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1960.

GOOD MEN
SLEEP
AT HOME

Other plays by Walter Ellis

ALMOST A HONEYMOON

A LITTLE BIT OF FLUFF

S. O. S.

GLASS HOUSES

HAWLEYS OF THE HIGH STREET

BEDTIME STORY

ETC.

GOOD MEN
SLEEP
AT HOME

A Farce in Three Acts

by

WALTER ELLIS

..

London

George Allen and Unwin Ltd

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1940

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WOKING

GOOD MEN SLEEP AT HOME was first presented by Shaftesbury Plays, Ltd., under the direction of George Black, Jr., and Hairy Hanson, at the Shaftesbury Theatre, London, on April 2, 1940, with the following cast:

Joe Bromelli	ANTONYHOLLES
Alice	ELSIE HENIGHAN
Mr. X	CHRISTOPHER STEELE
Jack Marx	MACKENZIEWARD
Dr. Boone	PHILIP KINO
George VVarburton	HUGH WAKEFIELD
Pamela Brooks	JANE WEISH
Nixon	BRIAN REECE
Mrs. Warburton	OLGA LINDO
Clare Roy	BETTY LARKE-SMITH

The Play produced by WALTER ELLIS

CHARACTERS

GEORGE WARBURTON	A Financier
JACK MARX	An Inventor
JOE BROMELLI	Proprietor of "The Cuckoo's Nest"
DR. BOONE	Medical
MR. X	A Stranger
NIXON	Butler
MRS. WARBURTON	George's wife
PAMELA BROOKS	A novelist
CLARE ROY	A film star
ALICE	Maid
FIRST MAN }	Male nurses
SECOND MAN }	

SCENES

ACT ONE A sitting-room at a country road-house: "The Cuckoo's Nest." A morning in late summer.

ACT Two Mr. Warburton's flat—Knightsbridge, London.
The next morning.

ACT THREE The same. A few hours later.

ACT ONE

SCENE: *The scene represents a semi-private room at a wad-house a few miles out of London. It is on the ground floor with a large bay window at the back showing trees with deck-chairs and tables away to the left. The window is practically on one side L.o.c. To the left below the window is a passage entrance, and to the right up-stage is a bedroom door. Fireplace down right and settee with a table behind it. A table-desk down left with telephone, chair, etc., and a small bureau above door R. A table up L. and a small easy-chair with two cushions by fireplace.*

There is a general appearance of barrenness, neglect, and fustiness, with time-tables and such like on the table, and a nondescript male bust ornamenting the writing-desk.

It is a morning in late summer.

JOE BROMELLI enters R. He is in his shirt-sleeves and generally hot and bothered. Pie pauses c. for a moment to collect himself, then goes to window and calls.

He speaks broken English and his excitable Latin temperament is in evidence at all times.

JOE. *[Calling]* Alice! Alice! *[Comes to archway L. and calls again]* Alice! *[Comes quickly to telephone. At telephone]* Hullo! I want New Pudscy Police Station. Yes, please. It's urgent. *[Holding the receiver.]* *[ALICE runs in at window.]*

ALICE. Did you call, sir?

JOE. Did I call! Any signs of the doctor yet?

ALICE. No, sir—I haven't seen him,

JOE. He promised faithfully to come this morning.

ALICE. Williams says he might find a doctor in the swimming pool who comes here regular like, but he may not be dressed.

JOE. Well, I don't care who it is as long as it's a doctor. Those two people in there look pretty bad to me. Tell William to find someone at once.

[ALICE is going.]

Oh, and—er—

[ALICE lingers.]

Find out if they had any bags or suit-cases with them.

ALICE. Yes, sir. [*Going and returning a little each time.*]

JOE. And bring some hot water.

ALICE. Yes, sir.

JOE. And tell William to bring that doctor—dressed or undressed.

ALICE. [*Shocked*] Hoh! [*ALICE runs out by window.*]

JOE. [*At telephone*] Hullo! Is that the police station? I say—there was a motor-car accident here late last night. *Here—here!* "The Cuckoo's Nest." Eh? No, Pm not trying to be funny. . . . Eh? Well, where is the beastly policeman? All right—I'll try Bidhurst. Thank you. [*Dials again.*]

[*ALICE re-enters at Archway with two damaged suit-cases and jug of hot water.*]

ALICE. William found these bags in the wreckage, sir.

JOE. Well, put them over there for the moment.

[*AncE places the hot water on table behind settee, and the bags above door R.*]

I'm trying to get a policeman from somewhere. [*Sits table L.*]

ALICE. There's only one policeman at New Pudsey, and he's an awful flirt.

JOE. He won't flirt with me. But he's gone over to the sports ground and I'm trying to get Bidhurst. [*Retaining the receiver.*]

ALICE. They're not going to die in there, are they, sir?

JOE. We gotta wait and see what the doctor says. It's very difficult to tell what will happen when people get injured.

ALICE. Isn't post-mortem the best way to find out?

JOE. Sure—but very few people favour that method except doctors.

ALICE. Is "unconscious" very dangerous?

JOE. Not always, sometimes it's a habit.

ALICE. A customer said I was unconscious the other day.

JOE. The customer is always right—aha! [*Turns to 'phone*] Hullo. Is that the police station? There was a motor accident here last night . . . man and his wife injured. . . . What's that? All right. [*Replaces receiver. To ALICE*] The policeman at Bidhurst is in bed with 'flu. This *would* happen while your mistress was away. Now go and tell William to jump on his bike and run over to the sports ground.

**

ALICE. Yes, sir.

[ALICE crosses up left.]

JOE. And tell him I want the doctor.

ALICE. [Looking off left] If you please, sir, there's the gentleman in the garden who William says witnessed the accident.

JOE. Good. Bring him in.

ALICE. [Calling off] Will you come this way please, sir?

JOE. He'll be useful. We'll keep him here till the police come. I'll talk to him. You take that hot water into the bedroom.

[ALICE exits with hot water, right.]

[During JOE'S last speech MR. X enters and remains up Centre. He is a thin man about forty, with a moustache. He wears sports shirt, white shoes, straw hat. He is very voluble but, having an impediment or cleft palate is perfectly incoherent. He speaks very confidentially to everyone as though imparting great secrets. He speaks quickly, sounding rather like Donald Duck.]

[Turning to MR. X and shaking hands] Well, sir, pleased to meet you.

MR. X. [Quite unintelligible] And I'm very pleased to meet you, too. Oh, what a terrible accident. But there you are, "In the midst of life you are in death," aren't you?

JOE. Je ne comprends pas. Qu'est-ce que vous dites?

MR. X. I'm sorry, I don't understand. I don't speak Italian.

JOE. Was ist das? Sie sprechen zu schnell.

MR. X. Most peculiar. I have no foreign languages, sir.

JOE. Oh, I don't understand what you're talking about. I understand you saw this motor accident last night and can tell us exactly how it happened.

MR. X. It all happened so suddenly, I've hardly got over it yet. My nerves are still shaking like an aspen in a jelly.

JOE. [Straining to hear with a baffled and pained expression] You did see the accident?

MR. X. Oh yes! I saw the accident right from the very beginning. The two cars were each going in opposite directions and they both came together "Wallop!"

JOE. [Mystified] Well, that all sounds very nice. Very clear and concise. I like the way you put it.

MR. X. One car was going out the gate, and the other car was coming in. Oh, it was awful! Do you think you'll want me as a wet nurse?

JOE. Want you as a *wet nurse*?

MR. X. No, Not a \vct nurse. A witness.

JOK. Sure, .sure, I got you the first time. But do you mind sitting down there for a moment? [*Leads him to chair L.*] Sit down. Make yourself comfortable.

[*JACK MARX enters. He is a good-looking young man about thirty, dressed in white suit, etc.*]

JACK. Ah, there you are, Joe. I've been looking for you all the morning.

JOE. So has everybody else, worst luck!

MR. X. Lf this young man wants my name and address . . .

JOK. Sit down, please. I'm engaged at the moment.

JACK. If I come down here to patronize your rotten place you ought to look after me.

JOE. Corpo di Baccho! What's the trouble now?

JACK. I saw her again yesterday.

JOE. Who?

JACK. My "wonder" in the silvery bathing-dress. She looked simply divine—just like some beautiful mermaid.

JOE. Personally I'm not struck on mermaids.

JACK. Why not?

JOE. Their tails are too problematical.

JACK. Who is she—do you know?

JOE. I've not got the faintest idea.

MR. X. [*Rising, suddenly starts another incoherent harangue*] Of course you know, I don't live here. I'm only a bird of passage.

JOE. [*Urging him back to his seat*] Yes, I'll make a note of that. If you'll excuse me, I'm very busy at the moment. [*Returns to JACK.*]

MR. X. I'll tell you when you're disengaged. [*Sits.*]

JACK. [*To JOE*] Who's your friend?

*JoE. I'm not quite sure. I think he's swallowed something valuable and can't get at it.

JACK. Listen. I tried hard yesterday to keep my eye on her in the swimming pool. I didn't leave for a moment, but she dodged me somehow, and now she's gone.

JOE. [*Turning to leave*] Well, better luck next time.

JACK. This is the fourth time I've seen her, and she won't even look at me.

JOE. A lot of girls see plenty when they're not looking.

MR. X. [*Rising, with hand up like a schoolboy*] If I may be excused for a moment . . .

JOE. Urrr! [*He makes a savage movement towards MR. X, who subsides on the chair again.*]

JACK. But you must know who she is?

JOE. I tell you I don't know, and I've not gotta time to* go broody over mermaids.

MR. X. [*Ruing*] Oh, please be kind enough to excuse me . . . [*But he is seated again before JOE says anything.*]

JOE. I've got enough trouble on my hands as it is. People lying unconscious in there——[*Pointing R.*] No doctor . . . No police . . . and men who talk but don't say anything.

JACK. What, politicians?

JOE. No. [*Indicates MR. X.*]

JACK. Oh, I see. Well, what's happened?

JOE. We had an accident here last night.

JACK. Really?

JOE. A man and his wife, in there [*R.*] both unconscious. A lady in a sports car going out by the far gates signalled that she was gonna turna right . . . [*Gesture.*]

JACK. And of course turneda left. . . . [*Same gesture.*]

JOE. Naturally.

JACK. Obviously.

JOE. Well, the other fool ought to have known that, but apparently he didn't.

MR. X. I really must ask you to excuse me. . . .

JOE. [*Raging to MR. X*] Let me have this! [*Then very sweetly between his teeth*] Do you mind? [*Sits him down*] Thank you too much.

MR. X. I really can't stay here all day . . .

JOE. [*To JACK*] He turned in at the gates, thinking the sports car was going to the right, and there was a devil of a smash. The man and his wife were picked up unconscious. The other girl, apparently not hurt very much, lost her head, jumped back into her car and drove off.

MR. X. [*Who has been following the story and amplifying it in dumb show, now rises eagerly and crosses to them*] If you want to know all about the accident, I can tell you . . .

JOE. No, no, no more, please. [*Crosses to R. of JACK*] It's all yours, I give, I give. [*He makes a martyrlic exit R.*]

MR. X. [*Shaking hands with JACK and grasping the opportunity to tell his version*] You see, sir, it was like this. The two cars were going in opposite directions and they both came together "Wallop." [*He splashes JACK.*]

JACK. Well, I was thinking of going for a swim, but I don't think I'll bother now, [*Wiping his eye.*]

MR. X. I can tell you all about it if you'll wait a minute. . . .

JACK. [*Showing him back to chair*] Yes, yes, yes. I quite agree, but I'm afraid it's all a little too hechnical—er technical for me.

[*DR. BOONE enters briskly at window. He is a very hairy man with side-whiskers and bushy hair. He wears bathing trunks, robe, and slippers, and carries a little black bag.*]

DOCTOR. [*To JACK, smartly*] I am Dr. Boone. An urgent case, I believe?

JACK. [*Doubtfully glancing at MR. X*] Yes—er—yes, doctor.

MR. X. [*Going to doctor*] If you want to know all about the accident I can tell you. You see, the two cars were going in the opposite directions, and they came together "Wallop!" [*Pointing L.*] One car was going out the gate, and the other car was coming in. [*Pointing R.*] Oh, it was awful! [*Covers face with hands.*]

DOCTOR. [*Going over to JACK, and putting bag on table R.*] You know, this man's bad!

JACK. You're telling me! He's putrid! [*Nervously looking round for someone to come.*]

DOCTOR. [*Crossing to MR. X*] Well, sit down, sit down. Let's have a look at you.

MR. X. [*Returning to chair*] I don't know what you want to look at me for!

DOCTOR. No, no, don't tell me. Let me find out for myself. I'm seldom wrong in my diagnoses. [*Turns to his bag for the stethoscope.*]

MR. X. Do you want me to say "Ninety-nine?"

[*MR. X places his straw hat on the floor.*]

DOCTOR. [*Crosses to JACK*] I'm afraid his tonsils are not quite as they should be. [*Referring to JACK.*] What is his business—do you know?

JACK. [*R.*] Afraid not. Professor of Elocution, I should think.

DOCTOR returns to MR. X and treads on the straw hat.]

DOCTOR. So sorry.

[*He throws it away as if it were nothing; examines MR. X.*]

[*JoE re-enters R., followed by ALICE, who remains by door R.*]

DOCTOR. Now let me have a look at you. Head back. Open, please.

JACK. [*Quietly to JOE*] The doctor—the doctor.

JOE. Oh, good! [*Crosses to doctor*] No, that's not the patient, doctor.

DOCTOR. Eh? You don't mean that?

[*DOCTOR looks at MR. X in disgust. Closes his mouth and pushes his headforward.*]

JOE. My name is Bromelli—I'm the proprietor here.

DOCTOR. Oh, how do you do? You must excuse my attire; I was bathing in the pool when they came for me—I understood it was very urgent.

JOE. It is urgent. I 'phoned for a doctor last night, but he hasn't turned up. The patients are here in the bedroom—two of them.

DOCTOR. Really? [*Looking back at MR. X embarrassed*] But—er—oh, very well, I'll come at once. [*Gets bag from table R. Returns to MR. X*] You should take things quietly, you know. And if you'd like to come into my clinic for a time, in spite of your appearance, I think I can cure you. I'll send the account here to Mr. Bromelli.

[*DOCTOR exits R. ALICE closes door after him.*]

MR. X. [*Fairly distinctly*] Oh hell!

JOE. [*To MR. X*] Will you go with my maid and wait till the police come? I want you to give them *in your own words* your account of the accident. Tell them everything. Don't keep anything back!

MR. X. Oh yes, I'll be delighted to give the full details.

JOE. [*Interrupting him*] Alice, show this gentleman to my office, and don't let him tell anyone about the accident.

[*MR. X, now on steps, comes down to JOE.*]

MR. X. You can depend on me. I won't tell a soul, only the police. Oh, it was a horrible accident . . .

[*JoE, with a ferocious noise, rushes at him. MR. X scampers off like a scared rabbit, waving the pieces of his broken hat, and babbling to himself*]

JACK. He *is* a little chatterbox, isn't he?

JOE. People like that make a nice change now and again.

JACK. [*Ironically*] Oh, they do, don't they?

[WARBURTON *is heard off, chortling. THEY look at each other.*]

Oh, *he's* getting better, surely?

JOE. I don't care now the doctor's here: it takes a great responsibility off my hands.

JACK. Who is the chap, do you know?

JOE, I haven't the foggiest. He must be a married man, because he kept moaning about his wife when I picked him up.

JACK. And you've got them both in here?

JOE. Yes.

JACK. Are these their bags?

JOE. I imagine so.

JACK. That's evidently the lady's bag, and this is obviously the man's. [*Looking at the initials*] "G.W."—George Washington.

[JACK *brings the bag down to settee.*]

JOE. No, he doesn't look truthful enough for that.

JACK. [*Peeping carefully at a paper where the bag is torn*] Look at this, Joe, it's all full of papers.

JOE. Don't open it. Leave that for the police.

JACK. But you ought to advise his relatives or someone. [*Reading a paper*] Warburton? G.—W——? Jove! if this is George Warburton—I know the man.

JOE. You do?

JACK. Well, when I say "know him" I mean I've got some business with him. *Oh, yes, sir!*

JOE. That may help us.

JACK. [*A warning note*] I've been waiting to see him for some time. This is quite a stroke of luck. [*Replaces bag.*]

JOE. Well, you can't see him now.

[*The DOCTOR re-enters R. and watches JACK for a moment.*]

JACK. Perhaps not. But I can wait for him here, can't I? I'll go and do a spot of dressing right away, while I've got time, [*Going into ecstasies*] And if you see my mermaid, say "I love you. I adore you, I worship——" [*looking at doctor*]. Oh, my lor' not you!

[JACK *dries up and exits by window.*]

DOCTOR. I'm running a Mental Home myself, but this place is quite a revelation to me.

JOE. What is the verdict, doctor?

DOCTOR. I don't think there is a great deal to worry about. The man's tonsils are, of course, the chief trouble, and as soon as he's well enough, he must have those out. But that's not serious. We have a method now of removing diseased or hypertrophied tonsils by means of a galvano cautery.

JOE. Yes, sure—you took the words right out of my mouth! Suppose he doesn't want to have his tonsils out?

DOCTOR. Then he'll have to have his teeth out. He must have something out. I'm sure there's infection there.

JOE. Oh, I quite agree.

DOCTOR. Who did the bandaging?

JOE. [*Proudly*] I did.

DOCTOR. Quite unnecessary, I've removed it.

JOE. [*Crushed*] Oh! but after an accident, you gotta do something.

DOCTOR. What accident?

JOE. Being thrown out of the motor car, of course.

DOCTOR. [*Mystified*] Oh, indeed! I didn't know that.

JOE. Yes, it was a terrible smash.

DOCTOR. Oh, dear, dear, dear! That's news to me. Why wasn't I told?

JOE. I thought you knew, doctor.

DOCTOR. I can't guess these things. Besides, I wasn't examining them for anything like that. [*Crosses R.*] Still—still, whatever symptoms there may be later, the man's tonsils undoubtedly need attention. I'm sure of that.

JOE. Yes, yes, doctor—I'm sure he's got terrible troublesome tonsils.

DOCTOR. [*Opening bag*] Now, I want you to soak these tabloids in water—they'll take about an hour to dissolve—and give them to him frequently. If he's asleep, don't wake him; but he must have them every half-hour.

JOE. [*Takes the packet*] Yes, doctor.

DOCTOR. [*Handing a bottle to JOE*] And I should give him a teaspoonful of that every quarter of an hour—a large teaspoonful.

JOE. [*Resigned*] Yes, doctor.

DOCTOR. [*Handing another packet*] If he should feel any pain, rub this liniment on very freely.

JOE. On his tonsils?

DOCTOR. Round the neck or chest or anywhere; it won't do any harm.

JOE. Will it do any good?

DOCTOR. Probably not; but it's highly recommended. And give him two of these pills with an effervescing drink every two hours.

JOE. Yes, doctor.

DOCTOR. [*Handing out another bottle*] If he complains of nausea, I should give him a large spoonful of this—to be repeated later.

JOE. Yes, doctor.

DOCTOR. And if he's in any pain after the treatment——

JOE——AS he probably will be——

DOCTOR.——Well then, we might get further advice. In any case, I'll examine him thoroughly when I come back. Now, you know exactly what to do?

JOE. [*Looking at the many parcels*] Perfectly.

DOCTOR. I don't think I've forgotten anything.

JOE. It don't seem possible, does it? How about the lady?

DOCTOR. She's dozing at the moment: I've just given her a sleeping draught. She *must* rest. [*Closes bag. Crosses up*] Oh, by the way, keep my name out of the papers, if you can. I'm not supposed to be down here—on pleasure.

JOE. [*Nods assent*] I never spill anything. [*Smiling*] You've got a nice day for it, ain't you?

DOCTOR. Er—yes, H'm! Shall I send my account on here?

JOE. Oh, yes, you can *send* it anywhere you like. Must I keep these people in bed?

DOCTOR. If you give the man that treatment, he won't *want* to stop in bed.

JOE. I'm sure he won't.

DOCTOR. Of course, if he's had a blow on the head it may affect him in various ways. He may even become violent. However, I've got to take a lady friend home now, but I'll pop back in the car and run over him. . . .

[*Exit DOCTOR by window L.*]

JOE. [*Alarmed*] No, doctor! [*Goes to follow DOCTOR, but changes his mind.*]

[*ALICE, with breakfast tray, crosses from the archway L, to*

door R. As she approaches, WARBURTON is heard off, laughing peculiarly. ALICE backs away, marly spilling the tray. JOE comes forward and, helping to rearrange the tray, wipes a saucer on his trousers.'}

[A little nervous] Where are you taking that? Did they order breakfast?

ALICE. No, nobody ordered it, but I thought I'd better take it in.

JOE. You'd better wait till he's simmered down a bit. Put the tray down there—on the table. [Table R.]

[ALICE slams the tray down.]

JOE. And don't slam the things about.

ALICE. [Adjusting the cups, etc.] But I shan't have time. You know I'm leaving to-day.

JOE. Can't you get on the 'phone and tell the people there's illness in the house, and say you can't leave just yet?

ALICE. No, I can't do that. The lady doesn't know I'm working here.

JOE. She *must* know.

ALICE. She doesn't. Lots of people won't have girls from public places, and I'm so keen on getting into private service.

JOE. Does your mistress know that?

ALICE. Yes, and she's helped me to do it.

JOE. [Angrily] Why wasn't I told?

ALICE. She said she'd give you orders later on.

JOE. [Going, turns] What do you mean by "orders"? Who do you think is master here?

ALICE. I'd hate to tell you. [Laughs.]

JOE. Pah! [Stream of Italian.]

[JOE stamps out by archway, still carrying doctor's bottles.

ALICE gathers up the tray and crosses L.]

[WARBURTON enters R. He is a well set-up man of forty. His clothes are dirty and torn, but he is cheerful withal. He gazes round with a glint of wild amusement in his eye, ALICE, with a little shriek, makes for the door left, cups rattling.']}

WARBURTON, [Stopping her] Who are you?

ALICE. [Timidly] My name's Alice.

WARBURTON. Alice? Absurd. [Coaxingly] Come over here.

[ALICE does so.]

I say, you're not a bad looker, are you?

ALICE. [*With a giggle*] Do you think so, sir?

WARBURTON. Yes, rather. Have you been here long?

ALICE. Yes, sir, but I'm leaving to-day.

WARBURTON. I'm sorry to hear that. Where are you going?

ALICE. I'm going into private service, sir.

WARBURTON. Pity. I'd like to have seen more of you. [*With meaning.*]

ALICE. [*Giggling*] Did you want anything, sir?

WARBURTON. Well—er—no, no. Go away.

[ALICE is going. At the archway she laughs at him over her shoulder.]

Go away!

[ALICE, all of a flutter, Goes. Almost immediately there is a terrific glass crash. JOE comes on enraged, with a stream of Italian. He turns, and with a gasp sees WARBURTON. They dodge one another "cat-and-mouse" fashion for a few moments. Both laughing.]

WARBURTON. [*Suddenly*] Who are you?

JOE. [*Laughing nervously*] It's all right. It's quite all right. I'm Joe Bromelli. Ha, ha, ha, ha.

[THEY BOTH stop laughing suddenly.]

WARBURTON. [*Severely*] What is there to laugh at?

JOE. [*L. of table L.*] Nothing—I was—just being pleasant.

WARBURTON. [*Trying to collect himself*] I don't feel very pleasant. Where am I?

JOE. [*A little swagger*] You're in "The Cuckoo's Nest." [*Coming L.C.*] This is a road-house. I'm the proprietor.

WARBURTON. Good heavens!

JOE. You haven't been very well, but the doctor says you'll be all right so soon as you've had your tonsils out.

WARBURTON. What are my tonsils to do with you?

JOE. Oh, nothing, sir—I don't want them. Would you like some breakfast?

WARBURTON. Breakfast? [*Trying to remember*] Is this to-morrow?

JOE. No, it's to-day.

WARBURTON. Of course it's to-day, but speaking as from yesterday to-day would be to-morrow, wouldn't it?

JOE. I can't see that, because if to-day is to-morrow, to-day would really be yesterday, and to-morrow—

[WARBURTON glares at him. JOE gives vent to a little nervous laugh.]

Well, it doesn't matter very much, does it?

WARBURTON. It matters to me.

JOE. [*Brightly*] You've had a motor accident.

WARBURTON. [*Trying to remember*] An accident?

JOE. Sure. You were driving in at the gates here when another car ran into you, and we had to pick you up, carry you in, and put you to bed.

WARBURTON. [*With disgust*] What—in there?

JOE. These are the best rooms: we call it the bridal suite.

WARBURTON. [*To himself*] And I've been there all night?

JOE. You're quite welcome, sir.

WARBURTON. Then, this *is* to-morrow?

JOE. Yeah—no—I don't know: you've got me all mixed up now.

WARBURTON. I *must* leave here at once. [*Fuming*] What will my wife think?

JOE. [*Amazed*] Isn't that your wife in there?

[WARBURTON glares at JOE and he squirms.]

I say—isn't it?

WARBURTON. Do you mean to tell me that I've been in there all night with a woman?

JOE. [*Placatory*] But—but you were unconscious.

WARBURTON. [*Fiercely*] Who put me in there?

JOE. I—I—I—I did. I did my best. I'm only human.

WARBURTON. [*Madly*] Who told you that? [*Quieter tone*] Tell me, what's the lady like?

JOE. She's pretty attractive.

WARBURTON. What's the use of telling me that now?

JOE. Not much good now, is it?

WARBURTON. What did she say when we were picked up?

JOE. Nothing. She just looked *at you*.

WARBURTON. Looked at me? What then?

JOE. She became unconscious. [*Pause*] I'm not surprised.

WARBURTON. Did anyone else see the accident?

JOE. Er—only a few.

WARBURTON. That's a mercy!

JOE. Just the people round the bathing pool—about two hundred.

WARBURTON. Good heavens! Here's a nice position to be in. What can I possibly say to my wife?

JOE. Well, they put people together in hospitals, don't they?

WARBURTON. [*With contempt*] But not in a *bridal suite*.

JOE. Why? Who *is* the lady in there, because I've got to tell the police?

WARBURTON. How the devil should I know?

JOE. Can't you remember if there was anyone in the car with you when you started out? Try to think. Your brain can't be gone entirely.

WARBURTON. What do you mean by my brain gone?

JOE. Well, you must have had two or three blondes at least as a—*a*—sideline. Do try to think! Just to please me, eh?

[WARBURTON *thinks hard and then smiles reminiscently.*]

WARBURTON. [*Chuckling*] Ha, ha, ha.

JOE. [*Encouragingly*] That's better. Give it time. Let it come. Let it come.

WARBURTON. Ah yes! Now I remember. She asked me to run her down here for a dip in the pool. That was all. Nothing more.

JOE. Quite so.

WARBURTON. *You* know I haven't done anything wrong.

JOE. You didn't get much of a chance, did you?

WARBURTON. Yes. Now I remember. It was Clare Roy, the film star.

JOE. Has she any husbands? [*Crosses L. to 'phone.*]

WARBURTON. Oh yes. She's had a couple.

JOE. [*To himself*] Good! [*He dials 0*] Hello. Give me the police station.

WARBURTON. [*Rising*] What are you going to do? [*Crossing to JOE.*]

JOE. [*At 'phone*] The name of the woman in the accident was Clare Roy, the film star. Yes, she's had a couple.

WARBURTON. Good Heavens, man, what have you done?

JOE. I gotta tell the police.

WARBURTON. [*Fuming*] Oh, there's going to be trouble here, [c.]

JOE. I hope not.

WARBURTON. You've got to think of that woman's professional reputation. She'll be furious. I'd better have a chat with her at once. *[Going to Door R.]*

JOE. *[Pulling him up]* You can't do that. She's had a sleeping draught.

WARBURTON. But I must do something. May I leave a letter for her?

JOE. Sure. Come on. Sit down.

[WARBURTON goes left to desk.]

WARBURTON. Then that may help me out. *[Starting to write]*
Have you a car I can borrow?

JOE. My man William will run you home if you wish it.

WARBURTON. *[Writing]* Good. Get my bag, will you?

[JoE rings bell.]

WARBURTON. And don't forget, this is your responsibility. You've placed me in this position, and you've got to do your utmost to help me out of it.

JOE. I'm only too pleased to help anyone who comes down to "The Cuckoo's Nest" to play games.

WARBURTON. *[After a dignified pause]* I don't play games, sir.

JOE. Present company, of course.

[ALICE stumps in from passage left.]

Alice, is that all the luggage?

ALICE. Yes, sir. This is the lady's bag, and this is the gentleman's bag. *[Gives WARBURTON an arch look.]*

JOE. Thank you very much.

[Exit ALICE.]

WARBURTON. *[As ALICE goes]* I should kill that girl, you know.

JOE. *[Bringing bags down R.]* It's her last day here. She doesn't care.

WARBURTON. Now, let the lady have this letter directly she wakes up. *[Places it conspicuously on desk.]*

JOE. Very good, sir.

WARBURTON. And don't forget it, whatever you do.

JOE. No. I won't forget.

WARBURTON. Now look here, when I get home I may ring you up and ask for—*Mr. Stringer*. Will you answer the 'phone and say you *are* Stringer? Also, that I've been detained with you here on important business?

JOE. Yes, I don't mind doing that.

WARBURTON. I'm ringing up my wife now. My name's Warburton—can you remember that?

JOE. I'll try. It's a bit difficult. War—burton.

WARBURTON. Think of Burton ales. [*At 'phone—in angelic tones*] Hullo! Is that you, dear? . . . George speaking. [*Laughs*] Yes, d'arlihg.

JOE. [*Appreciatively*] That's the stuff to give 'em.

WARBURTON. Sh! [*In 'phone*] I hope you're not worried about me, dear. I've been detained here with Stringer on business. That new invention, the Marx engine, is going to be a very big thing for all of us. . . . [*Alarmed*] What's that? . . . Oh, but why—why? There was no necessity for it.

[*He covers the receiver and turns to JOE.*]

Oh, my lor'! she's been to the police to ask if I am on the accident list. They'll make enquiries all over the damned place [*To 'phone*] Hullo! . . . Why do you do these things without asking me? You'd better ring up at once and say you've made a mistake. . . . Yes . . . Eh? . . . But I *am* all right, I tell you. I'm down here with Stringer now. I'll introduce him to you. . . . Come here, Stringer, old bird, . . . my wife!

[*He holds up receiver to JOE.*]

JOE. [*Feebly*] How do you do, Mrs. Worthington, old bird.

WARBURTON. [*Correcting*] Warburton—nor Worthington. [*Into 'phone*] Isn't he funny, dear? You ought to see his face—you'd die laughing.

[*JoE indignant.*]

[*To JOE*] Tell her we've been working on the new engine all night.

[*He holds receiver to JOE.*]

JOE. Hullo! We've been having a ride on an engine all night.

WARBURTON. No, no, no! [*To 'phone*] He says he must have his little joke. That's all it is. [*Laughs into 'phone*] Ha, ha, ha, ha! [*To JOE—holding out the receiver*] Laugh—go on!

[*JoE laughs feebly, then WARBURTON laughs, and they join in together.*]

JOE. 'Ere, what the devil are we laughing at?

WARBURTON. [*Into 'phone*] Eh? But there's been no accident,

darling, I assure you. And I'm coming home at once. . . . Yes!
Good-bye, darling! [*Holds the receiver to JOE.*]

JOE. [*To 'phone*] Good-bye, darling.

WARBURTON. [*Hangs up the receiver quickly*] What is your number? Oh, yes! [*Looks at the apparatus and makes a note on his cuff. Hurrying*] Now, if I ring up at any time and ask for Stringer, just say I've been with you, and *stick to it*.

JOE. But suppose Mr. Stringer himself should be here? I don't always answer the 'phone.

WARBURTON. He won't be here. [*Rises.*]

JOE. You can't be sure. On a fine day this place gets packed.

WARBURTON. [*Lowering his voice*] There's *no such person* as Mr. Stringer.

JOE. [*Smiles*] No such person? Oh-h-h-h! I see!

WARBURTON. A man doesn't want to take his wife about with him always. So, occasionally I go away on business with—Mr. Stringer. It saves a lot of argument. Now, buzz off and get that car ready for me. [*Crosses to the bags.*]

JOE. [*Crossing up*] If I can find William.

WARBURTON. [R.] Ah, this is my bag. [*Choosing one*] It's had a bit of a smash, hasn't it? Where's my hat?

[*Enter JACK, stands in archway L.*]

JOE. I didn't see any hat at the time of the accident.

WARBURTON. I can't go home without one—that's very certain. Could *you* lend me a hat of some kind?

JOE. I'll see what I can do for you.

WARBURTON. I wonder.

[*Exit JOE by window.*]

JACK. Good morning, Mr. Warburton.

WARBURTON. [*Shortly*] Oh, good morning.

JACK. You remember me?

WARBURTON. [*Reluctantly*] Yes, yes, of course—Mr. er—Mr. Marx. But I'm not feeling too well at the moment, and I'm anxious to go home.

JACK. I know you've had a nasty accident, but I should like a few words with you.

WARBURTON. I can't stop now. You can see me at my office any time.

JACK. I've called at your office twice daily for the past month, but you've either been out or in conference.

WARBURTON. Well, I'm a very busy man.

JACK. [*With meaning*] But you can find time for relaxation here—at "The Cuckoo's Nest,"

[WARBURTON *leaves the bag by the window and works down to settee R.*]

WARBURTON. Oh, very well, what is it you want?

JACK. Two months ago I brought you my new invention, the Marx engine. You had it tested, you approved of it, even the terms of the contract were agreed. Now, for some reason, you seem to have changed your mind.

WARBURTON. As I told you, I am not an engineer. I'm a financier.

JACK. That's why I came to you.

WARBURTON. I handed the whole matter over to Mr. Stringer. He's the big noise in my business.

JACK. And Mr. Stringer is never to be seen.

WARBURTON. [*Crossing to desk L.*] Well, these things take time, besides, you must be patient.

JACK. Why can't I see Mr. Stringer? I shan't eat him.

WARBURTON. Like me, he's a very busy man.

JACK. Did you come down here on business?

WARBURTON. Certainly. As a matter of fact, I expected to meet Stringer here.

JACK. [*Smiling*'] Indeed. Does he come here very often?

WARBURTON. Occasionally. But I can't wait now: I've got other matters to attend to. [*Picks up the lady's fiag and crosses upc.*]

JACK. [*Warming up*] Well, it won't do, Mr. Warburton. I shall send for the model and the specification to-morrow.

WARBURTON. I can't give them to you. Stringer's got them, and I can't hunt him out in five minutes. You'll have to excuse me. I'm late now.

[*JoE enters at window with a hat in readiness.*]

JOE. How's this for a hat?

WARBURTON. [*Takes it mechanically*] Thanks!

JACK. If I don't hear something by to-morrow j I shall start legal proceedings.

WARBURTON. You can do as you like, of course; but that—ha! ha! [*Puts on the hat, which is absurdly large for him*—that will only make us laugh. [*Laughs.*]

JACK. You've said it.

[*Exit WARBURTON.*]

JOE. [*Coming down*] What's the trouble now?

JACK. You remember my telling you about that new engine of mine?

JOE. Oh, the invention.

JACK. He's the man who promised to put it on the market for me. I thought I wasn't mistaken.

JOE. Oh, good!

JACK. Not so good. If I'm not very careful he'll do me out of every penny.

JOE. [*Tidying round*] Why don't you wait here and have a chat with the lady in here? She probably plays with his cheque-book and can pull the strings.

JACK. [*Cigarette*] It isn't his wife.

JOE. I know that.

JACK. I got all the facts about the accident from old blotto voce.

JOE. Old who?

JACK. You know—[*Bus. imitating MR. X*] that chap. It appears that the woman who was driving *with* Warburton picked herself up and dashed away in the other woman's car—before you came on the scene.

JOE. Are you sure of that? [*To desk L.*]

JACK. Positive. The girl you picked up was the one driving the tourer by herself.

JOE. She was clinging to the man when I found them. Hey! This is gonna make things pretty awkward for somebody, isn't it?

JACK. I'm only sorry it isn't the girl who came down *with* him.

JOE. Why?

JACK. I could go to his wife and tell tales, couldn't I? I'd have him at my mercy.

JOE. But he still *thinks* it's the same woman—Clare Roy, the film star. He told me so. Look! he's left a letter for her—there!

JACK. [*Looking at the letter*] Oh, has he? [*ALICE enters.*]

ALICE. [*Brusquely*] The doctor's coming.

JOE. O! Then you'd better go in and see if you can help the lady.

JACK. You've not left yet!

[ALICE *hesitates, then stumps out R., slamming the door.*]

[DR. BOONE *enters L., still with bushy hair, etc., but now neatly dressed. He carries a bag.*]

JOE. Ha, doctor! You come back, eh?

DOCTOR. [*Business-like—glancing at JACK*] And how are the patients?

JOE. The *man's gone.*

[*The DOCTOR starts and points upwards slightly.*]

No—he's gone home.

[*The DOCTOR points downwards.*]

No—he's left here. There didn't seem to be much the matter with him.

DOCTOR. Ah, you can never tell. I wanted to see the result of that treatment. What about his tonsils?

JOE. [*Shrug*] He took those with him.

DOCTOR. But there may be all sorts of complications. If there's been any injury to the head, he might suddenly develop a temporary insanity.

JACK. He didn't seem quite normal when / spoke to him.

JOE. O! Here comes the lady.

[ALICE *ushers in PAMELA BROOKS, R. She is a good-looking, well-dressed girl in the late twenties. She advances slowly as if from weakness. The DOCTOR meets her. ALICE stumps across and exit by passage L.*]

[JACK *stares in wonderment as he sees PAMELA, and then drags JOE aside L.*]

DOCTOR. You remember me?

PAMELA. [*Smiling sweetly*] Oh, the doctor—yes, of course.

DOCTOR. [*Leading her to the settee R.*] You know, I don't think you ought to be up and about like this. You've had a nasty shaking.

[*JOE and JACK move up L.*]

PAMELA. Oh, I think I'm all right, doctor.

[*DOCTOR feels her pulse.*]

JACK. [*Aside to JOE in a whisper—very elated*] It is—it is—my mermaid!

JOE. Complete with the permanent waves.

JACK. Why didn't I know this before? [*Watches ecstatically—making JOE do likewise.*]

DOCTOR. [*Releasing her hand*] Yes, that's not too bad. How have you slept?

PAMELA. Beautifully. I don't remember a thing.

DOCTOR. That was the sleeping draught I gave you.

PAMELA. I can just remember the cars coming together, and the awful smash, but nothing else.

JACK. [*Aside to JOE*] Isn't she wonderful?

JOE. [*Excited*] Yes! She's—pretty nice—pretty good.

DOCTOR. Any pains anywhere?

PAMELA. No, doctor.

DOCTOR. Well, you must take things quietly for a time.

PAMELA. Oh, I want to go home. I've got a lot of work to do.

DOCTOR. Work? What kind of work?

PAMELA. I'm a novelist, you know; I came down here just to—to—to get colour.

JOE. [*Quietly to JACK*] What's the matter with the chemist?

JACK. Oh, shut up!

DOCTOR. I daresay you'd feel happier in your own home. Well, you'll have to go very carefully. [*Calling JOE forward*] Mr.—er—er—

[*JOE crosses down.*]

Can you arrange for this lady to be taken home very gently? She must have great care.

JOE. You know something has happened to your car, madam?

PAMELA. Yes, the maid told me, but it's well insured.

JOE. There's a place down the road where they let out cars.

PAMELA. Oh, good. Will you send for one for me?

JOE. I'll do it right away. [*Speaks to JACK as he crosses up.*]

[*Exit JOE by window.*]

DOCTOR. [*To PAMELA*] I think I'd better take your temperature before you go—if I may. It won't do to take any risks. [*Takes out his clinical thermometer.*~\]

QACK, seizing an opportunity, brings the cushions from the chairs, and offers them to the DOCTOR.]

JACK. [R.] And these might help, don't you think, doctor?

DOCTOR, [c.] Oh yes—that's excellent.

JACK. *[To PAMELA]* Up ze daisy. There we are. You'll find that much more comfortable.

[JACK arranges the extra cushions for PAMELA, who glares at him. JACK sits down.]

JACK. Oh, I beg your pardon. *[Rises.]*

DOCTOR. Open, please. *[Inserts the thermometer in PAMELA'S inouth].* Close, please. *[To JACK]* A relation of yours?

JACK. Oh no, she's much too nice to be a relation.

[PAMELA glares at JACK for his impudence.]

DOCTOR. Just a friend?

JACK. Yes, rather!—a very dear friend.

[JACK is smiling at PAMELA all the time, who is trying to resent it.]

DOCTOR. Then, you'll take great care of her?

JACK. You bet your life, I will. She's dearer to me than anything in the whole world. *[PAMELA makes a movement in protest.]*

DOCTOR. *[Immediately]* No, no, you mustn't move—please. Just keep the mouth closed.

JACK. Ladies always find that very difficult, don't they?

[PAMELA moves again.]

DOCTOR. Has she any family or children?

JACK. Not to my knowledge.

DOCTOR. Not married?

JACK. Oh no. She's going to be married very shortly. *[Qpietly]* But she doesn't know it yet.

DOCTOR. No? That *will* be a nice surprise. *[To PAMELA]* Now then! *[Removes the thermometer]* Oh, that's not too bad. But you'll have to take things quietly for a time. I'd like to run over and have a look at you to-morrow, if I may.

PAMELA. Thank you, doctor. My name is Pamela Brooks.

JACK. *[Delightedly]* Pamela!

PAMELA. I'm in the telephone book—marked novelist.

DOCTOR. *[Making a briefnote]* Miss Brooks—Brooks with an E?

PAMELA. No—no E, doctor.

JACK. *[Also making a note]* No "he" at present.

[PAMELA glares. JACK smiles—picks up the doctor's bag.]

DOCTOR. I should watch your diet for a time, and above all—rest. You *must* do that. *[Offers hand]* Well, good-day, Miss Brooks.

PAMELA. Good-day, doctor. Thank you so much.

JACK. Oh, doctor, wait a minute. You're forgetting your implements of torture.

DOCTOR. *[To JACK as he hands him the bag]* Thank you! Good morning!

JACK. *[Imitating DOCTOR]* Good morning!

[Exit DOCTOR briskly by archway.]

[Wireless—soft music heard off.]

Nice bloke that, don't you think?

QACK stands smiling at PAMELA, who tries to appear severe.]

PAMELA. A little bit fresh, aren't you?—considering I don't know you.

JACK. *[Smiling and charming]* You haven't given me a chance. I'm quite prepared to tell you all about myself.

PAMELA. You're very impertinent.

JACK. Then / shall be personal, too. I think you're very, very beautiful.

PAMELA. *[Almost smiles]* And I'll wish you good day. *[Rises.]*

JACK. But the doctor said I was to look after you.

PAMELA. Because you led him to believe I knew you. *[Putting on hat.]*

JACK. Well, you know me now, don't you? Can't we be friends?

PAMELA. No, thank you.

JACK. May I see you home in the car?

PAMELA. Quite unnecessary.

JACK. I promise not to flirt or hold hands or do anything like that.

[PAMELA smiles,]

Good—now you're smiling.

PAMELA. *[Severe]* I'm not.

JACK. You know I've been watching you out there for weeks and weeks.

PAMELA. Pity you haven't something better to do. *[Moves c. putting on gloves.]*

JACK. I'd give up everything to see you in that glorious bathing dress. Your streamlines when you stand up to dive are——*[He gestures an hour-glass figure.]*

PAMELA. I don't want a demonstration, thank you.

JACK. I'm sorry. But I've been waiting for you all my life. Listen, Pam.

PAMELA. And don't call me Pam.

JACK. Sorry, Pam. Listen, dear. I've got no money just now, but I have an invention which is going to make me as rich as Croesus. St. Paul's Cathedral won't hold the gold.

PAMELA. Then I should take the Albert Hall as an annexe.

JACK. I'm not joking, really.

PAMELA. And *am not interested.* [*Goes to sofa table for bag.*]

[*JOE enters.*]

JOE. The car is here, madam.

PAMELA. Thank you, I'll come at once. [*Crossing up to window.*]

JACK. Do let me see you home. [*Picks up WARBURTON'S bag.*]

PAMELA. No, thank you. [*Crosses to JACK—takes hold of bag.*]

[*JACK hands the bag reluctantly. The following dialogue spoken very smartly.*]

JACK. Shan't I see you again?

PAMELA. Probably not.

JACK. I shall ring you up to-morrow.

PAMELA. I shan't be at home.

JACK. Will you lunch with me—any time?

PAMELA. No, thank you. [*Pointedly*] I always lunch by myself at the Carlton.

[*Exits up L. with provocative smile.*]

JACK. [*Elated*] Joe, isn't she divine? And she knows I love her!

[*He gives JOE a slap on back—JOE staggers down R.*]

JOE. Divine or not, the next lot of people who spread themselves out in the road here will be left, corpses or no corpses.

[*MR. X enters at window up L., and comes down to JOE c.*]

MR. X. [*Very confidentially*] My throat's so dry. I wonder if you could let me have a glass of water?

[*JACK sees MR. X and tries to escape through doorway L.*]

JOE. What's that? You want a glass of water? [*Telephone bell goes. To JACK*] Answer that 'phone for me, will you?

JACK. Hulloo, hulloo, hulloo. [*JACK sits L. and picks up receiver.*]

JOE. [*To MR. X, shepherding him to L. end of settee*] Well, just sit down here for a minute and I'll bring you a glass of water.

JACK. [*At 'phone*] Hulloo. Yes, yes, hold the line. [*To JOE*] It's Mr. Warburton on the 'phone asking for Mr. Stringer.

JOE. Tell him I'm out.

JACK. Tell him you're out? But your name is Bromelli!

JOE. Don't you realize there's no such person as Mr. Stringer?

JACK. No such person?

JOE. No. It's just his excuse to play games.

JACK. Do you mean that?

JOE. Yes, sure.

JACK. If that's a fact, Joe, I've-got-a-wonderful-idea.

JOE. Well, now's your chance.

JACK. But he'll recognize my voice!

JOE. [*Pointing to MR. X, who is looking at a magazine*] Okay! Then get *him* to do it for you.

[*JOE exits L., laughing.*]

JACK. [*To MR. X*] Psst! Oy, Esperanto! here a minute.

[*MR. X rises and comes over chattering.*]

Yes, I know, old chap, "Wallop," But just answer that 'phone and say you're *Mr. Stringer*, will you?

MR. X. [*Incoherent*] But I *am* Mr. Stringer. How extraordinary that you should want me to say so. [*Etc., etc.*]

JACK. [*Putting receiver into MR. X's hand and forcing him into chair L.*] Yes, yes, I quite agree. Don't argue, old man, just say you're Stringer.

MR. X. [*At 'phone*] Hullo. Is that you? Well, this is me. Yes, I'm Mr. Stringer. What? I'm a liar! [70 JACK] Oh, he *is* rude. Yes, it was I who witnessed the accident. What, you can't hear what I'm saying? [*He blows loudly into the receiver*] Is that better. Yes, I'm Mr. Stringer. [*Getting very excited*] I *am* Mr. Stringer. Yes, I'm Mr. Stringer . . .

[*JACK looks on—stifling his laughter*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS

[*as MR. X babbles*]

END OF ACT I

ACT TWO

SCENE: *The scene represents the lounge at the Warburtons* flat at Knightsbridge. It is a spacious and elaborately furnished apartment on a first floor. The left wall is well on stage, but shows a bay window recessed down left. The entrance door L. is above the recessed window. The back wall with fireplace faces the spectator, and a settee faces the fire. Down R. is a door leading to Warburton's "den" and up extreme R. is a door leading to the bedroom. A writing-table with telephone, etc., is near the window L., and a table in window. There is a fancy table centre at the back of the settee, and a gate-leg or collapsible table is R. centre, with two chairs top and left. An armchair between doors R.*

// is the morning following the events in the previous Act. The gate-leg table is opened out for breakfast and daintily laid for two R. of centre. On the sofa table L., are entree dishes, etc. The morning newspaper is placed on the table.

At Rise: NIXON, a well-groomed butler, with a comedian's face showing a perpetual smile, is discovered bringing toast from centre table to breakfast table. He returns to centre table.

After a short pause MRS. WARBURTON enters door up R. She is a rather stately, good-looking woman in the thirties, and well-dressed throughout the play.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Placing her hand-bag in a chair R.*] Good morning, Nixon.

NIXON. [*By centre table*] Good morning, madam.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Crossing to window L.*] The master is coming now: he's quite ready.

NIXON. [*Bringing down "Daily Sketch" to table*] Very good, madam.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Glancing out of window*] It's a nice morning, isn't it?

NIXON. [*Crossing back to sofa table, left*] It should be, madam, as the papers predict a depression.

MRS. WARBURTON. You're always sceptical, aren't you? [*Working to table*] Have you seen the new maid this morning?

NIXON. Er—yes, madam.

MRS. WARBURTON. She seems rather quiet and retiring.

NIXON. They're generally like that the first few weeks, madam.

MRS. WARBURTON. But she hasn't been in service before, so she tells me.

NIXON. I was not aware, madam.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Sitting at the head of the table—facing the spectator*] Give her all the assistance you can, will you?

NIXON. Very good, madam. [*Takes ashtray down to desk L.*]

[*MRS. WARBURTON pours the coffee. WARBURTON peeps in at the door up R., sees NIXON and enters furtively.*]

WARBURTON. [*Gazing around—timidly*] Good morning, Nixon.

NIXON. [*Boldly—with his broad smile*] Good morning, sir.

[*WARBURTON replies to NIXON'S smile with a very pained and sour expression. Exit NIXON L.*]

WARBURTON. [*All nerves*] Good morning, my dear.

MRS. WARBURTON. I can do with a "good morning" after listening to your snoring for eight hours.

WARBURTON. Well, don't be harsh with me. [*Crosses up to sofa table and selects a relish from t/ie entree dishes.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. One thing—I'm glad you've stopped that awful noise you generally make in the bathroom.

WARBURTON. I didn't feel like singing this morning.

MRS. WARBURTON. I should hardly call it singing.

WARBURTON. The weather puts one off, I suppose.

MRS. WARBURTON. Nixon says a depression is on its way here.

WARBURTON. [*Apprehensive*] A depression! [*Recovers*] Oh, yes, yes.

MRS. WARBURTON. How you crept into bed last night without my hearing you is a puzzle to me. You must have come in like a cat burglar.

WARBURTON. I didn't wish to disturb you of course, dear. [*Crossing to table with plate.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Passing coffee*] You're not always so considerate.

[*WARBURTON sits L. of table with his back to the door L.*]

It must have been very late, too. And after promising me so faithfully to come straight home. Mr. Stringer must have heard you say so over the 'phone—you can't deny it.

WARBURTON. Well, I had a lot of things to do after I left Stringer. I had to buy a new hat and call at the tailor's, and then I had to leave the car at a garage: the battery's run down, I think.

MRS. WARBURTON. Don't tell me you walked !

WARBURTON. No, I had to get another car to bring me home.

MRS. WARBURTON. But every night your hours are very much the same. I might just as well have married a night watchman.

WARBURTON. Even they have their moments.

MRS. WARBURTON. What time *did* you come in ?

WARBURTON. Er—what time did *you* go to bed ?

MRS. WARBURTON. And you came in immediately afterwards I suppose? Just missed me as usual.

WARBURTON. Oh, no, no, I wasn't going to say that.

MRS. WARBURTON. I'm sorry if I've spoilt something original. As a matter of fact I didn't go to bed till past twelve. Nixon was out, and I had to sit up to let the new maid in. She was held up somewhere because she'd lost her bags.

WARBURTON. She couldn't very well come without those, could she?

MRS. WARBURTON. [*After glancing at WARBURTON*] Well, she's here now, and when she comes in please don't *stare* as you usually do. It's her first time in service, and naturally she's reserved.

WARBURTON. What's her name?

MRS. WARBURTON. She prefers to be called Alice.

[WARBURTON *looks away from the table with horror, then tries to sneak the newspaper from the table to place it elsewhere.*]

WARBURTON. Alice!

MRS. WARBURTON. Don't you want the paper this morning?

WARBURTON. No, it's quite all right. I'll get the *Financial Times* when I go out. [*Tries to hide paper by sitting on it.*]

MRS. WARBURTON, *If you don't want it I'll have it.* [*She takes paper.*]

WARBURTON. [*Hesitates*] You shouldn't read at meals; you know it interferes with digestion: all the doctors say so.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*With mock sweetness*] Your example, George, is better than their precept every time.

[WARBURTON *Imitates, then hands it to her. He returns to the sofa table up c., and stands toying with the dishes as he thinks.*]

[Turning the paper] What's the matter? Isn't there enough bacon?
WARBURTON, Oh yes, dear—yes, plenty. [Returns to table and resumes breakfast.]

MRS. WARBURTON. [Reading] There we are—another motor accident!

[WARBURTON spills his coffee.]

Do be careful. It's a clean cloth, too. You are clumsy.

WARBURTON. Sorry—sorry, my dear.

MRS. WARBURTON. You are the most awkward man at the table. You're not fit to be in a decent place.

WARBURTON. [Picking up the salt-cellar as if to throw it] I ought to throw this over my shoulder—?

MRS. WARBURTON. [Taking it from him] Don't be absurd.

[The telephone bell is heard. WARBURTON starts up.]

I'll answer it. [Crosses L.] Finish your breakfast. You'll be late.
[At 'phone] Hello! . . . Oh, you have the wrong number, I think. No one of that name here. [Replaces the receiver.]

[WARBURTON trying to hide the newspaper.]

[Returning to the table] Something about a bag—asking for a Mr. Worthington!

[WARBURTON alarmed.]

At this hour, too! What have you done with the paper?

WARBURTON. Oh, the paper? [Drops it on the floor from under his coat—sheepishly] Here it is.

MRS. WARBURTON. I want to see if there is anyone we know in that motor accident.

WARBURTON. [Fearfully] Yes—I wonder.

MRS. WARBURTON. Oh! It only says a well-known screen actress. It doesn't give any name.

WARBURTON. The papers are very discreet, aren't they?

MRS. WARBURTON. They have to be, I expect. Oh, look—a picture of the new Lord Mayor.

WARBURTON. That doesn't interest me.

MRS. WARBURTON. What does interest you?

WARBURTON. I've got a lot of business to think about this morning, and Lord Mayors at breakfast-time are pretty tough to swallow. [Pensive—glancing at door L.]

MRS. WARBURTON. That's a good picture—the sands at Margate. Thousands of people: it must be jolly.

WARBURTON. A bit lonely if you're a Christian.

MRS. WARBURTON. Of course all these photos of girls bathing—they may call them artistic, but to me they are absolutely *indecent* and *disgusting*.

WARBURTON. [*Taking the paper—eagerly*] Oh, really? Let's have a look.

[ALICE enters L. She is neatly dressed in uniform, and now very subdued and demure—in direct contrast to her bearing in Act I. She comes to the side of MRS. WARBURTON and stands at the back of WARBURTON,]

ALICE. Nixon said you might want some more toast, madam.

MRS. WARBURTON. Thank you, Alice.

[WARBURTON looks away wide-eyed and apprehensive. ALICE turns to go.]

Oh, Alice, just pass me my bag from the chair over there, will you?

ALICE. Yes, madam.

[ALICE crosses at the back of MRS. WARBURTON to the chair R. of table. WARBURTON takes one glance at ALICE and then buries his face in the newspaper. MRS. WARBURTON accepts the bag from ALICE, and extracts her handkerchief from it.]

MRS. WARBURTON. Were there any letters this morning?

ALICE. Yes, madam, they're in the hall.

MRS. WARBURTON. Always remember we like them on the breakfast-table, will you, please?

ALICE. Yes, madam. I'll bring them now.

[Exit ALICE L. with an affected manner and walk.]

MRS. WARBURTON. Because I asked you not to stare at the girl, there was no necessity to devour the newspaper. [*Snatches newspaper from him.*]

WARBURTON. I didn't devour it.

MRS. WARBURTON. Anything to do with a woman and you get that inane look of "stop me and buy one."

WARBURTON. You distinctly told me not to stare at the girl.

MRS. WARBURTON. There's a difference between staring and playing at rabbits behind a newspaper. What will the girl think?—that we have no manners at all.

WARBURTON. Well, let me have the paper will you, please? [*Glances round at the door L. anxiously.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. In a minute. I just want to see this fashion advertisement.

WARBURTON. But I was reading something—please let me—

[ALICE enters with the letters. WARBURTON knocks a spoon off the table and dives down to retrieve it.]

ALICE. The letters, madam.

MRS. WARBURTON. [Accepting the letters] Thank you, Alies!

[Exit ALICE,]

[To WARBURTON under the table] What are you doing? The girl'll think we're quite mad.

WARBURTON. [Resuming his seat] Get rid of her, will you? I don't like the look of her.

MRS. WARBURTON. Don't be absurd. How can I get rid of a girl when she's only just come. And you didn't even look at her.

WARBURTON. Oh yes, I did.

MRS. WARBURTON. I suppose the girl's legs don't please you.

WARBURTON. Nothing of the sort. I didn't look at her legs.

MRS. WARBURTON. Then why-did-you-get-under-the-table?

WARBURTON. Because I dropped a spoon.

MRS. WARBURTON. Is that what you were looking for?

WARBURTON. Yes—no—yes!

[MRS. WARBURTON has sniffed the letters, and hands two or three to Warburton.]

[Holding out a letter] Here, I don't think you sniffed this one.

[The telephone bell is heard. WARBURTON uses, but MRS.

WARBURTON intervenes and crosses to the writing-table. WARBURTON listens anxiously.]

MRS. WARBURTON. [At 'phone] Hullo! . . . Yes, Mrs. Warburton speaking. Twelve o'clock? Well, I'll try to manage it, but I'm frightfully busy. . . . All right—thank you. . . . Goodbye! [Returns to the table. Hurrying] It's the dressmaker. She wants to see me this morning. Have you finished? [Packs up breakfast-things a little.]

WARBURTON. What's the hurry? You've plenty of time.

MRS. WARBURTON. There isn't plenty of time. Like all men, you think there's nothing to do in a flat. I've got to dress and see cook and a hundred and one things.

WARBURTON. Well, ask Nixon to bring my hat and gloves.

MRS. WARBURTON. And this morning I want to start the spring cleaning.

WARBURTON. Heaven help us!

[Exit MRS. WARBURTON L. WARBURTON looks out door L. Goes to 'phone, as he dials he mutters:]

Alice where art thou? In the swimming pool with the cuckoos in the nest. [Rattles the apparatus impatiently] Hullo! [Glances at the door] Hullo! ... Is Miss Roy there? Miss Clare Roy. ... Eh? ... Out? ... Did she come home last night? ... She did? ... Oh, good. When will she be in? ... But I *must* know. I want to see her particularly. ... No, no, I shall be out. It's no use her calling here. I'll come along at once and wait till she arrives. Ask her to wait in for me. ... Eh? ... She might not know my name? ... , Just say "Woodles." [Hangs up the receiver.]

[Nixon enters with hat, gloves, and walking-stick, which he hands to WARBURTON. The door L. is left open.]

Thank you, Nixon. I'm in rather a hurry this morning.

NIXON. [Still smiling] Yes, sir.

[As WARBURTON adjusts his gloves, etc., he tries to look out by the open door to see if ALICE is about. At the same time he has to appear at ease with NIXON, who proceeds to pack up the breakfast things, finally folding the table and returning it to its position R. WARBURTON manoeuvring by doorway.]

[The Hoover begins quietly off L.]

WARBURTON. What is the new girl doing now?

NIXON. [Busying] Spring cleaning the hall, sir.

WARBURTON. Oh yes, she would be. Very necessary, I suppose.

[He goes L. to door, but the loud noise of a Hoover stops him when he opens the door.]

Yes—yes—oh yes—very necessary—seasonable, I suppose.

[Thinking the coast is clear, he buttons up and tries to make a dash for it. The noise swells out and he dodges back into the room. He passes it off with NIXON.]

NIXON. [Casually as he proceeds with his work] Waiting for anything, sir?

WARBURTON. No—no—just thinking—in case I've forgotten something. And I'm not in any hurry. [Nettled] I wish, Nixon, you wouldn't smile quite so frequently.

NIXON. I can't very well help it, sir. Fm just made that way, I suppose.

WARBURTON. [*Still watching for a chance to escape*] Oh! What do you do at funerals?

NIXON. Oh, enjoy them just the same, sir. You see, I was on the stage originally, sir.

WARBURTON. [*Still intent on the doorway*] So I've heard! But that's for other people to laugh at.

NIXON. [*Still packing up the breakfast things*] You know, I played Hamlet once, sir.

WARBURTON. [*Distract*] The audience should have forgiven you if you only played it once.

NIXON. Oddly enough there was no audience, sir. [*Returning the table to its position R. and picking up the loaded tray.*]

WARBURTON. No audience? How do you account for that? [*Backs away from door as NIXON approaches the door L.*]

NIXON. [*At door—going*] I think it was due to the fact that I had played Othello the night before.

[*Exit NIXON with tray, smiling.*]

WARBURTON. [*To himself*] Grinning ape!

[*Returns to the door and peeps out—closes it suddenly—backs away quickly, and stands hiding his face with his hat, turning up coat collar.*]

[*MRS. WARBURTON enters briskly and comes to a sudden stop on seeing WARBURTON. She watches him in silence for a moment. She carries a bundle of bills. During the scene she goes through them and writes out a cheque.*]

[*WARBURTON peeps out from his hat, discovers his wife, and tries to pass it off.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Crossing to writing-table*] Unfortunately there's no divorce for temporary insanity. [*Sits table L.*]

WARBURTON. I've—er—I've just lost a sneeze.

MRS. WARBURTON. You'll lose other things if you're not careful. [*Scribbles out a household list on writing-table*] Will you be in to dinner to-night?

WARBURTON. I—er—I'm not sure—no, I don't think so.

MRS. WARBURTON. Out with Mr. Stringer again, I suppose?

WARBURTON. Er—yes, we've got a conference on.

MRS. WARBURTON. It seems strange to me that you can't discuss business in the daytime.

WARBURTON. One gets better results from night conferences.

MRS. WARBURTON. Depends on what *kind* of results.

WARBURTON. [*Shrug*] You see, Stringer is a very brilliant man.

MRS. WARBURTON. And he can only switch on the brilliance after dark?

WARBURTON. That's what it amounts to, yes.

MRS. WARBURTON. How he must dread the summer evenings.

WARBURTON. Oh, he does. You see, he's a very clever scientist, and he's been trying to split the atom for years.

MRS. WARBURTON. Nicework!

WARBURTON. And he says that spots on the sun make night work absolutely necessary. In fact, it's quite impossible to study heavenly bodies in the daytime.

MRS. WARBURTON. Yes, I can appreciate that, but I can't understand why you don't invite Mr. Stringer here. I should be very pleased to receive him.

WARBURTON. Well—er—it's only a small flat, and Stringer's a frightfully wealthy man. His own house is, of course, simply magnificent.

MRS. WARBURTON. And where is that?

WARBURTON. [*Floored*] Oh—er—down in the country. I know the place quite well, but I couldn't tell you the address. It's one of those rustic names, like "The Beeches" or "The Chestnuts."

MRS. WARBURTON. "The Chestnuts" most likely.

WARBURTON. With his assistance this new Marx engine I told you about will revolutionize the whole motor industry, and that means a very big fortune for us. That is the actual truth.

MRS. WARBURTON. It must be a marvellous invention to produce *that*. Who is the inventor—will *he* make money?

WARBURTON. He's just a broken-down nothing. We may give him a couple of fivers.

MRS. WARBURTON. Is that quite fair?

WARBURTON. His idea counts for very little. It's our improvements which will make it a commercial proposition. [*Crosses up R. to table.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. But the original idea must be worth something, surely? [*Up c.*]

WARBURTON. You wouldn't think so if you were a financier. [*Puts hat, gloves, umbrella on table up R.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. But I can't see why you don't invite Mr.

Stringer here. You have your own room in there, [R.] and you can hold conferences all night if necessary. [*By table up c.*]

WARBURTON. That's not the point. One must have the proper environment.

[Nixon enters.]

What is it, Nixon?

NIXON. Mr. Stringer, sir.

[Pause. MRS. WARBURTON turns front very slowly.]

WARBURTON. What name?

NIXON. Mr.—Stringer.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Pleased*] Isn't that funny!

WARBURTON. [*With a nervous laugh*] D-D-damn funny!

MRS. WARBURTON. Just as we were talking about him.

WARBURTON. What's he like, Nixon?

MRS. WARBURTON. Don't be absurd. You only know one Mr. Stringer.

NIXON. He said he wanted to see you on business, sir—something rather important.

[WARBURTON tries to appear at ease, but stands thinking very hard.]

MRS. WARBURTON. Well, you can't keep him hanging about indefinitely.

WARBURTON. Nixon!

NIXON. Yes, sir?

WARBURTON. Oh, don't grin, for heaven's sake, man.

[Nixon tries to straighten his face.]

Ask Mr. Stringer if he minds waiting a minute. Say I'm in the bath.

NIXON. [*Trying to wrestle with his smile and distorting his face*] Yes, sir.

[Exit NIXON.]

MRS. WARBURTON. I don't know why you're making all this fuss and trouble.

WARBURTON. There's no fuss or trouble, dear, but I must receive the man properly.

MRS. WARBURTON. But not in a bath. Now he's broken the ice you can have all your conferences here. It'll be wonderful.

WARBURTON. I know—it is—wonderful. [*With a despairing look*] Bless his little old bald head.

MRS. WARBURTON. Bald? Now you've never mentioned that before.

WARBURTON. I know I haven't, because he wears a false piece on top sometimes. If he's not wearing it this morning, don't notice for heaven's sake.

MHA. WARBURTON. Well, I think I know how to behave!

[ALICE enters. WARBURTON scrambles away on to settee at back.]

ALICE. Mr. Stringer says he can't wait, madam.

MRS. WARBURTON. Tell Nixon to show Mr. Stringer in.

ALICE. Very good, madam.

[Exit ALICE.]

WARBURTON. [Comes from his hiding-place—smiling] I thought it was Stringer, and I was going to pop out and frighten him.

MRS. WARBURTON. If you pop out like that at conferences no wonder he's bald. [Nixon shows in JACK MARX.]

NIXON. [Announcing] Mr. Stringer!

[Nixon retires^

[WARBURTON looks on in blank amazement, JACK hesitates.

MRS. WARBURTON looks to WARBURTON to speak, then advances to JACK.]

MRS. WARBURTON. We were introduced over the 'phone, I believe. Welcome, Mr. Stringer. [Extends her hand] I've heard so much about you.

JACK. [In his best manner] Mrs. Warburton?

MRS. WARBURTON. Yes.

JACK. May I say I've heard the most complimentary things about you.

MRS. WARBURTON. Oh, but you mustn't believe all the things my husband says.

JACK. Oh, I never do. But this must be the one *glorious* exception!

MRS. WARBURTON. Too kind, really, my dear Mr. Stringer. You know on the 'phone yesterday you sounded just like a foreigner.

JACK. [Nonplussed for a moment] Yes, of course, I'd just been eating spaghetti. You know—all round your mouth and your ears and things. . . .

MRS. WARBURTON. [Smiling] Yes, yes, of course.

[They all laughed together in an embarrassing fashion.]

JACK. [*Waving his hand*] Well, good morning, George, old boy.

WARBURTON. [*Hesitates, then waves back*] 'Morning, Stringer, old man.

They both laugh; JACK crosses R. to WARBURTON. They both open their mouths to speak, but can't think of anything to say, except "Well." During this, MRS. WARBURTON has come up- behind JACK, to see if he is really wearing a toupee. Just as she is about to touch the back of his head, JACK turns and catches her. She bursts into silvery laughter and waves her arms about. They all start waving their arms about.]

JACK. [*When the laughter subsides, feeling he must say something*] Well, good old Warburton! [*He slaps WARBURTON on the back.*]

WARBURTON. [*Doesn't like it, but he feels he had better reciprocate. Uncomfortably . . . just a little tap on the chest*] Well, good old Stringer.

JACK. Good old George! [*Hits him much harder on the back.*]

[*WARBURTON staggers forward.*]

WARBURTON. [*Recovering, with a wide anticipatory grin, rolling up his sleeve*] Good old Jack! [*Gives him a terrific hit.*]

[*JACK is sent staggering over to L. centre. Furious, he recovers, and is about to deliver a good punch on the nose. He narrowly misses MRS. WARBURTON, who comes down between them. He passes it off by ad libbing about "Arm exercises."*]

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Very pleasantly*] Tell me, Mr. Stringer, have you come straight up from the country this morning?

JACK. No, Mrs. Warburton, no. I came up yesterday.

MRS. WARBURTON. I expect you get tired of the "Chestnuts" occasionally?

JACK. The Chestnuts?

[*WARBURTON signals to him frantically, but he doesn't notice.*]

Well, of course, they *are* rather indigestible, don't you think?

[*WARBURTON makes big gestures trying to indicate a house with chimney. MRS. WARBURTON turns and catches him. He passes it off by waving silly greetings.*]

JACK. [*Catching on*] Possibly you mean the Coconuts?

[*WARBURTON goes through the actions of the "Chestnut Tree" song. MRS. WARBURTON turns and catches him. He passes it off by smoothing his hair. She is bewildered.*]

WARBURTON. Yes. You know I've just been telling my wife

about your house in the country, and I couldn't remember the name.

JACK. Why, "The Old Chestnuts."

WARBURTON. Yes. "The Old Chestnuts." I knew it was something like that. By jove, we've had some wonderful times there, havep't we?

JACK. Oh, indescribable!

WARBURTON. Yes, crashing times.

MRS. WARBURTON. Well now, I suppose you two want to talk businesstogether?

JACK. That was certainly my intention, Mrs. Warburton.

[WARBURTON's face drops.]

MRS. WARBURTON. George has been telling me about this wonderful invention you're bringing out.

JACK. Oh, the Marx engine. Yes, it's going to be the biggest thing we've handled yet.

WARBURTON. There you are! What did I tell you?

JACK. There's a fortune in it for everybody.

MRS. WARBURTON. I suppose the inventor will get something?

JACK. Oh, my dear Mrs. Warburton, he's going to be a very rich man.

MRS. WARBURTON. George says he doesn't deserve to have anything.

WARBURTON. No, dear, no. I didn't say that.

MRS. WARBURTON. Yes, you did. You said you and Mr. Stringer were adding some improvements, and you weren't going to pay the inventor anything at all.

JACK. [Laughs] Ah, that's just George's little joke. You see, I am going to make it my duty to see that the inventor gets every penny he deserves. [Goes L. a little.]

WARBURTON. I shan't agree to that exactly.

JACK. Don't you remember what you said the night before last when I met you at the—er—er.

WARBURTON. [At once] Oh yes, yes. I agree, Stringer, to anything you say.

MRS. WARBURTON. If the man is poor and broken down, well, I mean, there's no reason why he shouldn't be paid.

JACK. [Standing] But he's not broken down, Mrs. Warburton, is he, George?

WARBURTON. No, perhaps not.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Crosses a little R. To WARBURTON*] You do mislead people.

JACK. He's a very smart man and good-looking—isn't he, George?

WARBURTON. That's a matter of opinion, of course.

JACK. And we're going to fix up all the business properly—now.

WARBURTON. No, we can't do that this morning.

JACK. Oh yes, we can. Don't you remember what you said to me when we were looking at that swimming pool at the time—

WARBURTON. Oh yes, yes. Well, just what you say.

MRS. WARBURTON. Then I'd better leave you alone.

[*JACK moves to open door L. for MRS. W.*]

Women, I know, are a nuisance when business is to be discussed. [*Going. To JACK*] Do let me know if there's anything you want.

WARBURTON. Don't worry—he'll get all he wants.

JACK. George is always such a perfect host.

[*Exit MRS. WARBURTON.*]

[*JACK assumes a light bantering tone through the following scene.*

WARBURTON *listens at the door for a moment, then plunges in "medias res."*]

WARBURTON. [*Wildly*] What is the meaning of this?

JACK. [*Calm and smiling—coming c.*] I happened to be in the neighbourhood and thought I'd pop in—just to have a little chat about that invention of mine.

WARBURTON. You think you're going to make a fool of me—
—h?

JACK. Oh no, I don't think you want any assistance in that way. To tell you the truth, I was feeling rather sorry for you.

WARBURTON. I don't require your sympathy, thank you very much.

JACK. You know, your idea of creating a Mr. Stringer was quite a stroke of genius. I darned nearly fell for it, myself.

WARBURTON. Well, as a matter of fact, there *is* a Mr. Stringer.

JACK. *Now* there is. Sooner or later you would have to produce

someone to satisfy your wife. You can't fool women all the time. You ought to know that, surely?

WARBURTON. What takes place between me and my wife has nothing whatever to do with you.

JACK. Obviously.

WARBURTON. [*Savagely*] And I'm going to ask you very politely to—get—out.

JACK. I'm never slow to take a hint. [*Crosses R. and sits in arm-chair*] But before I go I want you to fix up a proper contract with me over the Marx engine.

WARBURTON. It's not convenient at the moment, and I shall conduct my business when and as I think fit.

JACK. Then I hope you'll grant me the same privilege. Oh, by the way, there's something I must ask you. Have you told your wife about the motor-car accident?

WARBURTON. No—yes—no— What the devil's that got to do with you?

JACK. I must be prepared. I shan't know what to say, and I wouldn't like to let you down for the world.

WARBURTON. [*Raging*] Let me tell you plainly I'll not stand for this sort of thing. I won't stand for it. I——

[*MRS. WARBURTON enters L. with tray of drinks and cigars. He sees her and changes his tone.*]

You must have the right metals. You've got to think in a big way.

JACK. [*Helping him out*] Yes, I know. Like the elephants. Yes, I see your point.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Apologetically*] So sorry to interrupt, but I thought a little stimulant might help the conference. I wouldn't let Alice disturb you. [*To table at back.*]

WARBURTON. We can ring if we want anything, surely?

JACK. Well, I think that's very thoughtful of Mrs. Warburton.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Going up to table c. and coming back with cigars*] There you are, I brought *these* cigars, but I'm not sure they're your best ones,

WARBURTON. Oh yes—they're quite all right.

MRS. WARBURTON. Don't you think those in the bureau are better: they have very pretty bands round them.

WARBURTON. No, they're not.

JACK. Do you remember those excellent cigars we had the day before yesterday at the—er—Cuck—

WARBURTON. [*Eagerly*] All right—I'll get them—I'll get them. [*Crosses to bureau down R.*]

JACK. You know, I think George is the most generous man I've ever met.

WARBURTON. [*Ironically*] I shall be very generous to you when I get the chance.

JACK. [*Lightly*] I shall give you every opportunity, George.

MRS. WARBURTON. But he's so forgetful, you know.

[WARBURTON *lets* with the cigars.]

JACK. Is he really? Ah, those are much better. [*Testing one*] No wonder you were hiding them. Aren't you going to have one, George, old boy?

WARBURTON. [*Through his teeth*] No, thank you, Stringer, old sport.

MRS. WARBURTON. Now, is there anything else?

JACK. No, thank you, Mrs. Warburton.

MRS. WARBURTON. You mustn't work too hard, you know. [*Turning at door left.*]

JACK. Don't worry, Mrs. Warburton, we shall be as happy now as two cuckoos in a nest.

[*Exit MRS. WARBURTON with a gay laugh. WARBURTON registers dismay.*]

JACK. [*Going to table c. and pouring himself a drink*] Well, George, old fellow, aren't you going to join me? I fancy you're going to need something before we've finished.

WARBURTON. [*Between his teeth*] No, thank you.

JACK. [*Coming down to chair L. with glass and cigar in hand*] Well, this is a proper sort of conference, isn't it? Just like a real directors' meeting. Your very good health. [*Drinks.*]

WARBURTON. I hope it chokes you. You know, Mr. Marx, blackmail is a very ugly word.

JACK. [*Lighting cigar*] So is the bridal-suite.

WARBURTON. And it may interest you to know that every penny I possess has been placed in my wife's name.

JACK. Well, that was a damned silly thing to have done.

WARBURTON. You wouldn't think so if you were a financier. So if you breathe a word of slander about me, my wife will

divorce me as quickly as the law allows, and I shan't have a penny to float companies, inventions, or any other damned thing. So now you know what to do. It'll be your funeral as well as mine. *[Turns away.]*

JACK. Well, that suits me!

WAJ?BURTON, Are you mad?

JACK. I think Mrs. Warburton is a very attractive woman——

WARBURTON. What the devil has that got to do with it?

JACK. If she divorces you, I shall marry her. So, I shall get your wife and your money, and she'll get my invention.

[WARBURTON reels to the table c. and gulps a drink.]

[Calmly] This is really a very good cigar. *[Crosses slowly to chair R.]*

WARBURTON. *[Coming R. to JACK]* You're acting like a cad—— yes, sir, a cad! And I'm not going to stand for this sort of thing from anybody. *[Shaking his fist in JACK'S face]* I'll get level with you as sure as my name's Warburton. I'll get——

[MRS. WARBURTON creeps in with soda-water, and catches

WARBURTON with his fist raised.]

[Very pleasantly—still holding his fist up before JACK] Just like that. If you could reduce the engine to about that size. You must see that, Stringer, old man.

JACK. *[Helping him out]* Of course—I see exa-ctly. *[Holds up his fist]* An engine not much bigger than my fist. I see. Yes, a rattling good idea.

MRS. WARBURTON. *[Whispering]* More soda water. *[She has come down between them R. centre.]*

JACK. *[Also whispering]* Oh, thank you, Mrs. Warburton, thank you very much indeed.

[Finger to lips, pointing to soda water. MRS. WARBURTON creeps out. WARBURTON Om/JACK, nodding and smiling go through same actions. When she is gone, WARBURTON turns, and he and JACK SSH! each other. Suddenly realising, WARBURTON turns away L. with a snarl.]

JACK. Well, I hope she doesn't think we're both potty.

WARBURTON. She may find you very amusing.

JACK. And she may find me even more diverting as we progress. A letter addressed to Miss Clare Roy was left at "The Cuckoo's Nest," yesterday. For some unaccountable reason the

lady did not receive the letter, and it is now reposing in my pocket.

WARBURTON. [*Raging up c.*] Oh!!!

JACK. Oh, I have no idea of the contents, but I presume they must be of some consequence—and the superscription is in your handwriting.

WARBURTON. [*Crossing to table c. Gulps another drink*] You're bent on wrecking my home, aren't you?

JACK. No, I'm only trying to save what belongs to me.

WARBURTON. Look here, Marx, why can't we be friends?

JACK. [*Coming c. to WARBURTON*] That's the whole point of my argument. With this blonde between us—bond, I should say—there's no reason for anything else. [*Pouring out another drink*] You're a most hospitable fellow, and I'm an awfully nice chap. [*Crosses L. to desk, sits.*]

WARBURTON. I'll do anything you wish, but for heaven's sake, don't mention the name of Clare Roy. [R.]

JACK. In those circumstances of course not.

WARBURTON. Never?

JACK. To me Clare Roy is simply—

[MRS. WARBURTON *has entered quietly and stands listening.*

WARBURTON *signals frantically to JACK, but he has already grasped the situation.*]

[*Continues*—*r*—what shall I say? [*Boldly*] Clare Roy? Of course, every time, if you've been following Clare Roy as you say.

MRS. WARBURTON. [c.] Now where have I heard that name before?

[WARBURTON *in a frenzy.*]

JACK. [*Smiling*] Everywhere, Mrs. Warburton, everywhere. If it runs in the Cambridgeshire, put every penny you can on it. Don't you think so, George?

WARBURTON. [*Recovering*] Yes—yes—oh yes. It'll beat the favourite undoubtedly.

JACK. George is going to put his shirt on Clare Roy, aren't you, George?

WARBURTON. [*With a gulp*] Er—yes, and my shorts.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Pleasantly*] Well, with my permission, of course.

[WARBURTON *alarmed.*]

JACK. Oh, of course.

MRS. WARBURTON. Everything George has belongs to me, you know.

JACK. But not his shirt, and his shorts, surely?

[ALL laugh—WARBURTON in a very strained manner.]

MRS. WARBURTON. Do forgive my interrupting you like this, but I have an appointment at the dressmaker's.

JACK. That comes before everything, Mrs. Warburton.

MRS. WARBURTON. You will excuse me? [Smiling.]

JACK. Of course.

MRS. WARBURTON. [To door up R.] I must remember that for the Cambridgeshire—Clare Roy.

JACK. That's right.

MRS. WARBURTON. [At door up R.] It's a funny name, too.

JACK. Not really.

MRS. WARBURTON. [Coming back R.c.] Clare is a lady's name.

JACK. [Confidentially—smiling] Aha! But this is a lady horse.

MRS. WARBURTON. [All smiles] Oh, oh, I see. [Glares at WARBURTON.]

[Exit MRS. WARBURTON, door up R.]

WARBURTON. Shall we have a drink? [Crosses to table c.]

JACK. Why not? This stuff seems all right.

WARBURTON. [Pouring drinks] You do see the awful position I'm in?

JACK. I certainly do: that's why I'm here.

WARBURTON. I know I've been a silly ass.

JACK. Well, this is no time for confessions.

WARBURTON. And you don't know my wife. She can scent out anything. A bloodhound is nothing to her—and if I said one word she'd divorce me.

JACK. Well, you'd better think out that word. It may come in handy later on.

WARBURTON. But all my money is in her name.

JACK. Then, we must hope for the best, and be prepared for the burst.

WARBURTON. Ever since I made everything over to her she's looked at me as she looks at a black-beetle.

JACK. Well, that's not surprising, you know. Directly a woman touches money she becomes barbaric and reverts to the jungle.

WARBURTON. Of course, I know I've not been an angel. Like other men I've had my little—er—you know——

JACK. Yes, quite so—quite so.

WARBURTON. But on this occasion I was absolutely innocent.
[*Moves R.*]

JACK. The accident didn't give you a chance, did it? [*Puts glass on table c.*]

WARBURTON. No—yes—no! And now all this blasted fuss for nothing.

JACK. What about Clare Roy?

WARBURTON. Well, it just happened that she asked me to drive her down to the bathing pool, and—of course—I was hoping——

JACK. Yes, that's the trouble—the hoping does it.

WARBURTON. Well, if you can get me out of this I'll sign any contract you like, and we'll make the Marx engine the biggest thing on the market.

JACK. Now you're talking. Is that a bargain?

WARBURTON. Yes.

JACK. And you'll sign that contract right away?

WARBURTON. I haven't the specification and papers with me.

JACK. Oh, yes, you have. They were in your bag at "The Cuckoo's Nest."

WARBURTON. Ssh!

JACK. The bag was broken—you may remember—we had to identify you, so I looked into matters.

WARBURTON. You seem to know everything.

JACK. Yes, I'm just ringing for the maid to get the bag.
[*Approaches bell.*]

WARBURTON. [*Alarmed*] No!! There's *another* woman we've got to think about.

JACK. Another one? Well, no wonder you're never at the office. Look here, you'd better make me out a list, so that I'll know what I'm doing.

WARBURTON. [*Lowering his voice*] Alice, the maid from "The Cuckoo's Nest" is here—engaged by my wife. Is that predestination or rotten luck?

JACK. Well, personally I should call it bad housekeeping. But you can settle her, surely.

WARBURTON. She'll settle me first. Directly she sees me the balloon will go up.

JACK. Well, listen, have you got a fiver on you?

WARBURTON. I think so, why?

JACK. Give it to me, I'll soon settle her. [*Rings bell.*]

WARBURTON. [*Handing out five pound notes*] You think you can?

JACK. Sure—in no time. One—two—three—four—five.

WARBURTON. That'll do. I'll pop in here. [*Down door R.*] Tap on the door if you want me.

[*Exit WARBURTON.*]

JACK. All right.

[*ALICE enters L., crosses to JACK.*]

Ah, Alice! Don't you remember me?

ALICE. [*Alarmed—hesitates*] N-no, sir.

JACK. Good girl! [*Counting the notes*] One, two, three, four, five. Mr. Warburton has been forbidden by his doctor to go to "The Cuckoo's Nest." His heart's weak, and he mustn't swim or play any games.

[*ALICE wails.*]

Yes, I know, very pathetic, isn't it? And he doesn't want Mrs. Warburton or the doctor to know he's been there. So, if you do recognize him, keep it to yourself—will you?

ALICE. [*In tears*] If you please, sir, I—I'll do anything if you or the master won't say you've seen me before. I've been trying so hard to get into private service, and I told the mistress this was my first situation. I *had* to. [*Produces handkerchief.*]

JACK. Oh, I see. Well, don't you worry. I'll put that all right. You're a nice girl. No one shall ever know, I promise you.

ALICE. Oh, thank you, sir.

JACK. [*Counting the money again*] One, two, three, four— [*Giving her the last one*] And take this. Buy yourself something. [*Returns the four notes to his pocket*] We'll keep your secret faithfully.

ALICE. [*Going*] I shall be so grateful, sir.

JACK. That's all right.

[*ALICE starts to go.*]

And bring Mr. Warburton's bag. We shall be in here. [*R.*]

ALICE. Very good, sir.

[*Blows her nose very loudly and exits L.*]

[*JACK taps on the door calling "George."* WARBURTON pops in.]

WARBURTON. [*Eagerly*] Hello! What did she say?

JACK. It's all fixed up—quite O.K. She's safe as a house.
[*Produces the four notes.*]

WARBURTON. Good! Come in here and we'll fix everything up. Didn't the money tempt her?

JACK. She's shut up like an oyster, that's all you want to know, isn't it? Four pounds change.

WARBURTON. You *are* wonderful. [*Holds out his hand.*]

JACK. I've been trying to tell you that for the past month and you wouldn't listen to me. There you are: two for you and two for me.

[*Both exeunt door down R.*]

[*Nixon enters L. with WARBURTON's bag. He looks around, then works to door down R. MRS. WARBURTON enters in outdoor clothes door up R.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. What is it, Nixon? [*Up c.*]

NIXON. The master has asked for his bag, madam.

MRS. WARBURTON. Oh, don't disturb him—I'll take it in.
[*Crosses to NIXON.*]

NIXON. Very good, madam.

[*Puts bag R.C., crosses behind MRS. WARBURTON.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. This isn't the master's bag, surely?

NIXON. It's the one he brought home last night, madam.

MRS. WARBURTON. Why hasn't it been unpacked?

NIXON. He said there were only papers in it, and such like.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Unconvinced*] Oh, oh, I see.

NIXON. I came in at the same time as the master last night, and took the bag out of the car myself.

MRS. WARBURTON. Then, it *must* be all right.

NIXON. Very good, madam.

[*Exit NIXON.*]

[*MRS. WARBURTON approaches the door down R. with the bag in her hand. She is about to tap on the door when she scents some" thing. After sniffing a little, she traces the odour to the bag. She opens the bag and becomes intrigued. She crosses to the writing-table and examines the contents of the bag more thoroughly. Slowly she extracts a very attenuated, silvery bathing costume and various articles of feminine attire. She shows wonder and amazement. Continuing her search she produces a few letters from the bag.*]

[A peal of laughter comes from JACK and WARBURTON in the other room. She echoes the laugh faintly to herself, then decides on a course of action. She closes the bag and, guided by the letters, dials a number.]

MRS. WARBURTON. [At 'phone—very reserved] Hullo! ... Is Miss Pamela Brooks there? [Pause. She closes the case] Hullo! . . . Miss Brooks? . . . I was wondering if you had lost a bag—a kind of suitcase. . . . Oh, you *have*? . . . No, it's not in my possession at the moment, but I might be able to help you. . . . No, you wouldn't know my name, but I can give you all the information—if you care to come round. . . . Number thirteen Cavendish Mansions, Knightsbridge. . . . [Bitingly] Oh, you know it? I was afraid perhaps you might. [Replaces the receiver.]

[She thinks for a moment, then taps on the door down R., and leaving the bag R.O.G., crosses up to door L. WARBURTON enters and picks up the bag quickly. He notices it is not his own bag. MRS. WARBURTON stands watching.]

WARBURTON. Oh! Are you going now, my dear?

MRS. WARBURTON. [In icy tones] If anyone calls, I shan't be long.

WARBURTON. I'll tell Nixon.

MRS. WARBURTON. Willow be here when I return?

WARBURTON. I can't leave Stringer very well, can I?

MRS. WARBURTON. I didn't know whether you might be going—swimming.

[Exit MRS. WARBURTON door L.]

WARBURTON. [To himself—blankly] Swimming!

[JACK enters.]

JACK. Hullo, old fellow, anything wrong?

WARBURTON. [Vacantly] She mentioned swimming. Swimming!—bathing pool!—Cuckoo's Nest! [Fatally] She's on the scent!

JACK. Nonsense! She can't be.

WARBURTON. This bag doesn't belong to me. She must have seen it.

JACK. Whose is it? Give it to me.

WARBURTON. I must have brought the damn thing home last night by mistake.

JACK. Give me the bag. [Takes it to the table and opens it—Extracts the bathing dress from the bag. Exultantly] Oh, look! Look.

It's hers. Oh, isn't it wonderful! Look at it! [*Displaying the garment*] Isn't it lovely? It's hers!

WARBURTON. What is it—a horse's blinkers?

JACK. Don't be ridiculous. It's her bathing dress.

WARBURTON. Is that all there is of it?

JACK. Don't be silly, old boy, there's the rest of it. Look!

WARBURTON. [*Alarmed*] There you are. My wife said—"Swimming." She must have seen it,

[*Nixon enters.*]

NIXON. A lady to see you, sir.

WARBURTON. What name did she say?

NIXON. Miss Clare Roy.

[*JACK and WARBURTON look at each other blankly.*]

JACK. You'd better see her: it may clear the air.

[*Bus.: JACK waves brassiere nonchalantly. NIXON raises his eyebrows. JACK hides garment.*]

WARBURTON. [*Faintly*] Show her in, Nixon.

[*Both stand looking very helpless.*]

JACK. [*Glancing around*] Would you like the—er—the smelling salts?

NIXON. Miss Clare Roy.

WARBURTON. I'll leave this to you. [*Trying to escape door up R.*]

JACK. No you don't.

[*Nixon shows in CLARE ROY. She is a blonde of the actress type, about thirty, and very showily dressed. She carries several newspapers in her hand.*]

[*Nixon retires.*]

CLARE. [*Stopping WARBURTON, in high dudgeon*] Woodles! This isn't playing the game!

WARBURTON. I don't know what game you mean, but your coming here isn't exactly cricket.

CLARE. There's a sense of self-preservation in all of us.

JACK. Yes, we know that.

CLARE. [*Snappily—turning to JACK*] This is nothing to do with you.

JACK. I beg your pardon. [*JACK, crushed, goes up L.C.*]

WARBURTON. He knows everything—a great friend of mine.

CLARE. I'm sorry for you. [*Controlling her temper*] I want to know who put this notice in the papers.

WARBURTON. W—what notice?

CLARE. About the accident, of course.

WARBURTON. It didn't mention any names, thank heaven!

CLARE. Not in some of the papers; but there are three or four which have got it in large type about *me*. You, I suppose, have been -clever enough to keep your name out of it. [*Moves away to L.G.*]

WARBURTON. Well, not so loudly, please. Think of the servants.

[*JACK crosses to door L. and listens.*]

CLARE. [*Coming c.*] I'm going to shout it from Westminster Bridge if necessary. I am dependent on my public who pay their money to see me, and I've got to think of my career.

WARBURTON. But you know very well not one person in a million has ever heard of you, Clare.

CLARE. That's all you know, Woodles.

JACK. [*Soothingly*] It is a vital point with any actress, Woodles.

CLARE. [*Softened*] Even you can see that.

JACK. She's right there.

WARBURTON. She's never acted in her life. They only put her photos in the papers because she's got a lovely figure.

CLARE. It doesn't look like it here. [*Reading from the papers*] "Clare Roy, the screen actress, meets with accident while joy-riding with friend." [*Reading another*] "Film star's romance meets with disaster." And this rag—with a top line meant to be funny—^U"A Bird in the NEST" ! [*Slams papers on table c.*]

WARBURTON. Well, you'll never stop headlines like that in the papers.

JACK. Don't you like publicity?

CLARE. [*Loudly*] Publicity be damned !

WARBURTON. Not so loudly, please.

[*JACK crosses to door L. and listens.*]

CLARE, [c.] Film stars *must be pure*.

JACK. [L.] What for?

[*CLARE glares at JACK.*]

WARBURTON. [R.] Thanking you in anticipation.

[*CLARE glares at WARBURTON.*]

JACK. As it leaves me at present.

[*CLARE glares at JACK.*]

CLARE. [*Crosses. Sits R.*] Somebody's going to pay for this, and it's going to cost them a pretty penny, I promise you.

WARBURTON. But you can't deny the facts?

CLARE. [*Powdering her nose*] I can deny them. I was in the Armstrong-Siddeley with you, that's true, unfortunately; but, directly after the accident I drove away. I knew what it meant to my reputation.

WARBURTON. [*On her L.*] How could you, if the Stro[^]garm Tiddeley was smashed?

JACK. Armstrong Tiddeley, old boy.

WARBURTON. Tiddeley Armstrong.

CLARE. I took the other woman's 'bus.

JACK. That's true, Woodles.

WARBURTON. Then, who was parked in the bridal suite with me?

CLARE. [*Rise*] What I want to know is who handed the story to the papers or the police? [*Crosses c. To WARBURTON*] And if you can't tell me, I shall have no alternative but to test it in the courts right away.

WARBURTON. Well, one man, I know, did 'phone to the police.

CLARE. Who was it?

WARBURTON. Er—Mr. Stringer.

JACK. Ha! Ha! Good old Stringer,

CLARE. Where does he live?

WARBURTON. At "The—er—Cuckoo's Nest."

CLARE. Then, we'll ring him up and hear what he has to say. Where's your 'phone? [*Crosses to the writing-table.*]

JACK. Oh. I don't think that's wise, do you, Woodles?

WARBURTON. No—and I don't know the number.

CLARE. /—do. [*Dials a number*] I've been on to them three times this morning.

[*JACK and WARBURTON helpless. Pause.*]

WARBURTON. [*Feebly to Jack*] It's nice to be busy, isn't it?

JACK. Oh yes: It passes the time.

CLARE. [*At 'phone*] Hullo! [*Irritably*] Is that "The Cuckoo's Nest?" . . . May I speak to Mr. Stringer? I'm speaking for Mr. Warburton. . . . What? . . . Not there? . . . [*Listens*] Yes! yes? . . . Good! . . . Thank you! [*Replaces the receiver*] He's out, but he left a message to say that your bag has been returned, and he's bringing it on to you here now.

JACK. Oh, that's excellent.

WARBURTON. Now you can run down and see him to-morrow.

CLARE. [*Sits L. at desk*] I'm not taking any chances. I'll wait here and see Mr. Stringer. [*Settles herself in the chair, opens her bag, applies lipstick, and scents her dress a little.*]

WARBURTON. No, no, Clare, you can't do that. I'm expecting my wife home any minute. It would be most unwise. [*Moving L. to CLARE.*]

CLARE. [*Deliberately*] I am going to wait here till he comes, and we're going to discuss this matter together.

WARBURTON. But you'll make all the trouble in the world.

JACK. [*Turns WARBURTON aside*] Miss Roy, listen to me. If you are found here there will be a tremendous scandal.

WARBURTON. And with my lurid past—oho!

JACK. Thames mud would look like gin in comparison.

WARBURTON. I know I've been a blackguard.

JACK. A loathsome brute; but hitherto he's kept your name out of it. Haven't you, Woodles?

WARBURTON. [*Pathetically*] Er—yes.

JACK. [*To CLARE*] If Mrs. Warburton cites you as co-respondent your libel case won't be worth tuppence ha'penny.

CLARE. [*Rising and realizing*] I didn't think of that. [*Gathers up papers*] Then, perhaps I'd better go.

[*Door slam heard off. JACK rushes to door L. and peeps out.*]

WARBURTON. What's that?

JACK. [*In a loud whisper*] It is———[*Coming to c.*] It's—your wife!

WARBURTON. [*To CLARE*] Now you've done it. We're sunk with all hands.

JACK. No! [*To CLARE*] Come in here. [*Down door R.*] I'll find some way out.

[*JACK opens the door and, passing CLARE out, prepares to follow.*]

WARBURTON. [*To JACK*] Here, take this bag for the love of Mike! And don't forget to lock the door. My wife is sure to go into the bedroom, and then we'll sneak this gold-digger out.

[*JACK picks up papers hurriedly. WARBURTON picks up bag; spills contents all over floor.*]

[*Picking things up*] Scent all over the damn place.

JACK. [*Going to door*] Has she really got a lovely figure?

WARBURTON. Gorgeous! But I hope everything she eats turns to fat.

[Exit JACK door down R. Door locked.]

[MRS. WARBURTON enters L., still in out-door clothes. She comes c. Her manner is hard and resolute.]

WARBURTON. Ah, my dear, you've got back.

MRS. WARBURTON. [Shortly] Where is Mr. Stringer?

WARBURTON. In there. [R.] He doesn't want to be disturbed for a moment.

MRS. WARBURTON. And why?

WARBURTON. He's busy—er—experimenting on the atom.

MRS. WARBURTON. [L. at desk. Begins to sniff the air] What can I smell?

WARBURTON. I don't know, my dear. I daresay the spring cleaning will remove it.

[MRS. WARBURTON moves R.C. and catches WARBURTON waving his handkerchief. He blows his nose.]

[MRS. WARBURTON moves around to chair left, etc., trying to trace the scent.]

WARBURTON. You don't think the cats get up here, do you, dear?

MRS. WARBURTON. Depends on what kind. [Continues sniffing around.]

[WARBURTON waves the sides of his jacket until discovered by MRS. WARBURTON.]

WARBURTON. [Smiling] Just an idea of flying—that's all. I wish I was an owl!

MRS. WARBURTON. All you need is the feathers!

[MRS. WARBURTON passes out to the bedroom door up R.]

[WARBURTON dashes to door down R. and taps frantically. JACK appears.]

WARBURTON. Come on—quickly. There isn't a moment to lose.

[JACK hurries in, dragging CLARE ROY with him. They get to centre when the door up R. opens slowly.]

No, no—go back—go back!

[JACK and CLARE scramble out door down R. WARBURTON, by door down R., sprawls nonchalantly in chair.-\]

[Nixon enters L. Crosses to door up R.]

NIXON. Madam!

MRS. WARBURTON. *[Off]* What is it, Nixon?

NIXON. The lady has arrived, madam.

MRS. WARBURTON. Show her in. *[Enters.]*

[WARBURTON tugs at the door down R., trying to escape, but finds it locked.]

Don't you go. I want you here—particularly. It may be someone you know.

WARBURTON. No, I'm sure not.

MRS. WARBURTON. We—shall see.

NIXON. Miss Brooks!

[NIXON shows in PAMELA BROOKS. She enters breezily, all smiles and affability. She is well-dressed. NIXON retires.]

MRS. WARBURTON. *[Very reserved]* Miss Pamela Brooks?

PAMELA. Yes. I say, it's frightfully nice of you, going to all this trouble about my wretched bag.

MRS. WARBURTON. How do you do. *[Searchingly]* I am Mrs. Warburton.

PAMELA. How do you do?

MRS. WARBURTON. *[Watches PAMELA and WARBURTON all through the scene]* This is my husband.

PAMELA. How do you do?

WARBURTON. How do you do? *[Crosses to PAMELA.]*

MRS. WARBURTON. I think you have met before.

WARBURTON. No, I regret to say.

PAMELA. I don't think I've had that pleasure.

[Both very natural and innocent. MRS. WARBURTON looks from one to the other with surprise. WARBURTON quite pleased with himself.]

WARBURTON. *[Offers chair L.]* Won't you sit down?

PAMELA. *[Sits—effusively]* Thanks, it was awfully decent of you to ring up. I've been in a terrible state about it, and I was afraid to advertise. You're sure it *is* my bag?

[WARBURTON alarmed.]

MRS. WARBURTON. I found your name inside.

PAMELA. Oh, good.

MRS. WARBURTON. *[To WARBURTON]* Where have you put Miss Brooks's bag?

WARBURTON. *[Confused]* I—er—I don't know. If you mean the one in there with Mr. Stringer—

MRS. WARBURTON. Probably. Will you kindly bring it here?

WARBURTON. Certainly [*To door*] Yes—no—er, I can't possibly disturb him at the moment, he's busy with his engine.

PAMELA. Oh, please—I don't mind waiting—really.

WARBURTON. [*Nervously*] From what I know of his ability, I don't think he'll be very long.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*To PAMELA*] If you don't mind waiting. How did you come to lose the bag?

PAMELA. Carelessness, I suppose. But I was feeling ill at the time, and I just picked up a man's bag by mistake.

MRS. WARBURTON. Oh, indeed.

[WARBURTON *wondering.*]

And what have you done with the man's bag?

PAMELA. I took it back immediately.

MRS. WARBURTON. To his house?

PAMELA. No—to "The Cuckoo's Nest."

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Amazed*] The what?

PAMELA. Just an ordinary road-house, you know.

MRS. WARBURTON. What do they do there? Do they have egg-laying contests?

PAMELA. No; nothing so productive.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*To WARBURTON*] *Have you ever heard of the place?*

WARBURTON. I can't remember anything of the kind, my dear.

PAMELA. You see, I'm a novelist, and—er—I have to go places for copy, as we call it. You may have heard of my best-seller, *One Passionate Week*.

[WARBURTON *is delighted. He sits R., wriggles his legs, straightens his tie, etc.* MRS. WARBURTON *scornfully watches him. He subsides.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. I'm sorry, I haven't. And the gentleman whose bag you took—was he there also seeking some passionate copy?

PAMELA. [*Laughing*] I couldn't tell you, I'm sure. I shouldn't have been there so frequently, but for—

MRS. WARBURTON. For what?

[WARBURTON *anxious.*]

PAMELA. [*Laughing it off modestly*] Well, to be frank, I met a most charming man there in the swimming pool.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Getting warm*] Indeed. And you fell for him?

PAMELA. [*Laughs*] Fell? The laws of gravitation must have all gone wrong. He swept me off my feet absolutely. He was the most audacious man I've ever met.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Watching WARBURTON, who squirms*] That's sometimes an attraction.

PAMELA. But, I'm not going to be taken for granted.

MRS. WARBURTON. Then, I should tell him so.

PAMELA. I *have*, more or less. I'm sorry to say I've treated him almost like mud.

WARBURTON. Mud! Then you'll have nothing left to offer him when you're married. [*Loudly*] Ha, ha, ha, ha.

[MRS. WARBURTON *turns to WARBURTON and he subsides at once.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. Why were you so afraid of advertising for the bag?

PAMELA. Well, it's rather a funny situation. I was in a motor accident, and I learned yesterday from the doctor that I was carried into the road-house with a gentleman as his wife. It sounds strange, I know.

[WARBURTON *registers panic.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. Very strange.

[WARBURTON *mopping his brow.*]

PAMELA. We were both more or less unconscious, and I'm simply in a blue fit in case I meet the man.

MRS. WARBURTON. But why—if you've acted innocently?

PAMELA. He might be married, and his wife might not believe me.

WARBURTON. [*Huskily*] I think I'll go and get a glass of water, if you'll excuse me. [WARBURTON *gropes his way to door up R. Can't find knob.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. Since you can't get out, will you kindly ask Mr. Stringer for the bag?

WARBURTON. [*Dazedly*] Certainly.

MRS. WARBURTON. Or shall I go?

WARBURTON. Oh no; I'll do it.

[WARBURTON *staggers out down R.*]

[MRS. WARBURTON *turns immediately to her visitor.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Severely*] I suppose, Miss Brooks, you have no idea why your bag happens to be here in my flat?

PAMELA. I haven't the slightest. [*All smiles.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. And you have no suggestion to offer?

PAMELA. None whatsoever. [*Crosses L. to desk.*]

[*JACK rushes in with the bag, followed by WARBURTON. The door is left ajar.*]

JACK. [*Joyously*] Pam! I didn't know you were here. [*Takes her hands, which she resents slightly—Puts bag under R. end of desk L.*] This is wonderful! I knew you wouldn't desert me. Are you going to lunch with me to-day?

PAMELA. [*Coldly*] I've called for my bag.

JACK. I'm so sorry. I took it away by mistake, of course. I did, really. You *will* forgive me, Pam? I wouldn't have done it for worlds.

[*WARBURTON is jubilant. MRS. WARBURTON watches him with a baffled expression.*]

[*Nixon enters.*]

NIXON. A gentleman has arrived with the master's bag, from "The Cuckoo's Nest."

MRS. WARBURTON. Show him in.

[*Nixon retires.*]

PAMELA. [*Alarmed*] Then that means . . . [*Moves R.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. We shall see.

PAMELA. Oh!!!

[*JACK and WARBURTON alarmed.*]

[*Nixon shows in JOE BROMELLI, carrying Warburton's bag. Exit NIXON.*]

[*JOE enters briskly, then stands nervously taking in the scene.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. [*To JOE*] Take the bag from him and plant it in front of WARBURTON.]

MRS. WARBURTON. [*To WARBURTON—severely*] Is that your bag?

WARBURTON. [*Nervously*] I don't know—yes—it might be.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*To PAMELA*] Is that the bag you returned to the road-house?

PAMELA. Yes, it is.

MRS. WARBURTON. And you have the audacity to come here and tell me these fairy tales!

PAMELA. Oh!! [*Turns away to JACK.*]

JOE. [*Centre*] Excuse me, Mrs. Worthington, Miss Brooks is not to blame. The cause of the trouble was the film star who drove away after the accident.

MRS. WARBURTON. How do you know this?

JOE. Well, I was there.

MR& WARBURTON. Oh, indeed? I don't think I have the pleasure of your acquaintance?

JOE. My name is——[*Pauses, looking to WARBURTON with conspiratorial expression*]——STRINGER.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Aghast*] Stringer?

[*Enter CLARE, down right.*]

CLARE. And I'm the lady who drove away after the accident.

MRS. WARBURTON. And who are you?

CLARE. My name is Clare Roy.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*With a shriek*] Oh!! The racehorse!

GENERAL COLLAPSE.

CURTAIN.

*

ACT III

SCENE : *The scene is the same. A few hours have elapsed since the events in the previous Act, and it is now afternoon. The breakfast-table is now up R., with lamp, ornament) etc.*

Before the curtain rises a door slam is heard. The Curtain rises, Another slam is heard.

MRS. WARBURTON *enters in angry mood door up R. and slams the door. She crosses L. tempestuously, changes her mind, re-crosses to door down R. and Exit—slams door.*

WARBURTON *enters door U.R. in similar mood—slams door. He hesitates about c., then crosses and exit door L.—slams door. Another loud slam qffL.*

MRS. WARBURTON *re-enters door down R. and slams door. A door is heard to slam off-stage to the L. MRS. WARBURTON hurries to door up R.—exit and slams door.*

WARBURTON *rushes in door L.—slams door. He crosses quickly to door up R., tugs at the handle and finds it locked. He stands nonplussed for a moment.*

NIXON *enters L.*

NIXON. Are you requiring anything, sir?

WARBURTON. *[Calmly]* No—no thanks.

[Nixon is going.]

WARBURTON. Oh—er—Nixon, you may have noticed that there's been just a spot of domestic trouble in the house—

NIXON. I haven't noticed anything, sir. Cook passed some comment ; but I assured her it was just *ordinary happy married life.*

WARBURTON. *[Looking rather sick]* Oh, yes.

[Nixon retires.]

[WARBURTON crosses to door down R. and exit—slams door.]

[The Telephone bell is heard.]

[MRS. WARBURTON peeps out from door up R., then crosses stealthily to the 'phone.]

MRS. WARBURTON. *[At 'phone]* Hullo? *[Listens]* Who? What name? . . . *[With a wryface]* Woodles? No, no one of *that* name here. *[Replaces receiver. Crosses R.]* At least, I hope not! *[Phone*

rings] Hullo! Is that Messrs. Sherwood and Sherwood. . . . Yes, please. Mr. Sherwood? . . . Yes, Mrs. Warburton speaking—of Knightsbridge. . . . Thank you! [Waits] Oh, Mr. Sherwood, can you or your partner come along at once? . . . It's about my husband, and frightfully important. . . . Thank you! [*Replaces receiver,*]

[WARBURTON *rushes in door down R. and slams the door, but becomes apologetic immediately on discovering his wife.*]

WARBURTON. Oh! I've just been thinking, my dear—isn't it time you had a new fur coat?

MRS. WARBURTON. What for? To keep me warm or to keep me quiet? [*She turns to leave.*]

WARBURTON. Now look here, will you listen to me—just for a moment—please—and I'll tell you the *real* truth.

MRS. WARBURTON. You couldn't tell the real truth if you tried, and I'm fed up with the other variety.

WARBURTON. But if I can prove what I say?

MRS. WARBURTON. You'll have ample opportunity to do that through the solicitors. I've just been on the 'phone to them now.

WARBURTON. What for?

MRS. WARBURTON. I am going to apply for a divorce.

WARBURTON. Don't be absurd. No decent-minded judge would listen to such a silly story.

MRS. WARBURTON. Judges are not paid to be decent-minded. Your appearance alone would be sufficient for any woman to get a decree in five minutes.

WARBURTON. I didn't know I created such a bad impression.

MRS. WARBURTON. You grin like Lothario, you talk like Don Juan, and you walk—like Henry the Eighth.

[*At this moment WARBURTON is walking down R.G.*]

WARBURTON. That's very unfortunate for me. But, even if I am so bad, wouldn't it be more to your credit to stand by me and make an honest man of me?

MRS. WARBURTON. An archangel couldn't do that.

WARBURTON. Have you thought about money matters—how you're going to live without me?

MRS. WARBURTON. Well, considering you placed everything in my name, I shall be better off without you. [*Coming L.G.*]

WARBURTON. Oh yes—I'm glad you've remembered that.

MRS. WARBURTON. But I shall not leave you destitute.

WARBURTON. That's very generous of you—with my money.

MRS. WARBURTON. Not too generous. I shall provide for you in a way that will leave no scope for further indiscretions.

WARBURTON. [R.C. *with resignation*] Thanks very much. But how am I to run a financial business without capital? [*Crosses R.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. Thousands of others do. [*Ironically*] Possibly Mr. Jack Marx will help you.

WARBURTON. He's only an inventor. [*Crosses L.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. You've no need to remind me of that. [*Moving up R.*] But he doesn't take me in as easily as you imagine. And I don't believe your stories about Stringer. [*Coming down R.C.*] Nor do I believe that motor engines have anything to do with knobs on the sun!

[*She slams off up R.*]

WARBURTON. /said spots! Pimples!

[*Enter JACK.*]

JACK. Pimples?

[WARBURTON *gives a startled squeak.*]

Is she coming round?

WARBURTON. Doesn't look like it. She's out to give battle.

JACK. [*Despondent. Sinks into chair*] All women are the same. [*Buries his head in his hands*] I've just spent two pounds on a lunch, and Pam won't have me.

WARBURTON. You shouldn't waste your money.

JACK. It *was* your money.

WARBURTON. Try her with a diet next time.

JACK. [*Hopelessly*] It's no use. There must be something about me she doesn't like.

WARBURTON. I think that's really at the bottom of *my* trouble. [*Crosses L.*] Tell me, how did Henry the Eighth walk, do you happen to know?

JACK. Not very stylishly, I should think, after all he went through. But don't start dragging him into this for Heaven's sake.

WARBURTON. I don't want to.

JACK. There's too much of his stuff flying about as it is. I've got to make money, that's the main point. I'm sure when you propose that it acts like an anaesthetic on a woman, and they agree to anything.

WARBURTON. But it's awful when they "come to."

JACK. Where's that damned bag with our agreement?

WARBURTON. In there. [*Pointing to door down R.*] I've hidden it.

JACK. [*Crossing to door down R.*] Let us go through those papers. We've got to do something.

[*Exit JACK door down R.—leaving it open.*]

[*WARBURTON stands by the open door giving directions. He is concealed by the door as MRS. WARBURTON enters stealthily door up R. She crosses to L., and passes out door L. unnoticed by WARBURTON.*]

WARBURTON. [*Speaking off*] Just behind the easy chair—over there. That's right—just underneath.

[*JACK returns with bag, crosses to table L. WARBURTON closes the door.*]

JACK. [*Extracting papers from the bag on the writing-table*] I want to fix up those agreements about the engine. Then we shall know what we're doing.

WARBURTON. But while my wife controls everything my signature isn't worth a sausage.

JACK. I'll get *her* to sign on the dotted line, don't you worry. [*Opens out the agreements.*]

WARBURTON. [*Signing*] Just as you like, but I haven't a penny to back it. Two months from now I shall be on the Embankment.

JACK. [*Returns the agreements to his pocket*] Don't you believe it.

WARBURTON. She wants a divorce—she's already 'phoned the solicitors.

JACK. Oh, that's absurd!

WARBURTON. Women do absurd things.

JACK. She's got no grounds for divorce.

[*Pause. JACK looks at WARBURTON with a sudden suspicion. WARBURTON looks guilty.*]

Has she?

WARBURTON. [*Shrugs*] Well, it depends on what they rake up, of course.

JACK. That's where you beat me. But I haven't been idle. I've got a new idea, and it's going to make your wife listen to me.

WARBURTON. Ssh! She may be listening now.

JACK. What? [*Lowering his voice*] In the bedroom? [*Moves up R. and comes down to R. of WARBURTON.*]

WARBURTON. Yes.

JACK. [*Whispering*] Of course—she went in there, didn't she? [*Raising his voice as they both glance towards door up R.*] I say, what a strange thing that racehorse of yours should be the same name as my lady friend.

WARBURTON. [*Raising his voice*] Yes, isn't it? Most odd!.

[*Each time they work in turn nearer to the door.*]

JACK. [*Eyes on door*] But she can't get a divorce for a thing like that. And I can bring hundreds of men to prove that you have never looked at another woman.

WARBURTON. [*Loudly*] So can I. I can bring *thousands*.

JACK. You are the most scrupulously moral man I've ever met.

WARBURTON. [*Under his breath*] Say that again.

JACK. [*Quietly*] No—doesn't sound right if you repeat it.

WARBURTON. [*Loudly*] You know what I think of my wife.

JACK. I certainly do. I know how you worship her. I've never met a man so devoted to his wife in all my life.

WARBURTON. I can't help it; I love her so.

JACK. So do I.

[*Having worked gradually nearer and nearer to the door, JACK is now stooping for his voice to pass through the keyhole.*]

WARBURTON. [*Sotto voce*] No! No! You fool! [*Loudly*] I can't live without her.

JACK. [*Aside*] You never said a truer word than that.

WARBURTON. [*Tearfully*] I can't really.

JACK. Well, don't give way, old boy. I hate to see a man cry.

WARBURTON. It's the innocent who always suffer.

JACK. Yes! [*Pathetically.*]

WARBURTON. And I've been so faithful to her.

JACK. I know you have. True as a little soldier.

WARBURTON. Sailor!

JACK. Sailor.

[*They are both turned towards door up R. as MRS. WARBURTON enters stealthily at L., and crossing R., stands watching them.*]

She can't get a divorce if you've done nothing.

WARBURTON. But I don't want her to turn from me. She's such a sweet woman. [*He turns and discovers MRS. WARBURTON.*]

[*JACK continues at the keyhole. WARBURTON tries to attract his attention by kicking out backwards.*]

JACK. What a husband ! What a man ! What an angel! [*Three times*] [*Quietly*] Come on, don't leave it all to me.

[*JACK turns and also discovers MRS. WARBURTON watching.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Coldly*] Will you kindly allow me to pass?

[*They move aside a little. MRS. WARBURTON crosses in front of them.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Frigidly*] Thank you.

[*She opens the door and exits with dignity', closing door with a bang. WARBURTON strolls down L. JACK down R., both too full to speak.*]

WARBURTON. [*After a silence, mopping his neck*] It keeps warm, doesn't it.?

[**JACK** *only breathes a sigh.*]

Was that the new idea you spoke about?

JACK. [*Testily*] No !

WARBURTON. I was going to say if it is I don't think much of it.

JACK. But we've got to do something. A woman in a mood like that may do anything. I'm going to tell—the—truth.

WARBURTON. Never!

JACK. Everything from start to finish.

WARBURTON. [*Sitting wearily at table L. head on hand*] Ah, she'd never believe it. I've tried her with every truth I could think of.

JACK. But I've asked the other people to come here and substantiate. She can't go against them. [*Taking out cigarette case*] Have a cigarette?

WARBURTON. Thanks.

JACK. Where do you keep 'em?

[*WARBURTON goes up to table c. and comes back with cigarette box.*]

[*Filling his case*] Now look here. I've asked Pam to come here, but she doesn't love me, you see, so she mightn't turn up ... you never know.

WARBURTON. Here, you've left a couple!

JACK. Thanks. [*Takes the last two.*]

[*WARBURTON does panto business of lighting and smoking cigarette. JACK watches sympathetically.*]

JACK. Here, have one of mine, will you?

[*WARBURTON takes one and each lights his own cigarette.*]

I've also asked old Joe Bromelli to come along, and he's promised to telephone the doctor,

WARBURTON. What doctor?

JACK. Doctor Boone who examined you at the "Nest."

WARBURTON. What good can he do?

JACK. He can prove that you were the victim of circumstances—that you were unconscious, and so forth.

WARBURTON. It won't do any good.

JACK. We *must* try something. I don't fancy spending the rest of my life in poverty, if you do.

WARBURTON. You are thinking only of the financial side.

JACK. I know the importance of it when you're in love with a girl.

[Nixon enters.]

WARBURTON. What is it, Nixon?

NIXON. A gentleman to see you, sir.

WARBURTON. What name?

NIXON. He was here this morning. He says he's not quite sure about his name.

JACK. It's Joe Bromelli.

WARBURTON. Show him in.

NIXON. Very good, sir.

[Nixon retires.]

JACK. Keep him well plied with drink. You must keep him in good humour.

WARBURTON. [*Gets drinks from cabinet*] Excellent idea.

JACK. My humour is of importance too.

WARBURTON. I was expecting that.

JACK. [*Loudly—to door up R.*] I'm going to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth.

WARBURTON. [*Under his breath*] Oh, don't start that again, for heaven's sake!

[Nixon shows in JOE BROMELLI, who enters nervously. He is slightly drunk. Exit NIXON. JOE goes to shake hands with JACK, but walks past him.]

JACK. Hullo, Joe, my dear fellow. Good of you to come and all that. We must help a friend in need.

JOE. Especially as I feel somewhat to blame.

WARBURTON. [*Offering glass*] Have a drink.

JOE. I've been drinking a lot of chianti, but thank you very much, Mr. Woppleton.

WARBURTON. Warburton! I do wish you'd get my name. [*He pours out drink for JACK and himself.*]

JOE. Yes, sure, I got it, Mr. Woppleton.

JACK. Sit down.

[*JOE almost collapses into the chair JACK pushes under him.*]

Everything is just like home. There's nothing to worry about.

JOE. Except that Miss Roy. She's going to sue me for libel.

JACK. Oh, don't listen to her. She's only out for cheap advertisement and money. These women will cut their throats for a headline in the papers. [*Takes drink from WARBURTON*] All I want from you is the truth about the accident. Mrs. Warburton is a bit annoyed. Drink up! Now the only difficulty is going to be the fact that you put Mr. Warburton and the lady in the same bedroom.

JOE. I'm sure you would have done the same thing yourself.

JACK. I daresay. I daresay.

JOE. It's a funny thing about that other man, though.

JACK. Which one?

JOE. The one that you said was a professor of elocution.

JACK. Oh yes! [*Moves up to table centre.*]

JOE. Well, I've found out that his name really is Stringer.

WARBURTON. I say! What a coincidence!

JACK. Pity we didn't know that earlier, eh?

JOE. Someone said he's a B.B.C. announcer—but I don't believe it.

WARBURTON. O Lord, no! He's too tall! [*Comes round to left of JOE.*]

JOE. He's coming up to give his account of the accident.

WARBURTON. Now you know exactly what to do?

JOE. Sure.

WARBURTON. For Heaven's sake don't mention any blondes or film stars.

[*MRS. WARBURTON enters up R. and goes to armchair R. for a magazine.*]

JACK. Mrs. Warburton, will you kindly listen for a moment? Mr. Bromelli is anxious to explain a few things to you.

MRS. WARBURTON. I'm sorry, but I'm not interested, Mr. Marx.

JACK. You are doing your husband a grave injustice.

WARBURTON. I know, of course, what you must think of me.

MRS. WARBURTON. I hope you don't.

JACK. In the first place, this is not Mr. Stringer. This is Mr. Joe Bromelli, proprietor of "The Cuckoo's Nest."

[Joe *ises and bows awkwardly.*]

JOE. Hullo, Mrs. Wobbleton, old bird, how are you?

JACK. Sit down. He will tell you categorically what happened that evening,

MRS. WARBURTON. It will not alter my opinion.

JACK. [*Taking JOE'S glass R.*] Proceed.

JOE. Well, Mrs. Wobblington, on—er that evening, your husband was driving his car near "The Cuckoo's Nest"—

JACK. Alone?

JOE. Sure, when a lady crash into him.

JACK. In another car. Correct! He was driving perfectly straight, wasn't he?

JOE. Magernificently!

JACK. No signs of alcohol or anything?

JOE. Not the slightest.

JACK. Correct. Proceed.

JOE. Well, after the accident, I make a big mistake. I gather up the pieces—that is, Mr. Wimbledon and the lady, and carry them into the Bridal Suite.

WARBURTON. I was unconscious during all this.

MRS. WARBURTON. Not unusual.

JOE. You see, Mr. Woppington kept on moaning about his poor wife, and naturally I thought the lady next to him *was* his wife.

MRS. WARBURTON. Then why the Bridal Suite?

JACK. Yes, why?

WARBURTON. Why?

JOE. Why? Well, there were no other rooms vacant. My two sons occupy the red and blue rooms, my three daughters they got the large front and small back, and the twins they got the nursery, and I'm a very busy man.

MRS. WARBURTON. I should say so.

JOE. I'm never away from home for a moment.

MRS. WARBURTON. Your spare time must be strictly limited!

JOE. My wife sees to that.

WARBURTON. Men often suffer in silence.

MRS. WARBURTON. Quite an inane remark.

WARBURTON. Thank you.

JACK. You see, George knew you would worry about the accident, so he did his best to keep the news from you! Well, carry on. Tell the whole truth. Keep nothing back.

JOE% [*Rises. Merry and muddled*] Well, Mrs. Walthamstow, the whole truth and nothing *of the* truth. Your husband drove down to the swimming pool to find a mermaid.

MRS. WARBURTON. What!

JOE. He had an accident and couldn't find the right woman.

MRS. WARBURTON. Oh! [*Crosses R. and back.*]

[*JACK protests.*]

JOE. No, no, the whole truth, you've said it. Then Mr. Wobblington tried to think of all the blondes he knew . . . hundreds of them. . . .

MRS. WARBURTON. OH!!

JOE. . . . and he couldn't. He took the wrong worran. He said she was a film star. . . .

[*MRS. WARBURTON glares at WARBURTON, who goes up L.*]

But he couldn't get her to twinkle because she'd had a couple.

[*SSShing business from WARBURTON and JACK.*]

The lacy is going to sue your husband for breach of libel because she's fighting for her honour and he's trying to make her lose it.

JACK. Shut up!

[*MRS. WARBURTON goes up R. JACK follows, trying to pacify her.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. Don't you talk to me.

JOE. The whole truth, Mr. Woodlebottle. [*Persisting*] He wanted to go back to the Bridal Suite because he'd made her unconscious.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Rises, with a horrified:*] Ohh!

JOE. But I wouldn't let him. No. There's no such person as Mr. Stringer. It's only an excuse to play games; he told me so.

[*MRS. WARBURTON threatens JOE. JACK intervenes.*]

JACK. [*Game to the last*] Mrs. Warburton, is there anything else we can tell you?

MRS. WARBURTON. Yes! Can any of you tell me, who is "*Woodles*"?

JACK. [*Stumped . . . then a brainwave*] Clare Roy's jockey!

[MRS. WARBURTON glares at him and advances threateningly on him. JACK retreats. She then slams off up R.]

JOE. [*Sings*] Oh, Woodles, who is Woodles, he's gone and drowned his poppa's poodles.

WARBURTON. [*Ringing bell*] I told you the truth was no use. My wife never did take to it.

JACK. Everything was going splendidly, until she sprang "Woodles" on us.

JOE. [*Sings*] Oh, Woodles, who is Woodles? He died last night from eating noodles.

WARBURTON. Wouldn't you like to go home to your family?

JOE. No, I'm enjoying myself.

[*Enter NIXON.*]

WARBURTON. Nixon, see this gentleman safely on to a bus, will you?

NIXON. Yes, sir. Which bus?

JACK. The first bus that comes along.

JOE. Okay, I can take a hint. Glad to be of service to you, gentlemen. Joe Bromelli don't let his friends down, no sir!

[*Nixon holds door open for JOE, who makes a drunken exit, and follows him off.*]

WARBURTON. Disgusting.

JACK. He never could carry his drink.

WARBURTON. I only hope the devil has some secret torture saved up for women.

JACK. You know, I believe your wife's had this divorce business at the back of her mind for a long time.

[*Enter ALICE.*]

ALICE. Miss Brooks to see Mr. Marx.

JACK. [*Delightedly*] It's Pam!

WARBURTON. Well, show her in, Alice. [*Exit ALICE.*]

JACK. I must see her alone. Perhaps she's going to accept me, after all.

WARBURTON. Then you didn't waste my money! [*Heroically*] You shall be alone. [*Crosses to door down R.*] I'm going in here to consider the advisability of committing suicide.

JACK. I can't make love with that going on. Don't be so damn selfish!

WARBURTON. [*With dignity*] If I decide to end everything, I will endeavour to pass out with as little noise as possible.

[*Exit WARBURTON, down R. Enter ALICE.*]

ALICE. Miss Brooks.

[*PAMELA enters left to centre.*]

PAMELA. Hello! Am I late for the meeting?

JACK. Yes, I'm afraid you are, rather.

PAMELA. Sorry; I had an appointment.

JACK. Oh, it doesn't matter. I didn't expect you, anyway.

PAMELA. Why not?

JACK. Well, you knew I should be here, I suppose, and wanted to avoid me. [*He crosses a little right.*]

PAMELA. Why should I want to avoid you?

JACK. Because I asked you to marry me, and I haven't any money.

PAMELA. All you talk about is money, just as if I were some horrid little gold-digger.

JACK. Well, you wouldn't marry a man without money . . . would you?

PAMELA. Who said so? It would depend on the man and whether he loved me or not.

JACK. But you know I love you.

PAMELA. How can I know? [*She crosses to him*] You haven't told me.

JACK. [*Very romantic, working up to an embrace*] Oh, Pam darling, I love you . . . I love you more than anything else in the whole wide world—I do—

[*There is a terrific crash of chairs off right.*]

JACK. [*To PAMELA*] Excuse me a minute. [*Crosses to R. and shouts through it*] I say, George! If you *could* postpone it for ten minutes, I'd be awfully grateful. [*Returns to PAMELA*] I'm sorry, Pam, it's Mr. Warburton. He's not very well.

PAMELA. When Dr. Boone called on me he seemed very worried about Mr. Warburton.

JACK. It isn't that, it's his wife. She's going to divorce him.

PAMELA. Poor man. He looks so innocent, and he seems quite crazy with worry.

JACK. Crazy! That's the idea. Why didn't I think of it before.

PAMELA. But he isn't really crazy, is he?

JACK. No, but he might be. Accident, concussion, anything might develop.

PAMELA. But . . .

JACK. Now don't ask questions, Pam. You've given me a *terrific idea*. Jump into your car and find that doctor; don't lose a minute. This may mean all the money in the world for us.

PAMELA. [*Going L.*] You can rely on me. I'll step on it.

JACK. [*Calling her back*] Pam darling, come here. Then will you marry me?

PAMELA. I'd love to.

JACK. Darling. [*They embrace.*]

PAMELA. I must fly!

JACK. Yes, and hurry back here, won't you?

[*They blow each other a kiss. Exit PAMELA. JACK dashes down right, finds door locked.*]

[*Pounding on door and calling frantically through it*] George! Woodles! If you haven't done it yet, don't do it!

[*WARBURTON dazedly wanders out, one trouser leg caught up. They face each other.*]

JACK. Oh, thank goodness!

WARBURTON. Tried to get out of the window, but the chair slipped.

JACK. Listen! I've got an idea.

WARBURTON. Another idea? I'll try the window again. [*To door.*]

JACK. [*Stopping him*] George, come here, listen to me! Pam's gone to find that doctor. Your wife can't get a divorce for temporary insanity—pull your trousers down—and that's where we could beat her, *if you were only nuts!*

WARBURTON. Nuts?

JACK. Cuckoo . . . Potty . . . going like this. . . . [*Panto of lunatic*] You see?

WARBURTON. But I'm not, am I?

JACK. You *will* be if you allow this to go on. Why not anticipate a little? Listen. [*Rattling on*] When you had the accident the doctor said that complications were possible. Your head was injured—brain might be affected. Now you have hallucinations—you're not responsible for your actions. There's the excuse for everything. You get a clean sheet right up to date, and—she *carCt* divorce you.

WARBURTON. My wife would never believe it, she knows I must have *some* brains.

JACK. What makes you so sure? She can't argue against medical opinion. All you've got to do is to be a little strange—rave a little in front of the doctor, and I'll do the talking.

WARBURTON. I'd hate anyone to think I'd lost my senses.

JACK. Your friends may not notice it. The difference would be almost imperceptible.

WARBURTON. I couldn't risk it.

JACK. All right. You know the alternative—the Embankment. What time do they open?

[ALICE enters.]

ALICE. Dr. Boone.

JACK. There you are. The very man we want, and if you go through with this we've nothing more to worry about but old age.

WARBURTON. No, I couldn't risk it. Wait! Come in here and tell me the whole idea again, very carefully. [To door down R.]

JACK. [To ALICE] Show the doctor in, and ask him to wait a few moments.

ALICE. Very good, sir. [Retires.]

JACK. [Going] I'm sure we can spoof him into anything.

[Exeunt JACK and WARBURTON talking, door down R.]

[MRS. WARBURTON enters door up R. and crosses stealthily to the telephone. Just as she begins to dial, ALICE shows in DR. BOONE.]

ALICE. Dr. Boone!

[ALICE retires.]

MRS. WARBURTON. [Surprised] Doc-tor?

DOCTOR. Mrs. Warburton?

MRS. WARBURTON. Yes.

DOCTOR. I was asked to call about your husband.

MRS. WARBURTON. [Mystified] Oh, indeed?

DOCTOR. I presume he's not so well?

MRS. WARBURTON. I was not aware. Are you sure you've come to the right address?

DOCTOR. I think so.

[JACK enters from door down R.]

JACK. [Shaking hands] Ah, doctor—you remember me?

DOCTOR. How do you do? [MRS. WARBURTON turns to go.]

JACK. Oh, don't go, please, Mrs. Warburton. It's about George, and very serious.

MRS. WARBURTON. Serious?

JACK. Yes. I'm a great friend of Mr. Warburton's, doctor, and I'm terribly worried about his condition.

MRS. WARBURTON. Now what's happened?

JACK. You remember, of course, the motor-car accident, doctor?

DOCTOR. Oh, perfectly.

JACK. Well, Mrs. Warburton hasn't heard the truth of the matter.

MRS. WARBURTON. No, I'd begun to give up hope.

JACK. Didn't you say at the time that there was an injury to the head which might affect his mental condition?

DOCTOR. Yes, there is always that possibility.

JACK. Well, I'm afraid that's happened, doctor.

DOCTOR. Well, where is he? Let me see him.

JACK. [*Pathetically, almost overcome*] Well, he's ... in ... here. I'll fetch him. [*Crosses sadly to door down R. and calls*] George! [*Then he returns to R. centre*] It's all right, doctor, he's . . . coming. [*Very upset.*]

[*While JACK goes to door R. DOCTOR arranges chair in favourable light left c., just clear of table L.*]

[*With waistcoat undone and tie flowing, WARBURTON dances on, to Doctor, down-stage, and then trots round and round Doctor three times. The last time he stays on Doctor's right. DOCTOR loses him. WARBURTON tells Doctor where he is. Points right, mutters "Underneath." Collapses in doctor's arms, Doctor takes him to chair left.*]

DOCTOR, [*To JACK*] Get my bag for me. [*To WARBURTON, who is raving*] Come along now, come along. You're in good hands. Just sit down and take things quietly.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*R. of WARBURTON*] George! George!

WARBURTON. I'm not George. I'm Henry the Eighth. [*Mimes cutting his throat.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. Ohhh!! [*With a shriek pivots away right.*]

DOCTOR. It's all right. Don't get excited. Just relax for a few minutes. [*WARBURTON still raving.*]

I'm an *old friend* of yours, you know.

WARBURTON. Ahh. Friend. [*Heavenly smile to JACK.*]

[DOCTOR if now feeling Warburton's head.

Not too short at the back, please.

DOCTOR. There's one rather large swelling here.

JACK. But surely there are some other knobs, aren't there, apart from the nuptial knocks?

WARBURTON. Knobs?

DOCTOR. Just loosen his shirt, will you? [*He takes out stethoscope.*]

[MRS. WARBURTON and JACK both go to do it. JACK does so.]

WARBURTON. [*Laughing*] Stop it, you fool, you're tickling me.

MRS. WARBURTON. George, dear, George, do listen.

WARBURTON. I'm not George. I'm a sardine without any toast to rest on.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Recoiling*] Oh, it's terrible. [*Weeps.*]

DOCTOR. That will do, that will do.

[DOCTOR proceeds to sound Warburton. WARBURTON seizes stethoscope, blows down it and speaks down it, deafening the doctor.]

WARBURTON. [*Into stethoscope*] Two poached eggs on roast. One China tea.

[WARBURTON notices doctor's head. Gleefully he searches it, as do the monkeys. JACK tries to stop him.]

DOCTOR. That'll do.

[*Standing up, he crosses behind JACK R. to MRS. WARBURTON.*]

JACK. | *To WARBURTON*] You're doing fine, but don't overdo it.

DOCTOR. [*To MRS. WARBURTON, R.C.—with stethoscope in hand*] Of course there's no doubt he's had some injury to the head. The cells are more or less shaken up, and no one can say with any degree of certainty which part of the brain may be damaged. It may cause excitability, even brainstorms at times.

JACK. Oh, but he's been having those frequently, doctor.

DOCTOR. I daresay. If anything displeases him he's likely to rush at it very madly.

MRS. WARBURTON. That'll be *me*, every time.

DOCTOR. On the other hand, it might result in amnesia, and his memory might go completely. He may even forget that he's married.

MRS. WARBURTON. Oh, but he was like that *before* the accident, doctor.

DOCTOR. Yes, yes, it's probably been coining on for years. [*To* WARBURTON] Do you know who I am? [*Moving to* JACK.]

WARBURTON. No, doctor.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Alarmed—nearer to* WARBURTON] Bui you know me, George, don't you? Now, don't be silly. It's me—Dora.

WARBURTON. No! You're the Queen of Sheba.

DOCTOR. [*Breaks in, crossing to* MRS. WARBURTON] I'm afraid, Mrs. Warburton, you'll have to wait till he comes lo his senses.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Tearful*] I've been waiting for that ever since we've been married, doctor.

JACK. You see, doctor, he does the most extraordinary things. He thinks that every man he meets is named Stringer.

DOCTOR. That's odd. I know a Mr. Stringer—throat trouble—a slight impediment in his speech—met him down at that road-house.

JACK. [*Smiling*] Do you hear that, Mrs. Warburton?

MRS. WARBURTON. Yes, I do.

DOCTOR. I could cure that man if I could get him into my clinic. This, of course, is not so simple.

JACK. He has illusions, too—tells everybody his name is Woodles.

DOCTOR. [*Incredibly*] Woodles? Oh dear, dear, dear!

JACK. And he keeps trying to put his shirt on a race-horse.

DOCTOR. That's not abnormal.

JACK. But the race-horse happens to be a lady.

DOCTOR. Oh, I see; and the shirt wouldn't quite meet the occasion.

JACK. No, it was too short. And to cap everything else, he brought home somebody else's bag yesterday, and has no recollection of it whatever.

DOCTOR. Did you show him the bag?

JACK. Yes—several times.

DOCTOR. And there was no stimulus—no reaction?

JACK. None.

DOCTOR. Oh, that's a terrible thing.

[*Here* WARBURTON *does panto losing fingers and finding them in mid-air.*]

[DOCTOR *crosses* R. *to* MRS. WARBURTON *and chats earnestly.*]

JACK. [*His back to the others—shakes hands with WARBURTON—elated*] What did I tell you?

WARBURTON. [*Sotto voce*] Fine! I didn't expect it to go as well as this.

JACK. It's going splendidly, but don't overdo it.

f They continue whispering together.]

You've lost two fingers already.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*A little alarmed*] No, no, doctor.

DOCTOR. But you have no accommodation here for a patient. He'll be so much more comfortable there.

MRS. WARBURTON. Well, of course, if it's your advice.

DOCTOR. [*Leaving MRS. WARBURTON*] May I use your 'phone? [*Back to table.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. Oh, certainly, doctor. [*Turns away slightly, blows her nose and appears slightly affected.*]

[The DOCTOR dials a number. Here WARBURTON does pantomime riding a bicycle.]

DOCTOR. [*At 'phone*] Hullo! Is that Dr. Boone's Mental Home? . . . Yes . . . Dr. Boone speaking. . . It is—the Mental Home?

[JACK and WARBURTON appear alarmed. WARBURTON stops clapping hands.]

Oh, is that you, Matron? Is there a bed available—for to-night? . . . Good! . . . The name is Mr. Warburton. . . . You'll have everything ready? [*Over his shoulder to MRS. WARBURTON*] Would you like to go, too, Mrs. Warburton?

MRS. WARBURTON. What?

DOCTOR. I mean to take him.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Shaking her head—sotto voce*] No, no, I couldn't—I really couldn't. I'm very sorry, I simply couldn't.

DOCTOR. [*To JACK*] Will'jyot/ take him?

[WARBURTON grabs JACK'S coat and hangs on.]

JACK. [*Appalled*] How—when—where?

DOCTOR. To the Home.

JACK. [*Struggling to get free*] No, I couldn't go. Besides, I've got a date, immediately, this minute.

DOCTOR. Then I'll get the Home to send somebody. [*To 'phone*] Hullo! . . . Matron? . . . Will you send for the patient? . . . Yes. [*Turning to MRS. WARBURTON*] Number thirteen, isn't it?

MRS. WARBURTON. Yes, thirteen; yes.

DOCTOR. [*To 'phone*] Number thirteen, Cavendish Mansions Knightsbridge. I think I should send two male nurses; it might be necessary.

[WARBURTON *holds up two fingers to JACK. Both amazed.*]

And—er—get on to Mr. Clark, the magistrate, . . .

[WARBURTON *makes a frenzied noise.*]

. . . for me, will you? . . . Thanks! . . . Good-bye! [*Replaces the receiver and packs his bag.*]

WARBURTON. [*Rising in a frenzy*] I'm not going to leave my home for anybody. Fm not goofy, I promise you.

DOCTOR [*Soothingly*] Ssh! Ssh! You'll be much better there, Mr. Warburton.

WARBURTON. I'm not going—I'm not going!

JACK. But, doctor, didn't you say his tonsils were wrong?

DOCTOR. The tonsils may be a contributory cause—that's *very likely indeed.*

JACK. Well, couldn't you make it tonsils this time, and leave the rest till later?

WARBURTON. Couldn't it all be done in my wife's name?

DOCTOR. I shall remove the tonsils in any case. This is my own clinic, you know, and we have every facility. He'll be well looked after. [*Crosses to MRS. WARBURTON.*]

JACK. [*To WARBURTON*] Oh well, it's the doctor's own place. What luck! You'll be awfully comfy—and—I'll bring you some grapes on Saturday.

WARBURTON. No!

JACK. Yes!

MRS. WARBURTON. [*To DOCTOR*] Hadn't he better have a bath before he goes, doctor?

DOCTOR. No, I don't think so: the night nurse will see to that.

[WARBURTON *registers delight, wriggling toes—lie, etc.*]

JACK. [*Aside to WARBURTON*] I tell you—it's *all right.*

MRS. WARBURTON. Then, I'd better get all his things packed?

DOCTOR. Yes, I should. They may be here at any moment. [*Offers hand*] Goodbye, Mrs. Warburton.

MRS. WARBURTON. Goodbye, doctor. Thank you so much. I had no idea . . . [*She exits tearfully door up R.*]

DOCTOR. [*Returning to table L. for his bag*] Now cheer up, old man. I'll see you in the morning.

WARBURTON. I hope not.

[DOCTOR, *with bag, starts to exit briskly after MRS. WARBURTON towards door up R.*]

JACK. No, no. This way, doctor. Not in there.

WARBURTON. None of that!

[DOCTOR *crosses back L. and pauses at door.*]

DOCTOR. [*To JACK*] By the way, what were the contents of that bag you say he brought home?

JACK. Oh, just a few feminine, silken, boudoir intimacies.

DOCTOR. And he showed no stimulus, no reaction?

JACK. None.

DOCTOR. Oh, the man's bad.

[DOCTOR *exits left.*]

WARBURTON. Oh, this was your rotten idea. [*Rises.*]

JACK. It was your rotten Woodles that let us down again.

WARBURTON. I'm not going into a potty house to please anybody.

JACK. Don't be silly! Think of the people you'll meet there. Film stars, crooners, members of parliament.

WARBURTON. Then I *shall* go nuts!

JACK. And it's going to clear up everything beautifully. Your wife can't divorce you now, and that's what we've been working for.

WARBURTON. I don't care what she's done. I'm not going—I'm not going!

JACK. If you rave on like that you'll be stuck there for ever. But if you'll only keep calm and quiet, I'll get you out in no time.

WARBURTON. How?

JACK. Oh, I'm sure to have a brainwave!

WARBURTON. When?

JACK. Well, in my opinion as soon as he's got your tonsils out he'll let you go. He's just one of these modern cut-and-come-again doctors.

WARBURTON. But you never know where you are with those fellows. You might lose. . . . Well, it's a helluva risk!

JACK. Nonsense, old chap. I'm perfectly certain you're going to have a lovely time. You can eat what you like, and your food will be brought up to you. And think of all the pretty nurses; they'll tuck you up in bed, and you can talk to them.

WARBURTON. Ah, they won't listen to me. They'll say "How dare you" every time. [*He slaps his own wrist.*"]

JACK. Well, I only wish / was going.

WARBURTON. Why don't you? They don't know me. You can be crackers just as easily as I can.

JACK. No, no, it wouldn't be fair to the old doctor. After all, it's his business, and if he doesn't shove somebody inside he might as well close down. You may be the only customer he's got.

WARBURTON. I could recommend him to all my friends.

JACK. And if I went instead of you they'd soon find out I was a fraud, and the doctor would lose a good "let." No, I'm convinced if you go they may keep you there for ever—what I mean to say is, I think you'll like it so much you'll want to stay on.

WARBURTON. Will I hell! [c.]

[MRS. WARBURTON *enters carrying large suitcase, ulster, slippers, dressing-gown, muffler, and felt hat. She places the suitcase next to Warburton, and the other things close at hand. WARBURTON looks on, passive and dazed.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Tense and reserved*] I think you had better go in your ulster; it may be winter when you come out.

WARBURTON. [*Quietly*] I'm not going for a world's tour, am I?

MRS. WARBURTON. No, dear, no. I've put in twelve pairs of socks and plenty of underwear. I can't get the dressing-gown in. I'm afraid you'll have to carry that, and your slippers. I do hope they'll send a private van. [*Crosses L. to door.*]

WARBURTON. A van?

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Coming back L.C.*] You'd like some sandwiches to eat on the way, wouldn't you?

WARBURTON. You know I hate sandwiches.

MRS. WARBURTON. Yes, dear, I'll get cook to cut you some.

JACK. You may not get anything till the morning, you'd better have them.

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Going L. to JACK*] Do you think he'll want a hot-water bottle?

JACK. No—the nurses will attend to those little comforts.

[WARBURTON *clenches fist at JACK. MRS. WARBURTON exits L.*]

WARBURTON. You can talk as much as you like, I'm not going! I'm not going!

JACK. [*Crosses L. for ulster*] And the more fuss you make the longer you'll be there. If you'll only keep quiet and reasonable, I'll have you out in a week, but if you make a scene and struggle you won't stand an earthly.

WARBURTON. What do you mean—struggle?

JACK: [*He punctuates this speech by tying knots in muffler*] You heard yourself. They're sending two men, aren't they? I know the kind—young giants—muscles as big round as my body—they stop at nothing. The only way to beat them is to be amenable and normal.

[MRS. WARBURTON enters L.]

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Timidly and tensely*] They're here.

JACK. [*Quietly—holding up two fingers*] Two?

[WARBURTON holds up two fingers to JACK.]

MRS. WARBURTON. Yes. They're waiting in the library.

JACK. [*Assisting WARBURTON into his ulster*] Come on, old man.

[WARBURTON submits slowly and sadly.]

MRS. WARBURTON. I'll get some books and papers: he'd like those to read.

JACK. [*Cheerfully*] Yes, and I'm sure he'd like *Film Fun* if you've got it.

[MRS. WARBURTON gathers papers, etc., at back.]

[*Brightly*] I say! This is a *new ulster*, isn't it?

WARBURTON. Yes. I bought it with the idea of doing a pleasure cruise.

JACK. Well, you'll find this little jaunt just as jolly.

WARBURTON. Don't make me too excited about it.

[ALICE enters with sandwiches. JACK drags a soft hat well over his forehead]

JACK. You'll have to carry these. [*Tucks the shoes and dressing-gown under his arm*] Ah—the sandwiches. Thank you, Alice.

[ALICE whispers in his ear and gives him something.]

With cook's compliments! [*Produces an orange*]

[ALICE retires.]

[*Stuffing several packets into his bulging pockets*] What are you thinking? [*Moves up R./or rug*] Cheer up!

WARBURTON. [*Tries to sing "Spring is coming" but breaks down with a grimace.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Comes down. Sadly*] I'm afraid you'll have to carry these, George. [*Loads him up with books and papers.*]

JACK, [*Taking a rug from the settee*] And you'd better take this rug in case they don't allow you to have clothes on the bed. [*Places it across his shoulder.*]

[WARBURTON *is now lumbered up from head to foot with bulging pockets, books, clothes, etc.*]

JACK. When shall I bring the grapes—before or after the operation?

WARBURTON. How the devil do I know?

JACK. Well, just send a postcard and let me know—say "Tonsils out, bring grapes," or "Grapes out, bring tonsils"—you know what I mean. Here's your alpenstock. [*Offers umbrella*] Well, good-bye, old man!

[MRS. WARBURTON *turns away.*]

WARBURTON. Will you look after my wife while I'm gone?

JACK. Rather. I'll keep her amused.

WARBURTON. [*Trying to find a free hand*] Thanks so much for all you've done for me.

JACK. Don't mention it. I haven't done for you yet. [*Shakes hands, then crossing, opens door L. in readiness.*]

WARBURTON. [*Turning to MRS. WARBURTON*] Good-bye, Dora! [*Going R.*] Good-bye, Dora!

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Breaking down a little*] No, no, don't go, George. I can't let him go. [*Arms round his neck.*]

JACK. [*Half closes the door*] It's too late to think of that now, Mrs. Warburton.

MRS. WARBURTON. No, no, George. I'll forgive everything. You do know I'm your wife, don't you? Can't you come to your senses just a little bit?

WARBURTON. You're well provided for. What does it matter, Dora?

MRS. WARBURTON. That's not my wish. I'll sign everything over to you—I will really. [*Sobbing, she flings her arms round his neck. Her back is to audience.*]

WARBURTON. [*To JACK*] What do you think?

JACK. It's too late. If you don't go quickly they'll take you by force—there's no way out at the moment.

WARBURTON. I'm afraid it's good-bye. [*Turns to MRS. WARBURTON.*]

[*Progresses slowly to door L.*]

[*Nixon enters.*]

NIXON. *[Announcing]* Mr. Stringer!

[WARBURTON collapses into NIXON'S arms.]

[MR. X enters quickly in the same effusive manner as in Act I. He goes straight to JACK c. and shakes his hand violently.]

MR. X. Oh, how do you do. I didn't expect to *find you* here.

JACK. Unfortunately you've come too late. This is Mrs. Warburton.

[MR. X wrings MRS. WARBURTON'S hand. She squeaks with pain.]

MR. X. How do you do, Mrs. Warburton? I hear you want to know all about the accident? Well, you see the two cars were going in opposite directions and came together "Wallop."

[MRS. WARBURTON, terrified of him, collapses across chair R., shrinking away from him.]

JACK. You know, Mrs. Warburton doesn't believe you *are* Mr. Stringer.

MR. X. What? Me not Mr. Stringer? Oh, but that's ridiculous. Look, here's my pocket-book and card. *[Produces them and shows them first to JACK and then to MRS. WARBURTON]* See? Egbert Stringer! And if you don't believe that, here's my laundry mark. *[Undoes waistcoat and whips out his shirt dickey]*

MRS. WARBURTON. *[Most embarrassed]* Yes, yes, I sec. They mark them plainly, don't they?

MR. X. And if you want further proof, it's here too. *[Pulls out his shirt.]*

MRS. WARBURTON. Ohh!! Yes, yes, quite so, *[Goes up R.]*

[Nixon who has been supporting WARBURTON, exits and closes door.]

JACK. *[Brainwave]* By Jove, I've got it! *[To MR. X]* By the way, you saw that motor accident, didn't you?

MR. X. Oh yes. Right from the very beginning. Oh, it was awful, awful.

JACK. Could you give a really faithful account of it?

MR. X. Oh yes, you see the two cars were coming in the opposite directions. . . . *[He is stuffing in his shirt and doing up his waistcoat]*

JACK. Good. You're the very man. Now look. There are two lawyers outside from the insurance companies, waiting to hear the whole story. Will you give them your version of the accident?

MR. X. Oh yes! I'm the only one who can give *any* version of the accident. *Pm going to be a wet nurse. [Highly pleased, dusting his coat and tidying himself.]*

JACK. Well, they want to take you out to dinner—big bottle of wine and all that. Will you go?

MR. X. Oh yes, I'd like a big bottle of wine!

JACK. They'll treat you like a lord.

MR. X. I've never been treated like a lord!

JACK. *[Getting rug, umbrella, and sandwiches]* Here, you'd better take these, you may need them.

MR. X. Very singular! I don't know what I want these for!

JACK. *[Shaking hands]* Well, good-bye, old man. *Tou will enjoy yourself.*

[JACK crosses to door left and beckons on two tough-looking men in dark suits, carrying bowler hats. The fast man goes centre. The second waits at the door. They watch MR. X suspiciously.]

JACK. This is the gentleman you're so anxious to meet.

MR. X. I hear you want to know all about the accident. Well, I can tell you. One car was going out the gate . . . *[Points left]*

[The ATTENDANT grabs his arm and pulls him off L., preceded by the second man.]

[As he goes waving umbrella] Well, good-bye, everyone, good-bye. . . .

[MR. and MRS. WARBURTON come down to JACK, who closes door.]

MRS. WARBURTON. Oh, I'm so grateful to you, Mr. Marx.

WARBURTON. That *was* a brainwave.

MRS. WARBURTON. And I know if I can only keep George at home I can cure him.

JACK. But you mustn't waste time. Go and pack a bag—George is ready—and take him away to Eastbourne, or anywhere—before they find out the mistake.

MRS. WARBURTON. Shall we?

JACK. You *must*.

WARBURTON. I'm game.

MRS. WARBURTON. Give me two minutes. Come on, George! *[She hurries off door up R.]*

[JACK stops WARBURTON who is following MRS. WARBURTON off up R.]

JACK. George, George, listen! I can't carry on unless she signs these papers before you go.

WARBURTON. She'll sign them, I feel sure. Don't worry. [*Going—turns*] An I shall want you as director of all my companies.

JACK. You don't mean that!

WARBURTON. I do. There is one qualification for a director that stands out above all others, and you have that gift.

JACK. I don't know.

WARBURTON. Oh, but you have! You are the most talented . . .

JACK. Oh no, George, really!

WARBURTON. The most brilliant . . .

JACK. Oh, I say!

WARBURTON. The most magnificent. . . LIAR I have ever met.

[*GEORGE exits up R.*]

[*JACK goes up to fireplace.*]

[*PAMELA runs on quickly straight to JACK.*]

PAMELA. Jack, I couldn't find the doctor. He was out on an urgent case.

JACK. I know. It's all right, he's been here and we're—both doing well.

[*They kiss.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Off*] Well, of course, I'll sign the papers.

[*PAMELA and JACK hide behind the settee.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. [*Entering swiftly to writing table L.*] I'll sign anything. Where are they? Give them to me at once.

WARBURTON. [*Entering with his wife's bag and looking all round the room*] Jack, Jack, where the devil are you, man? I want the papers . . . the papers!

[*JACK'S hand appears high over the settee holding a blue, imposing looking document. WARBURTON snatches it and takes it down L. to MRS. WARBURTON.*]

Here it is, my dear. Sign there. [*All through these lines he is trying to see what is going on on the couch*] And there . . . [*from opposite side of room*] and there.

[*Enter NIXON.*]

WARBURTON. Oh, Nixon, take those bags out and put them in a taxi at once.

NIXON. Yes, sir. [*He exits, leaving door open.*]

MRS. WARBURTON [*Handing document to WARBURTON*] There! Is that what you want!

WARBURTON. Yes, thank you, my dear! [*He kisses her with enthusiasm*] Signed! Signed!!

[*JACK'S hand appears above settee. WARBURTON puts document in it.*]

MRS. WARBURTON. Then come along at once. [*She crosses L. to door—at door*] Where is Jack?

WARBURTON. [*As he goes, with a final look over his shoulder and a chuckle*] I don't know. I think he's scuttled himself.

[*JACK'S arm still raised, slowly disappears from view as*]

THE CURTAIN FALLS.



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