN *hands up more books.*

MICHAEL: "Man and Superman". That's the stuff your generation need, Robin. There's more flesh and blood to him than to "Mary Rose".

SIR ERNEST: Where are writers of today?

MICHAEL : We shan't know for fifty years.

SIR ERNEST : What about yourself?

MICHAEL : Oh, I don't count. I'm only a debunker of bad history, who tells you what Charles the Second didn't do to Nell Gwynn. Besides, I haven't put pen to paper since 1939.

DIANA : You had better start again, if the war is really over. There won't be very much for you to do otherwise.

MICHAEL: What would you have me write?

SIR ERNEST : A history of the Second World War.

DIANA : Your experience of the past three years.

ROBIN : Yes, Daddy, write about all the things you've been doing.

MICHAEL: What did you do in the Great War, Daddy?

I hated mine enemy.
And what did you hate him for, Daddy?
For being as big a fool as me.

DIANA: Oh, come. That's 1918, obviously.

MICHAEL: I have a 1918 mentality. You forget that I fought in that war, too. (*Sits on the top of step-ladder, looking at them all*)

DIANA (*rising—suddenly nervy*): I don't know why we're all sitting

in here. It's a lovely evening. Let's drink our coffee in the garden, Ernest. (*Crosses to table, puts down MICHAEL'S cup*)

SIR ERNEST (*rises*): You mustn't let me forget the time. I've got to drive back to London before dark.

ROBIN (*below sofa to C*): All the church bells are going to ring tonight before the King speaks at nine o'clock. Ours are going to ring in the village here. (*To armchair*) Not like on Sundays. The real genuine peal that we had before the war.

MICHAEL: Do you remember, Diana, when we heard that last?

DIANA: No, Michael. When was it? In '39, I suppose?

[ROBIN *kneels in chair looking up at MICHAEL.*

MICHAEL: That Sunday in September, when war was declared. We went to church together. You were wearing a blue check suit. Suddenly the siren went. You put out your hand to me. It was in the middle of the Creed.

DIANA (*slowly*): Yes. . . . Yes, I remember now.

SIR ERNEST: A long time ago, isn't it? Anyway—you've both come out of it unscathed. You're the lucky ones.

MICHAEL: Yes—we're the lucky ones. (*Shuts book with a slam and puts it in shelf*)

[*There is a pause that all feel.*

SIR ERNEST (*trying to break it*): Come and show me the blue border, Diana, and let's pretend the war never happened. (*Goes U.R. of sofa.*)

DIANA: Alas, the border went a long time ago.

MICHAEL: There's a lot of beetroot there now—why not take a look at that instead?

SIR ERNEST *and* DIANA *exit to garden.*

ROBIN (*rises*): Do you want me to go on helping you with the books?

MICHAEL (*suddenly tired*): No—not particularly.

ROBIN: Because, if you don't, I think I shall just slip across to the farm and see what Uncle Richard is doing.

MICHAEL: He talks of going to Wales, doesn't he? (*Comes down ladder.*)

ROBIN : Yes, it's a rotten shame. I'm sure he doesn't really want to go. The farming's not half so good there. I can't think why he's doing it.

MICHAEL: You like him, don't you?

ROBIN : Rather! He's a splendid chap. He's my greatest friend. He taught me to fish.

MICHAEL : With my rod?

ROBIN (*backs a step towards sofa*): Well, you see—we didn't know then that you'd be coming back.

MICHAEL : No. That did make rather a difference.

ROBIN (*sits L. arm sofa*) : It **will** seem awfully queer without him. Though lately, of course, he hasn't been to the house at all. He was always here before.

MICHAEL: Before what? (*Stops as he is coming down steps*)

ROBIN : Before you came home.

MICHAEL (*takes coffee from table*) : Yours wasn't such a bad war, Robin, was it?

ROBIN : We had a bomb once, half-a-mile away. There's an enormous crater still.

MICHAEL: Is there? I wasn't thinking about bombs.

[*There is a pause for a moment. MICHAEL crosses R. below sofa.*

What were your Easter plans to have been, Robin, if I hadn't come home?

ROBIN: Oh, I was going to stay with Dawson—that's a pal of mine at school—for part of the holidays, while Mums and Uncle Richard were in Scotland.

[MICHAEL *U.S. of sofa to behind it.*

MICHAEL: Scotland? Where were they going in Scotland?

ROBIN : Some little cottage that Uncle Richard had taken. They were going to picnic, you know, do all the cooking themselves. Uncle Richard's a jolly good cook. Then Mums had to be back by the 29th, because of a meeting in London. We were all three going to the flat, to have a week up there, doing theatres and things, before I went back to school.

MICHAEL (*leans over and pats him on shoulder*): I'm sorry I spoilt the plan. Run along to the farm, then. I shan't be putting away more books tonight.

[ROBIN *exits, going U.L. of sofa and through windows.*

[MICHAEL puts cup on table L. He looks up and about him, round the room, as he did the fast evening he came home. After a few minutes he looks over his shoulder towards the door.

Venning! Venning! (Picks up books that are still on the floor and puts them on top of steps. Then to above table.

[VENNING comes into the room.

VENNING: Sir?

MICHAEL: I shall be going up to London this evening with Sir Ernest. Will you pack a suitcase, with my pyjamas, shaving-kit, usual things? And I shall want you to travel up by train in a day or two. I'll let you know what I need by telephone.

VENNING : Sir.

MICHAEL: I may be away or some considerable time. I shan't know full details until I get to London. (Pause) I may need you with me, where I'm going, or I may not. At any rate, you shall have your forty-eight hours' leave as soon as I can arrange it.

VENNING : Sir.

MICHAEL : All right, Venning.

[VENNING exits.

[MICHAEL picks up cheque-book from table, puts it into his pocket. Then looks through pile of papers.

SIR ERNEST (entering with DIANA) : Of course we'll have a stable Government for the next four years. The country won't be prepared for big changes, all of a sudden. We shall see some new faces, I suppose, which will be quite a good thing. I'm getting very tired of a lot of the old ones, I don't mind telling you. But no one is going to start revolution, I can promise you that. (D.R. puts cup on coffee table.)

MICHAEL: What about me?

[SIR ERNEST turns round and smiles.

SIR ERNEST: You're not in the running, Michael. You've come back to peace and quiet.

MICHAEL : I've changed my mind.

[THEY both look at him.

SIR ERNEST: What do you mean?

MICHAEL : The starving millions want a leader, don't they, to take them into the land of promise? Perhaps you are right, after all, and I am suited to the task. Very well, then, Ernest, I take back my refusal. Your offer is accepted.

SIR ERNEST: Are you joking?

MICHAEL : I was never more serious in my life. I shall come up with you to London—tonight.

[He smiles, and exits to hall.]

DIANA (D.C.): What's he talking about?

SIR ERNEST *(slowly)*: I had a feeling, all the while, that he wouldn't back out of it.

DIANA : You've got to tell me what you are asking Michael to do.

SIR ERNEST : The Government want him in Europe, Diana, but this time in the political field. He will be able to help us, as no one else can do.

DIANA : I still don't understand.

SIR ERNEST: Is it really true that you know nothing of your husband's work all these years?

DIANA : Absolutely. He's been so secretive and strange.

SIR ERNEST : How much *do* you know?

DIANA *(puts cup on coffee table and sits sofa)*: Only what I've read in the papers. What else, Ernest, is there for me to know?

SIR ERNEST *(U.R. of sofa)*: A very great deal, Diana. *(Pause.)* Michael was in touch with our people over here from the very first moment that he landed in Greece. *(D.L. of sofa.)* Messages came through by wireless, in those early weeks, messages that only ceased when he arrived back in this country last month. Little by little he built a secret, powerful organisation around him—people who listened, and waited, and whispered. The messages came from the Balkans, Holland and Belgium. *(Sits R. arm of armchair L.C.)* Those thousands of people in the occupied countries who came to know something of Michael's secret mission, Diana, are the ones who have been helping our armies on the Continent. All owing to his work.

DIANA *(in a whisper)*: Michael—did that?

SIR ERNEST : The risk of exposure and death never lifted day or night, all that time. But he never wavered.

DIANA: When did you learn all this?

SIR ERNEST : Only a few days ago. His identity was known only to one or two people, certainly not to an ordinary politician like myself. We knew the plan was progressing, but we didn't know who was behind it. Like you, like all his friends, I believed that Michael Wentworth crashed into the sea in '42 and was drowned. I never thought to question whether the crash was genuine or faked.

DIANA (*slowly*): Do you mean the flight to the Middle East was false, was a blind? That deliberately he flew to Greece, and landed there in secret, so that the world, and you, and I, should think him dead?

SIR ERNEST: Yes, Diana.

[She is very much moved.]

DIANA (*slowly*): Is it possible that Michael could have been so cruel?

SIR ERNEST: The best soldiers, Diana, have always fought the hardest wars.

DIANA: How could he leave me, as he did, smiling, cheerful, knowing what he was going to do, without a word or hint of any kind?

SIR ERNEST (*rises, to L. end sofa*): He happened to be rather fond of his country, Diana.

WARN LIGHTS

DIANA: His country. . . . You believe that? You believe that he cares about his country, after the way you've heard him laugh at efficiency and discipline, all the things we've been trying to do, here at home? (*Rises to mantelpiece.*) Do you think he cared for one moment? Do you think he cared whether I broke my heart, or married another man?

SIR ERNEST: Oh, my dear. . . .

DIANA (*in anguish, turns to ERNEST*): I want to love him as I loved him once. I want so much to believe in him.

SIR ERNEST: My dear. . . . You mustn't mind what I'm going to say, but I must say it. You're very unhappy, aren't you?

DIANA: Yes. (*Sits sofa.*)

SIR ERNEST (*above sofa*): There's terrible conflict in your mind, isn't there? You've given love and loyalty to two men, and you've had to choose between them.

DIANA: There's never been any question of choice. Michael came first—always.

SIR ERNEST: Yes. But you want your choice to be justified, don't you? Richard is a dear, unselfish fellow, I know that—but Michael needs you more than Richard does. Richard can live without you. Michael can't.

DIANA: What makes you think that?

SIR ERNEST: Don't you realise that the only thing that kept him

sane—during those three years of hell—was the thought of you, of Robin, of his home?

DIANA : If I could believe that, it would make the months to come easier to bear. But **will** he ever tell me, Ernest? Shall I ever know?

LIGHTS 8

[MICHAEL *comes in from the hall. He has changed. He looks alert, different somehow. MICHAEL puts hat and coat on armchair, crosses R. below sofa, takes Teddy Bear from mantelpiece.*

MICHAEL: I tell you what we'll do, Ernest. We'll get roaring drunk tonight, to celebrate the peace. If Diana wasn't such a wet blanket she'd come up with us. But it wouldn't do for a woman M.P. to be seen fighting in the streets. The Girls Training Corps might get to hear of it. It doesn't matter for an old stager like yourself.

SIR ERNEST : Merely keeping up the traditions of the House of Commons.

[MICHAEL *above sofa to table, Jills his cigarette case.*

DIANA (*rises U.R. of sofa*): I'll come with you, if you really want me to.

MICHAEL : No, not for the world. You'll be happier down here, gossiping with Nanny and Robin.

[SIR ERNEST *D.R.*

DIANA: What are your plans? Does Venning know? Have you given orders about packing?

MICHAEL : Everything's laid on. I'm a quick worker, you know, when I get going. You can give me a bed tonight, can't you, Ernest

SIR ERNEST : Yes, of course.

DIANA: Why don't you go to my flat?

MICHAEL (*carelessly*): Your flat? I'd forgotten you had a flat. I've never seen it, have I?

DIANA: No.

MICHAEL: I don't think I want to. I'd feel wrong there.

DIANA (*gently*): What nonsense!

[MICHAEL *D.L. chooses book.*

SIR ERNEST : Why doesn't Diana come up in a few days, and both of you go to the flat. You won't be off for a while, I suppose.

DIANA: Yes, why not? Where **will** it be this time? (D.C)

MICHAEL : Germany, I suppose. To join the fun and frolic with the boys. Hasn't Ernest been telling you all about it?

DIANA : He's told me what you've done.

MICHAEL : How very indiscreet of you, Ernest, to give away State secrets.

SIR ERNEST (*lightly*): Isn't it time your own wife knew something about your life?

MICHAEL : It's always a mistake, my dear fellow, to find out too much about anybody's life. And the closer you are to someone, the less you ought to know. (*Puts book in coat pocket.*)

SIR ERNEST: Cynical nonsense.

DIANA (*to MICHAEL*) : Do you really mean that?

MICHAEL (*lightly*): Of course, my sweet. (*Opens door and shouts "venning".*)

[DIANA *to sofa, sits.*

(*Turns to SIR ERNEST*) : What about a little drink before we go?

SIR ERNEST : Not for me.

MICHAEL (*to table, helps himself to drink*): Actually I haven't the slightest idea what I'm going to do, nor has Ernest. But I suppose first thing tomorrow morning I shall be dragged like a reluctant schoolboy before a lot of old gentlemen, and they will put their heads together and talk me over for a week, and then decide to send me in a special plane to some God-forsaken spot, and this time I really shall fall into the sea.

[*Enter VENNING.*

VENNING : Sir.

MICHAEL : Tell Sir Ernest's chauffeur we'll be leaving. And stick my bag in the car, will you ?

VENNING: Sir.

SIR ERNEST: I wonder what's happened to that boy of yours. Isn't he going to come and say good-bye?

[*Goes on to the terrace, and calls "Robin".*

MICHAEL: If you really feel like coming up in a few days—it will be nice to see you—

DIANA : You know I'll come, if you really want me, but why is it necessary to dash off with Ernest this evening?

MICHAEL : Once I've made up my mind about a thing, I like to be off and away, you know that. Anything else is anti-climax.

DIANA: There **will** be anti-climax now, though, won't there?
Peace, and——

MICHAEL: And what?

DIANA : Oh, everything.

MICHAEL: Doesn't that rather depend on ourselves?

DIANA: Michael, why are you doing this thing? Is it a sudden wave of patriotism, of blind conviction?

MICHAEL : Not exactly. You came to a decision today, didn't you, that was difficult for you and hard?

[DIANA *looks up quickly.*

MICHAEL: Don't ask me how I know—I understand. It gave me a feeling of humility and at the same time a funny sort of pride. If you could win your battle, so could I. I realized suddenly that if we are to make any future for Robin—for ourselves—I've got to help the people over in Europe just as you're going to help the people here at home. There must be no sitting back yet awhile. Not for our generation.

DIANA (*rises*): That's the way you used to talk to me five years ago. Michael, I want you to forgive me for these past few weeks. You must have thought me very cold, and dull, and strange.

MICHAEL : Not dull. Not strange.

DIANA : When you come home again I'll be different. ... I promise you.

[MICHAEL *smiles. She is not sure why he smiles.*

MICHAEL: Will you?

[*They might be going to say much to each other, but at this moment*

SIR ERNEST *appears at the window with ROBIN.*

SIR ERNEST: Here's this fellow. (*Goes D.R.*)

[DIANA *sits sofa.*

ROBIN (*to above sofa*) : Why are you going to London, Daddy?

WARN LIGHTS

WARN BELLS

MICHAEL : The lights and the music were too much for me.

ROBIN: When are you coming back?

MICHAEL: I'm not sure. It depends, as I was telling Mummy, on a lot of old gentlemen up in London.

ROBIN : Perhaps they are going to give you a medal.

MICHAEL : I shall be enormously offended if they don't.

ROBIN : Perhaps they'll make you President of the new German Republic.

MICHAEL : That's the most terrifying suggestion anyone has made yet. Come on, Ernest. (*Picks up his coat from chair and goes to L. of door*)

[SIR ERNEST *crosses below sofa, puts arm round ROBIN'S shoulders and they cross to door.*

SIR ERNEST : You must come up with Mummy in a few days and join Daddy in London.

ROBIN: Before I go back to school?

SIR ERNEST : Yes.

ROBIN : Good.

[THEY *exeunt.*

[DIANA *rises, moves to below chair.*

MICHAEL : Don't come out. I hate anyone waving farewell from a doorstep. It gives one such a feeling of finality. (*Comes to her.*)

DIANA : There are so many questions I haven't asked you. After what Ernest told me I want to know more—much more.

MICHAEL : I wouldn't bother if I were you.

DIANA : Michael, will you promise to tell me next time when you pretend to plunge into the sea and drown?

MICHAEL: Next time I'll take you with me, and we'll make a proper job of it.

DIANA: I believe you enjoyed it, Michael, and never thought of me at all.

MICHAEL (*smiles*): I didn't think of anyone. Do you remember the Irish airman? I used to quote him to my Sergeant Pilot before we crash-dived off the coast of Greece.

"Nor law, nor duty, bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight,
Drove to this tumult in the clouds."

Good night, darling.

LIGHTS 9

[*He lays two fingers on her cheek, and exits.*

ROBIN (*off*): Good-bye, Daddy. See you soon.

MICHAEL (*off*): Very soon, old fellow.

[DIANA *goes U.L. of sofa, takes cigarette out of box on table, is about to light it when she remembers MICHAEL'S remarks on her "smoking like*

a chimney", so she puts it back in box and picks up copy of speech. ROBIN comes back and stands aimlessly. He sees the books on top of steps.

ROBIN : Daddy never finished putting away the books.

[She doesn't answer.]

Perhaps I'd better do it for him. *(He climbs up the step-ladder. Glances at the titles.)* "Paradise Lost" *(opens book)* and "Paradise Regained". That's awfully stiff. The seniors have been reading that at school. *(Places on shelf.)* "Grimm's Fairy Tales". Gosh! Fancy a Colonel reading Fairy Tales. Daddy's got an awfully queer collection here. I can't think why he didn't let them go for Salvage. *(Puts last book on shelf, and dusts hands.)*

[DIANA is standing above sofa, looking at her carbon copy of the G.T.C. speech. In the distance the church bells begin their peal for victory. It is getting darker.]

The bells, Mums. Do you hear them? *(Runs up to windows.)*

DIANA *(lifts head and listens)*: Yes, darling.

[ROBIN looks out of window. DIANA moves to telephone and lifts receiver, the paper still in her hand.]

ROBIN: Are you going to ring up Uncle Richard? *(Comes into room.)*

DIANA: No. 32, please . . .

ROBIN : I expect he's listening to the bells too. *(Returns to windows.)*

[Bells continue all the while.]

DIANA : Is that Miss Jameson? Yes, it's Mrs. Wentworth speaking. Miss Jameson, have you got that message to the G.T.C. that we were working on this morning? That's right . . . because I want to alter the end. . . . At the moment it reads, "Our children shall be brought up to service, duty and obedience to the State." Yes. . . . Cut all that. . . . And just put instead, "We hope to build a wiser, happier Britain, where our children and ourselves shall grow in courage, faith and understanding". Yes . . . that's all. Thank you so much, Miss Jameson. Good night.

[DIANA puts down receiver. NANNY enters from hall.]

WARN CURTAIN

WARN BIG BEN

NANNY: Are you there, Mummy? I wondered if you could hear the bells in here. They're so loud and clear in the kitchen.

[Crosses below sofa to collect tray from coffee table. DIANA hands her MICHAEL'S cup from table.]

DIANA : Yes, Nan. We can hear them well.

ROBIN (*to above sofa*): I bet the old sexton is stiff tomorrow.

NANNY : Venning tells me the Colonel **will** be away for some time. He has to take the rest of his things up in the morning.

DIANA: Yes, Nan. The Government want him for some very important post. He's going up with Sir Ernest this evening.

NANNY: **Will** it be abroad? (*Picks up tray.*)

DIANA : I'm afraid so.

[NANNY *takes tray behind sofa to table L.*

ROBIN : Uncle Richard is going away too. To Wales. **Will** we be going up to see Daddy before he goes?

DIANA: Would you like to, darling?

ROBIN: Rather. (*Comes D.L. of sofa, sits beside DIANA.*

NANNY: Shall I close the windows? (*Goes up to windows.*)

DIANA: Please, Nan.

[NANNY *shuts out the sound of the bells. Then she comes to behind sofa.*

NANNY: It's queer, isn't it? I was saying to Venning in the kitchen, all over the country people have been longing, and waiting, and praying for this day to come, and now that it's over, it's been quiet and ordinary, just like any other day in summer. The war is over, the peace is to come, and we shall all go back to being just the same as we were before.

DIANA (*slowly*): Shall we?

[*There is a pause.*

ROBIN : Not quite the same, Nan. You forget I'm five years older. And I'm the chap that matters. Daddy said so. Isn't that right, Mums?

DIANA (*putting her hand on his knee*): Yes, darling. . . . You're the one that matters.

NANNY: It's just on nine. Shall I turn on the wireless?

DIANA : Yes, Nan.

[NANNY *switches on. We hear the last two notes of Big Ben, and then the voice of the announcer: "This is London. His Majesty King George the Sixth".*

SLOW CURTAIN

END OF PLAY

