

Sweet Coz

A Play in Three Acts

Gordon Daviot
[Elizabeth Mackintosh]
1954

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Title: Sweet Coz

Date of first publication: 1954

Author: Gordon Daviot (alias of Elizabeth Mackintosh) 1896-1952

Date first posted: May 29, 2015

Date last updated: May 29, 2015

Faded Page eBook #20150572

This ebook was produced by: Delphine Lettau, Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

Sweet Coz

Gordon Daviot (Elizabeth Mackintosh)

First published as part of Plays Vol 3.

CHARACTERS

DINAH PARTRIDGE

HECTOR PARTRIDGE

JOB

MRS BINT

JEMIMA CLAMP

ACT I

The living-room of a small flat on a morning in early Spring. It is a pleasant room, modern in furnishing and decoration without being mannered. It is also a woman's room, without being particularly feminine. In the rear wall is the entrance to the passage, off which are the bedrooms. In the left wall the fireplace, with an electric fire burning. In the right wall the window, and down from it the door to the vestibule and kitchen.

A table near the fire is half-set for breakfast.

Enter MRS BINT.

MRS BINT *'obliged' for years, owing to the 'ongoings' of her husband, but when she met DINAH PARTRIDGE she ceased 'obbliging' and slept in, and so became a housekeeper. At the moment she is carrying a tray filled with what she calls 'the rest of the dry things'. That is, with everything necessary for breakfast except the actual food. She mutters to herself in a worried fashion as she lays the things. When she has finished she lingers in front of the table and tries what is apparently a rehearsal.*

MRS BINT *(addressing an imaginary presence behind the table) If it's all the same to you, miss, I'd like to——(Trying again) I'm sorry to say it, miss, but I've decided——(She gives it up for the moment, fetches a chair, places it on the side nearest the fire, and tries again) Things bein' as they are, miss, I think it's only right to tell you——(She pauses and gives it up once more. She picks up a teaspoon from the saucer, beats on the edge of the saucer with it, replaces it, and goes out to fetch the rest of the things. She comes back with a substantial breakfast for one: coffee, eggs and bacon, and toast. No one has come from the bedroom, so she beats a second tattoo with the spoon and waits with it poised)*

DINAH *(off) Coming!*

[*AS MRS BINT is setting out the dishes, DINAH comes in from the passage. She is twenty-eight; good-looking without being a beauty, tailored without being mannish, independent without being farouche. A pleasant creature; just a little smug, just a little professionally bright, just a little too conscious of 'owing not any man'. But charming withal.*]

DINAH *(brightly) Good morning, Mrs Bint.*

MRS BINT (*with reserve*) Good morning, miss.

DINAH (*making straight for the table, with a glance at the clock as she comes*) Nearly half-past eight, I observe. That is the result of an evening out. It is just as well that Annual Balls are annual. Is this the new bacon?

MRS BINT That's the new bacon, miss.

DINAH Still very fat. Tell Rapson we like some protein.

MRS BINT Yes, miss.

DINAH (*eating*) It's very warm in here. You might turn down the fire a little. What is the outside temperature?

MRS BINT I don't know. I haven't looked this morning.

DINAH (*mildly*) Look now, then.

MRS BINT (*crossing to the window and opening it*) I don't know what a drop of mercury's likely to know about the weather.

DINAH (*scenting the atmosphere*) Your lumbago troubling you this morning, Mrs Bint?

MRS BINT No, thank you, I've no lumbago. (*She looks at the glass hanging outside the window and gives the figure*)

DINAH Mild for February. Everyone will be wanting tonics. Any telephones when I was out last night, Mrs Bint?

MRS BINT Just one. The message is on the pad.

DINAH What did it say?

MRS BINT It said that Mrs Snitcher's stomach's settled nicely.

DINAH I find it in my heart to envy Mrs Snitcher. Either I am getting too old for Hospital Balls, or I am developing a liver. I forgot to look at my tongue this morning. All right, Mrs Bint, you needn't wait. Do what you like about dinner. I'm too late to think about it. Chops, fillet of sole, anything.

MRS BINT If I could speak to you for a minute, miss.

DINAH Won't it keep till tonight, you masterpiece of worry?

MRS BINT No, miss, I'd like to get it off my chest.

DINAH What is it? A breakage?

MRS BINT Oh, no. There ain't nothing broken.

DINAH Don't tell me your husband has turned up again.

MRS BINT Oh, no. According to the law of averages he ain't due yet a bit.

DINAH What is it then?

MRS BINT (*taking her fence with a rush*) I should like to give a week's notice dating from today, miss.

DINAH Mrs Bint! Why? Are you ill, or something?

MRS BINT No, miss. I'm very well, thank you.

DINAH Then why do you want to leave me? All suddenly like this. Have I said anything to offend you?

MRS BINT No, it ain't anything you said——

DINAH I know I'm crotchety sometimes, but you must make allowances. In my job the stink of iodoform gets into one's hair. You have always made allowances so far. We have always agreed so well, I thought you——

MRS BINT Oh, yes, miss, I'm not denying that. A nicer lady in the way of manners you couldn't meet——

DINAH I thought you had been so happy this last year——

MRS BINT I have, miss, I have indeed. After obliging by the day for twenty years, it's been a grand life. I've always said so, and I shall always continue to say so. You've been very kind to me, and a nicer lady to work for there never was.

DINAH (*losing her poise*) Then if I'm an angel with seven haloes, what in thunder do you want to leave me for?

MRS BINT I don't *want* to. I'm driven to it. You see, everyone has something they won't stand for. Some doesn't like green, and some gets sick at the sight of snails, and——

DINAH And what, may I ask, is your breaking-point?

MRS BINT Riotous living.

DINAH (*taken aback*) What!

MRS BINT Maybe I'm narrow-minded, but that's the way I was brought up, and I can't help it any more than I can help the size of my feet. I'm a respectable woman.

DINAH (*dryly*) No one ever doubted it. And if you refer to the goings on of the artist creature in Number Forty, I can't see how riotous living up two flights of stairs can make any——

MRS BINT (*portentous with meaning*) I was referring to events nearer home, miss.

DINAH (*having stared at her; incredulous*) Do you seriously mean that you are giving me notice because for once I've had a night out?

MRS BINT I'm sorry, miss, but I won't countenance light living.

DINAH Light living! My God! I go to bed at eleven o'clock for three hundred and sixty-four nights in the year, and because I come home with the milk on the three hundred and sixty-fifth you give me notice. It's unbelievable.

MRS BINT It isn't just the coming in late——

DINAH (*with heavy sarcasm*) No, no, of course not; it's the immorality of it all. (*Coldly*) Very well, Mrs Bint, if you want to leave me, of course, I accept your notice.

MRS BINT I'm very sorry, miss. Of course, though I say a week, that doesn't mean that I won't stay till you're suited. I wouldn't——

DINAH I shall telephone the agencies this morning, and by the end of the week I shall no doubt have someone to take your place. Until then I hope that you can steel your conscience sufficiently to condone my purple life. Will you see if the porter has brought up the morning paper.

MRS BINT I'd just like to say, miss, that I deeply regret——

DINAH Don't say anything, Mrs Bint.

MRS BINT Very good, miss. How many shall I prepare dinner for?

DINAH (*faintly surprised*) Just for myself, as usual.

MRS BINT (*faintly surprised in turn*) Oh? Very good, miss. Shall I take some breakfast to the gentleman?

DINAH (*who has resumed her breakfast, pausing*) What? What gentleman?

MRS BINT The gentleman you brought home last night.

DINAH Have you taken leave of your senses?

MRS BINT (*with a trace of smugness*) Not me, I haven't, miss.

DINAH Do you seriously mean that—that someone stayed the night here?

MRS BINT Had you forgotten him, miss?

DINAH Forgotten? I don't even remember br——I don't believe it! Who was it?

MRS BINT A complete stranger to me, miss.

DINAH When did you see him?

MRS BINT When I took his boots off. They were spoiling Mr Hector's eiderdown, and Mr Hector's that particular.

DINAH You mean he was drunk?

MRS BINT Paralytic.

DINAH (*in a small voice*) I might as well tell you, Mrs Bint, that I have no recollection at all of coming home last night. It's most extraordinary. Complete aphasia. I think I must have been overworking.

MRS BINT (*judicially*) Well, some calls it that.

DINAH Did I seem—did I seem quite normal?

MRS BINT All but.

DINAH But what?

MRS BINT A strong smell of gin and a look in your eye.

DINAH But if he was as drunk as that how did I——? Did you? Did I——?

MRS BINT The taxi-man put him to bed. You gave him a fiver.

DINAH (*reviewing it; with conviction*) I must have been drunk.

MRS BINT It was worth it. He's no bantam, your gentleman friend.

DINAH I didn't mean the money. Great heavens, what a mess. And you mean that the man is actually in there at this moment?

[*From the distance comes the crash of broken glass.*]

MRS BINT I think that's him now. (*There is the sound of movement in the passage*) If you'll excuse me, miss——

DINAH No, don't go, Mrs Bint, don't leave me.

MRS BINT But wouldn't it be better——?

DINAH Stay where you are.

[*From the passage door there enters tentatively a tall, unshaven figure clad in an expensive dressing-gown that is much too small for him, shabby trousers, brilliant bedroom slippers of the sort that are only sole and toe, and a muffler that matches the dressing-gown. He is bearing in one hand the remains of a drinking-glass.*]

[*And since for the rest of the play he is to be known as JOB, he may as well be called JOB straight away.*]

JOB Good morning.

DINAH Good morning.

JOB I'm afraid I've broken a tumbler.

DINAH Oh, that's all right. It—they're quite inexpensive.

JOB I found the dressing-gown in the wardrobe.

DINAH Yes. Yes, it's my brother's.

JOB Thank God! (*In reply to her eyebrows*) I was afraid it was your husband's.

DINAH (*unable to take her eyes off him*) I must have been *very* drunk.

JOB I look better when I'm shaved.

DINAH (*hastily*) I didn't mean that.

[*There is an awkward pause.*]

MRS BINT (*briskly, into the silence*) Bacon and egg, ham and egg, scrambled eggs, or plain boiled.

JOB Oh, thank you. Whatever is going.

[*Exit MRS BINT.*]

DINAH Won't you sit down.

JOB Thank you.

DINAH I hope you slept well?

JOB Very well indeed, thank you. A most comfortable bed. And you?

DINAH Oh, I always sleep well.

JOB A most enviable accomplishment.

DINAH (*into a pause*) Would you like to begin on the toast while Mrs Bint is getting your eggs?

JOB Good idea. Thank you.

DINAH Did you enjoy the ball?

JOB The ball?

DINAH Last night.

JOB I don't think I was there.

DINAH Oh.

JOB Should I have been?

DINAH Well, I naturally thought——(*That it was there we met, she is going to say, but recollects herself*) Most people go.

JOB I have always been deficient in the herd instinct. One of my greatest weaknesses.

DINAH Really? What are your others?

JOB Scotch, Irish, rye, and bourbon. Fair play: what are yours?

DINAH (*seeing a chance to entrench*) I—I do the oddest things.

JOB Yes, I thought swimming was a little odd.

DINAH Swimming? (*As he crunches his toast heartily*) You did say swimming?

JOB It's just as well that I didn't listen to you, or we'd both have pneumonia this morning.

DINAH Yes, perhaps you were right. (*Remembering that if she is at a disadvantage where the early history of the evening is concerned, he at least can have no recollection of the end; brightly*) It was kind of you to see me home.

JOB Oh. Oh, that was nothing. I was delighted.

DINAH (*pleased to have him doing the groping for a change*) I'm sorry you missed your last train.

JOB Train? Oh, it didn't matter. It was charming of you to put me up.

DINAH I hope you didn't have to be at business early this morning.

JOB Not at all. If I appeared in the office more than once a week there would be a sensation.

DINAH What office is that?

JOB National Relief.

DINAH (*at a loss again*) A most interesting work.

JOB You know, it is a shocking thing to say to one's hostess, but I can't remember your name.

DINAH My name is Partridge. Dinah Partridge.

JOB Thank you. A charming bird. So modest and—and plump.

DINAH (*busy deciding that she will not confess to being unaware of his name*) Expensive though.

JOB I had not contemplated it from the point of view of possession. (*Before she can consider that*) What a very lucky thing for me that your brother was not at home!

DINAH (*unguardedly*) And for me!

JOB What?

DINAH (*retrieving*) I hate making up couch beds in the small hours of the morning. And Hector wouldn't share his bed with anyone.

JOB (*savouring it*) Hector.

DINAH Hector is my brother.

JOB I can hardly blame your brother. It is a very pretty bed. Is Hector a house decorator?

DINAH No, he is a poet.

JOB That might explain it.

DINAH Explain what?

JOB The bed. What kind of poet is he, by the way? ‘And the reluctant moon slid down the sky’? That kind? Or

‘Six sticks
And why and wherefore
Corrugated, corrugated,
Because
And the cat’s whiskers’?

DINAH Do you mean that you don’t know Hector?

JOB (*anxiously*) Did I say that I did?

DINAH Oh, no. But most people seem to. He wrote *Pink Daffodils*, you know.

JOB (*politely reverent*) No, I didn’t know.

DINAH Do you care for reading?

JOB I find it useful.

[*Enter MRS BINT with breakfast.*]

DINAH Ah, here is your breakfast.

JOB (*staring*) And when do you expect your brother back?

DINAH Tomorrow, I hope.

JOB Ah, that looks marvellous. What a very good cook you keep.

[*MRS BINT sniffs and goes out.*]

JOB That missed the mark, I think.

DINAH (*coldly*) Probably. It was Mrs Bint who took your boots off last night.

JOB Oh, then it wasn’t you who put me to bed?

DINAH (*indignant*) Certainly not! Why should you imagine that I would?

JOB Women are apt to become officious with a helpless male body at their disposal.

DINAH The male body is no treat to me. It’s my profession.

JOB (*staring*) I can't believe it! You look so——

DINAH I'm a doctor.

JOB (*genuinely shocked*) Good God!

DINAH And what is Good God about it?

JOB It makes me feel very undressed.

DINAH Does that worry you?

JOB No woman should know as much as that about any man. It isn't in nature. You probably take one look at me and decide that I am suffering from cirrhosis of the liver, hernia, and chronic constipation.

DINAH No. You are suffering from malnutrition, alcoholic poisoning, the after-effects of pneumonia and incipient phthisis.

JOB (*after the slightest pause*) You are a very good doctor. (*Resuming his poise*) And a charming hostess. I have never enjoyed a breakfast so much. I'm afraid you are not making much headway with yours.

DINAH I am not very hungry this morning. I——It is not very often I——(*The whole enormity of the situation floods over her in a rush, and to her horror she finds tears rising*)

JOB Are you crying, by any chance?

DINAH (*indignantly*) No! (*Equally indignantly*) Yes! Yes, I'm crying, and why shouldn't I? I feel awful. I think I'm going to die.

JOB For a doctor who has just made an excellent diagnosis I think that prognostication is nothing short of disgraceful.

DINAH (*who is now crying openly into her handkerchief*) Oh, don't be so pompous!

JOB If you'll tell me where the whisky is, I'll prescribe without pomp, charge, or delay.

DINAH I don't keep whisky in the flat. The stimulant habit is a very bad one.

JOB Don't tell me you are T.T. Not after last night.

DINAH Of course not. There is plenty of wine, but only for drinking with meals.

JOB And what, may I ask, do you usually do in a situation like this?

DINAH I've never been in a situation like this before.

JOB Oh, please don't cry. I'll go directly after breakfast.

DINAH (*unmollified*) Of course you will! If that were all. Mrs Bint's given notice

because of you.

JOB Because of you, you mean.

DINAH Me!

JOB I didn't bring home any strange man at three in the morning. (*As this produces a fresh burst of grief*) Oh, my sweet partridge, so modest and plump and expensive, please don't take on. If it will make you any happier I shall jump out of the window.

DINAH I should only have you in hospital.

JOB If I jumped very hard I might make it the morgue.

DINAH You couldn't.

JOB Why not?

DINAH It's only the first floor. Oh, dear, I haven't cried since I left school.

JOB You seem to be doing a lot of things for the first time in twenty-four hours.

[*The telephone rings.*]

DINAH (*mopping her eyes and going to the telephone*) And now I shall have to go round the agencies, and it's practically impossible to get anyone for housework. (*Blowing her nose and lifting the receiver*) Hullo. Who?... Oh, Doctor Simmons. Good morning.... Yes, of course I'm all right. Why shouldn't I be?... What nonsense!... What utter nonsense!... Yes, certainly I am.... I never had a hangover in my life, thank you.... What?... No, just a touch of catarrh.... Yes, certainly I shall be at hospital at my usual hour. (*Slams down the receiver*) Little whippersnapper!

JOB He sounded very considerate.

DINAH (*furious*) He said I was the sweetest case of acute alcoholism he had ever seen. (*As JOB laughs; viciously*) He wasn't very kind about you either. He said he wouldn't have guessed my condition—my condition, indeed!—if it hadn't been for the pupils of my eyes, and my taking a fancy to a frightful man at a coffee stall. He had to leave me there, he says, because I wouldn't come away. He wanted to know if I was all right.

JOB And you said you had catarrh.

DINAH So that is where I met you?

JOB At Toni's. Yes. Had you forgotten?

DINAH (*luxuriating in the truth*) I haven't the faintest recollection of ever seeing you before in my life.

JOB You mean you don't remember *any* of last night?

DINAH (*less certainly*) Is there much to remember?

JOB Well, up to the point when I passed out myself it seemed to me a pretty full evening. I thought I knew this town fairly well, but you certainly showed me round.

DINAH I showed you round!

JOB And for a woman who doesn't keep whisky on tap, you gave a brave display. I give you best, lady. No one has drunk me under the table in twenty years.

DINAH Eat your eggs. They're getting cold. (*She pours away her cold coffee and pours out fresh*)

JOB So I wasn't the only one who was surprised this morning.

DINAH Were you surprised?

JOB I was practically paralysed. I don't usually waken up in bedrooms like Hector's.

DINAH What did you think?

JOB Well, after I had considered the pillows, I decided that I was being rescued.

DINAH The pillows?

JOB Yes; the other one was virgin, you see. And then, after some deep research, I remembered everything from Toni's up to the fire——

DINAH Fire?

JOB The fire at Timpson's warehouse.

DINAH Were we there?

JOB We were. And I decided that, all things considered, it couldn't be rescue. Just bed and breakfast and no strings. The awkward part of it was that you didn't have a face.

DINAH A face!

JOB I could see you arguing with the fire-engine man——

DINAH What was I arguing about?

JOB You wanted to buy his boots.

DINAH What on earth for?

JOB To grow geraniums in, you said. But you didn't have any face. You didn't seem to have any face in *anything* we did together. So all I could do was to purloin a dressing-gown and do some investigating.

DINAH (*still with the same dream-like detachment*) And did you recognise me?

JOB I don't say I would have spotted you at a football match, but as between you and Mrs Whatsername it was a cinch.

DINAH (*considering it*) It must have been overwork.

JOB What must?

DINAH My performance last night.

JOB Or the Spring, shall we say?

DINAH Nonsense. I've been through a lot of Springs.

JOB I suppose Spring to a doctor is merely a matter of purgatives. Primrose in the hedgerows and treacle and brimstone in the home. Your poor children! Never a picnic outside a given radius from a public convenience.

DINAH (*stung*) I take it that your progeny, if you have any, greet the flowering year by flitting fairy-like from bud to bud.

JOB I haven't any, but that is how they would carry on—approximately.

DINAH How charming. I hope you won't carry on too much when you have to pay.

JOB Pay what?

DINAH Bills for shoe-leather and fines for uprooting blue-bells.

JOB You have a mundane mind. It distresses me. Last night you tilted at every windmill, you threw your bonnet over and ran to catch it on the other side, you were young and gay and——

DINAH And drunk.

JOB And now you sit there insisting that two and two make four.

DINAH (*coldly*) I find it the most convenient reckoning.

JOB Convenience! Expedience! Are these the gods of your idolatry! You who were so——

DINAH Have some mustard. That bacon is very fat. And if I tell you that my middle name is Martha it may save a lot of misunderstanding in the future.

JOB The future?

DINAH (*flashing out*) For the rest of this abominable breakfast. (*In a sudden burst; glad to find a scapegoat*) Have you ever *considered* the creature?

JOB (*startled*) Who?

DINAH *Mary!* The smug, selfish, good-for-nothing! Being soulful in the parlour while Martha sweated in the kitchen.

JOB Dinah, you shock me. What is a dish of curried mutton compared with an idea?

DINAH Nothing; if your stomach's full. Have you ever thought that Martha was struggling with supper for about twenty while Mary was sitting with her hands folded about an Idea? And don't tell me this world is built on ideas, because it isn't. It's built on Martha. If it weren't for Martha we'd still be living in caves.

JOB But Mary is older than the caves, my dear, much older. When the first mud-puppy crawled out of the primeval slime, that was Mary moved by a great idea.

DINAH Not at all. It was Martha deciding that higher up the hill was better for the children.

JOB I suppose that Socrates drank the hemlock merely to get away from his wife's tongue——

DINAH I wouldn't wonder——

JOB ——and Columbus, what did Columbus sail for? Curiosity?

DINAH Columbus sailed for ten per cent of the gross receipts, and he refused to leave harbour till the contract was water-tight.

JOB (*smiling at her*) Were you born like that, or has living with a Mary reduced you to Marthadom?

DINAH Living with one?

JOB I take it that Hector, being a poet, is a Mary.

DINAH You don't know much about poets, do you? Poets are the most practical people on earth.

JOB How nice for you. Do they scramble their own eggs when they come to supper?

DINAH Oh, we don't have poets here.

JOB Don't talk as if they were bugs.

DINAH Poets don't like each other, you know.

JOB Oh. Do doctors?

DINAH (*considering it*) Yes. We disapprove of each other, but we are quite friendly.

JOB What made *you* become a doctor? (*His tone says: 'You of all people'*)

DINAH I wasn't made to.

JOB Oh. Did you have a 'call'?

DINAH No; I had a quite normal belief that I could do something a great deal better than it had been done before.

JOB But why doctoring?

DINAH That seemed the department where stupidity was most rampant.

JOB Had you forgotten Parliament?

DINAH No. But if I must deal with wind I would rather deal with it in the stomach. It's curable there.

JOB The Goddess of Common Sense.

DINAH (*amending*) Good sense. It's not very common. What is your profession, by the way?

JOB I'm a window-box weeder.

DINAH I merely asked.

JOB In the summer, that is. In winter I make the holes in crumpets.

DINAH I suggest that next winter you do it in Switzerland. (*Rising*) And now I must go, or Clamp will be coming to look for me.

JOB Oh, don't go yet. Please. It won't matter if you are late for once. I'm quite sure you have never been as much as thirty seconds late since first you went to that hospital.

DINAH (*beginning to collect the various articles she has brought in with her and thrown on the sofa; hat, coat, gloves, and bag*) No, I haven't.

JOB Then it is high time you were. No one appreciates an automaton. I'm sorry I was fresh about my profession——

DINAH You had every right to be. What you do is no proper concern of mine.

JOB It wasn't meant to be snubbing. One gets into the habit of flippancy.

DINAH And anyhow, I have no time to listen to the story of anyone's life at this hour of the morning.

JOB Perhaps not. But there is no need for any mystery about me. I was an architect.

DINAH (*relaxing slightly to interest*) Why 'was'?

JOB Because to be an architect one must build things. And it is a long time since I built anything.

DINAH Were you a good architect?

JOB Yes.

DINAH What did you build?

JOB Houses mostly. And I did a good theatre once. And then there was a competition—for a county hall. Something good for itself, and good for the fellow that did it. I put aside everything for that. I was cocksure of getting it. Well, I didn't. And on the day I heard I had lost, my wife left me for another man. I don't blame her; for months I hadn't even noticed that she was around. I drank solidly for five weeks; then I had pneumonia, as you so shrewdly observed. And now I pick up a living by drawing straight lines on paper for other men.

DINAH I see. You didn't have to tell me, you know.

JOB Yes, I had to. I'm sorry, in a way. I think you're that woman in every hundred who doesn't like a failure. You hate failure in yourself—that's why you cried with rage this morning—and——

DINAH It wasn't with rage!

JOB —you despise it in others. However, last night changed my whole life for me. I am beginning new this morning. No more coffee-stall dinners at Toni's, no more drawing straight lines for other men. You have opened new prospects to me.

DINAH What prospects?

JOB Blackmail, of course.

DINAH I should have thought of that and poisoned your breakfast.

JOB It's bad to have bodies around.

DINAH Not when you can sign the death certificate.

JOB Even dead, I would take a lot of explaining to Hector.

DINAH (*at the window*) Yes, the car is there. I must go. Clamp mustn't come in and find you here.

JOB Can't Mrs Whatsername tell your chauffeur to wait a little?

DINAH Good gracious, Clamp isn't my chauffeur. She's the head masseuse at hospital. She happens to live upstairs, and so she gives me a lift to hospital in the mornings.

JOB Gives you a lift! You mean the nurse has a car and the doctor walks? You're not much of a blackmail prospect, are you?

DINAH Oh, we have a car, but Hector has it in the country. And don't ever let Clamp hear you call her a nurse. I'll leave you to finish your breakfast. You'd better begin all over again and have it in peace. (*Catching sight of herself in a mirror*) Heavens, what a face! (*Begins some hasty repairs*)

JOB Tell me: there's just one thing: if we ever happen to meet in the street, do we know each other?

DINAH (*without turning*) Why not? You sold me that terrier bitch I gave my cousin last year.

JOB Oh, did I? That's nice. I can stop and ask about the dog, can't I?

DINAH In moderation. You'll find cigarettes in the box. You won't stay too long, will you? Mrs Bint is very upset about last night, and—well——

JOB I shall be gone in half an hour. I'm sorry I couldn't meet Hector. Do you like Hector, by the way?

DINAH Like him? Of course I like him!

JOB Why of course?

DINAH He's my brother, isn't he?

JOB That's the oddest reason for liking anyone that I ever——

DINAH (*snatching up her gloves*) You know, Clamp is the salt of the earth, but I shudder to think what she would make of the present situation if she were to walk in and find this domestic scene——

CLAMP (*off*) Dinah!

DINAH Merciful heaven, there she is!

[*Enter JEMIMA CLAMP.*

[*CLAMP is square, solid, and uncompromising, and her formidable muscles are rapidly being smoothed over by comfortable fat. She has a level eye and wildly unbecoming clothes.*

[*She is carrying a square cardboard box, and she comes into the room as an habitu e does, without looking round; aware only that DINAH is there, and talking to her without looking at her, meanwhile depositing her parcel on the side table between the window and the door.*]

CLAMP If you don't hurry up, Dinah, you're going to create a record by being late! I've brought you some of the eggs that my farm woman——(*As she turns from the table to the room again she sees JOB*) Oh, pardon me!

DINAH Oh, Clamp dear, I'm sorry to keep you, but things are in a muddle this morning. I don't think you have met my cousin, have you?

CLAMP (*shaking hands*) Oh, are you George?

DINAH No; no, this is Job.

CLAMP (*accepting it*) I never knew you had a cousin called Job.

DINAH He's just home from Siam.

CLAMP (*to JOB*) Oh. Teak, I suppose.

JOB No, twins. Statistics, you know.

CLAMP Oh, yes. The incidence of the phenomenon.

JOB Eh? Oh, yes. Quite.

CLAMP That's very interesting. And what is the incidence, if you don't mind my asking?

JOB Point nought six per thousand.

CLAMP As low as that! Why do they call them Siamese, then?

JOB Because they began there. The climate, you know.

CLAMP (*intelligently, but with a shade of doubt*) Oh, I see.

DINAH I'm ready, Clamp.

CLAMP (*making no move*) Well, now that you're home, perhaps Dinah will step out a little more, and stop spending her evenings with Beaumont and company.

JOB Who is Beaumont?

CLAMP Aren't you a doctor?

JOB God forbid.

CLAMP But, those twins and things?

JOB Oh, that's Civil Service.

CLAMP Is it, indeed. (*That is comment, not question*) Yes, I suppose it is. Just counting things. Imagine being paid for just counting. Something you do with beads in the kindergarten. (*Hastily*) Not that I don't mean you were probably very good at it. Present company, and all that.

DINAH Clamp, my dear——

JOB You haven't told me about this Beaumont she spends her leisure with.

CLAMP What she usually spends her leisure with is Hector's socks, but——

DINAH Oh, Clamp dear, don't be ridiculous. You know Hector would never dream of wearing anything that was darned!

CLAMP I was speaking in parables. She's much too clever, really, for Beaumont

JOB But who——

CLAMP (*in patient explanation*) We—ll, if you're a doctor, and you can't decide whether your patient has malaria, D.T.s, or paralysis, you say: 'Forgive me for a moment', and you jink into the office and look up Beaumont.

JOB I see.

CLAMP Doctor's lifebelt, that's Beaumont. Other folks' too, if they only knew it. And when you've decided between the mumps and the malaria, there's the prescription all ready for you to write down when you get back to the surgery, with the proper air of: 'Now, let me see. We *might* try——' (*In the course of her tale her eye has fallen on* DINAH. *She stops abruptly, stares, and resumes in a tone of accusing ferocity. To* DINAH) I told you not to wear that frock!

DINAH What frock?

CLAMP Last night. Half a dozen miserable yards of tulle to cover your body on a February evening—and now look at you!

DINAH What's the matter with me?

CLAMP A nose like an electric bulb, and eyes like a dribbling spaniel. Have you gargled?

DINAH I haven't got a cold, you fool, I've only been sneezing.

CLAMP Have you gargled?

DINAH (*losing her temper*) No! I gargled yesterday, and I'll gargle tomorrow, but today I was rushed, and getting to my job on time is much more important than swilling a little permanganate round my throat.

CLAMP And so the whole of hospital has to be strewn with germs so that you can clock in at——

DINAH I can gargle in hospital, can't I? Come along.

CLAMP And meanwhile, I suppose, I get enough germs in my car to put my department out of action for a fortnight——

DINAH Come along!

CLAMP Doctor Partridge, you gargle or walk.

DINAH (*evidently recognising the tone*) Oh, blast you! (*She flings down her bag and gloves again and dashes angrily through the passage door*)

CLAMP (*in her normal voice, to* JOB) It was a pretty frock, wasn't it? (*She moves over to inspect the breakfast-table*)

JOB Lovely.

CLAMP (*helping herself to a scone and buttering it*) Me, I've never been able

to wear a frill without bringing ham to people's minds, but I like to see other women look nice. Women don't have so much of a time.

JOB Don't they?

CLAMP No, they don't, take it from me. I think, bar God, no one hears so many sad tales from women as I do.

JOB But tales aren't evidence, are they?

CLAMP Oh, I'm dealing with the evidence while they're telling the tale.

JOB Ah, well, perhaps it's retribution. It's thanks to a woman we were all thrown out of the Garden.

CLAMP What authority are you quoting?

JOB The Bible, of course.

CLAMP According to the Bible, we were thrown out because a man couldn't say no to something he wanted. You hadn't finished your breakfast. Go on. Don't mind me.

JOB (*amused*) Would you like some more coffee too? (*As well as her scone, he means*)

CLAMP I shouldn't mind a spot. (*She pours the slops into DINAH'S cup, and uses the slop-basin as cup*) What was the matter with Dinah's eggs?

JOB I think she's feeling a little after-the-ball, you know.

CLAMP (*with a snort*) H'm! She should go dancing oftener, then. Take it in homeopathic doses. Now that you have stopped counting twins for a bit, perhaps — (*Struck by a horrible thought*) Don't tell me you are a devoted husband with a large family?

JOB No, I'm neither a husband nor a father. But why should Dinah need to be rescued by me? Aren't there any followers?

CLAMP Weren't you at the ball?

JOB Well, then. What's to hinder her going out every night of her life?

CLAMP Nothing. Nothing. Except the biggest obstacle of all.

JOB What is that?

CLAMP She likes staying at home. Can you imagine it? A woman who can look the way she did last night 'liking to stay at home'! If I could look like that I'd hire a float to convey me round town for a couple of hours every night, like a holy image, so that no one would miss having a good look.

JOB A woman who likes staying at home is so rare, I think that she should be

encouraged.

CLAMP Encouraged! Huh! Encouraged to take a nerve tonic and get herself some vitality. (*Reaching over and dabbing some marmalade on the buttered scone she is eating*) It's all that little blood-sucker, Hector!

JOB So you don't like Hector?

CLAMP (*pausing to stare at him*) Does anyone like Hector?

JOB Dinah seems to.

CLAMP Oh, Dinah is daffy about him. 'My baby brother', and all that. Baby brother! Man-sized boa-constrictor.

JOB Tell me, have you read *Pink Daffodils*?

CLAMP I have not. Neither has anyone else.

JOB Is it not a success, then?

CLAMP Oh, yes, people buy it. But that's as far as they go. I think maybe Mrs Transom-Sills has read it.

JOB Mrs——Who is she?

CLAMP She is Hector's steady.

JOB Oh. And is there a Mr Transom-Sills?

CLAMP Not since the Grisons avalanche in '36.

JOB Rich widow?

CLAMP Very rich and quite a widow.

JOB Then why doesn't Hector marry her?

CLAMP Hector doesn't like being bothered, if you know what I mean.

JOB *Do* I know what you mean?

CLAMP I mean, Hector has been wrapped in cotton-wool so long that some real fresh air on his skin would probably kill him. If he married Mrs Transom-Sills he couldn't run home to Dinah any more, every time someone kicked him in the pants.

JOB Doesn't the widow keep a good brand of embrocation?

CLAMP If she does it's for her own skin. She's a sensible woman. That's what's wrong. Hector doesn't want a sensible woman, he wants an unselfish fool like Dinah. And they don't grow on bushes. Don't think me personal, will you, but is that Hector's dressing-gown you're wearing?

JOB It is.

CLAMP Cast-off? I mean, did he give it to you?

JOB Oh, no, I found it in his room.

CLAMP Then take a tip from a friend and don't be wearing it when he comes home tomorrow, or there'll be another row for Dinah to smoothe over. If he thought someone had worn it, he'd probably have prickly heat.

JOB Right now it's giving me leprosy.

CLAMP What's wrong with your own one?

JOB I haven't got one. Not here, I mean. I saw Dinah home last night, you see, and it was so late that she put me up.

CLAMP I suppose that meant Hector's pyjamas as well.

JOB Not—not exactly.

CLAMP And what does exactly mean?

JOB I sleep in my skin. Siam, you know.

CLAMP Why blame Siam? And while we're on the subject, I don't believe that statistics story. What did you really do in Siam?

JOB Drank.

CLAMP And what else?

JOB *And* drank.

CLAMP The statistics on that must be staggering.

JOB You have a genius for the right word.

CLAMP It seems a long way to go just to drink. Halfway to China, isn't it?

JOB If one goes that way.

CLAMP Is there another way?

JOB One could go west, I suppose.

CLAMP (*dismissing it*) Oh, well, who wants to go to China anyhow?

JOB (*murmuring*) Standard Oil, maybe.

CLAMP (*summing up the Chinese empire*) Floods, and rice, and people flying kites.

JOB I think sailing a paper boat among the clouds is an endearing pastime.

CLAMP They must fall over quite a bit.

JOB I would rather fall over because I had my eyes on the sky than because I lost my balance kicking a muddy ball.

CLAMP I expect the ground feels the same. And the tetanus.

JOB Is *your* middle name Martha?

CLAMP No, Kedge. Jemima Kedge Clamp. You don't have to mind. I stopped minding, myself, about twenty-five.

JOB What cured you?

CLAMP I found I could change it. Legally, you know. After that I stopped worrying. It's wonderful what you can put up with when you don't have to. Look at sport. If a man was condemned to have his feet tied to skids and be shoved off a snow mountain for hours every day, so that he was all black and blue, he'd yell his head off with rage. But if he does it of his own accord that's all right. That's skiing, that is. Do you ski?

JOB No, I curl.

CLAMP Curl what? Oh, yes; pushing stones about on ice. That's a sissy sort of amusement for a man your size.

JOB (*stung*) What ought I to do? Balance elephants on the tip of my tongue? What is Hector's game, by the way?

CLAMP Tag. How long is it since you saw Hector?

JOB Oh, long time.

CLAMP I shouldn't say you had much in common.

JOB No. No, we haven't. Not even an acquaintance.

CLAMP That's no great loss.

JOB Are Hector's acquaintances not what is called desirable?

CLAMP Only the way house-agents use the word. You know: This desirable residence. Lovely outside, and crawling with beetles inside.

[DINAH *comes hurrying back, to find her boon companion and her colleague happily having breakfast together.*]

DINAH *Well!* I thought you were in a hurry.

CLAMP Not me. I'm never in a hurry to get to hospital.

DINAH Oh, come along, Clamp.

CLAMP What you will never learn, Dinah, is that neither of us is in the least necessary to that place.

DINAH Stop talking nonsense and eating other people's food, and——

CLAMP The higher up you get in your job, the less you count. If we were both struck by lightning this minute, it wouldn't cause a ripple in the day's work.

DINAH Speak for yourself.

CLAMP It's the rank and file that keep the world going, not geniuses like you and me.

DINAH You're just talking so that you can eat another scone. For Heaven's sake, will you pull yourself together and let us go. I'll get Mrs Bint to make you a whole baking to yourself if you'll only——

CLAMP When?

DINAH Tomorrow.

CLAMP I may be dead tomorrow.

DINAH This evening. Any time you like.

CLAMP (*preparing to make a move*) Well, that's a good offer. I suppose we might as well get along anyhow. We have to go sometime. (*To JOB; referring to a remnant of scone*) Do you want that half? No? In that case, I'll take it with me. Dinah can drive, and I'll eat. I suppose, not being in the profession, you've never known the glory of putting your patients on a diet that you have no intention of using yourself. Well, I'll see you soon again, I expect. Perhaps you and Dinah will come upstairs and have a drink with me after dinner tonight?

DINAH Oh, Job is not staying.

CLAMP (*to JOB*) But you're in town, aren't you?

JOB Only to see my tailor and my dentist, like a little gentleman.

CLAMP Oh, well, you'll be along to see Hector when he comes back tomorrow, I expect, so I won't say good-bye.

[DINAH and JOB turn to each other, but before either can say a word of farewell there is the sound of the outer door of the flat being closed with a bang.]

CLAMP Mrs Bint doesn't seem her sunny self this morning.

DINAH (*faintly*) I think someone's come in.

[*There are the sounds of a man's voice in converse with MRS BINT.*]

CLAMP It sounds like our future Poet Laureate.

DINAH (*in a wild wail*) But it can't be!

CLAMP (*arrested by the tone*) Why not?

DINAH He's not coming back till tomorrow.

CLAMP Perhaps there weren't enough peeresses at that place. He always gets a temperature if there aren't enough peeresses.

[Enter HECTOR.]

[When HECTOR was three people stopped his perambulator in the street to gloat over his beauty. At seventeen he looked very much as he looked in his perambulator: cherubic and charming. At twenty-six he looks merely an elderly baby; his contours blurred a little by incipient adipose tissue, his pink-and-white complexion gone a little yellow, his hair growing already thin. His manner varies from pompousness when he is not at ease to a naïve trustfulness which is the last remnant of his boyish 'charm'. Speaking generally, he is of the type that most women want to 'shield' from life, and most men want to kick into the middle of next week.]

DINAH Hector! What is it? Are you ill?

HECTOR (*staring; in a cold drawl*) No, I am not ill—yet. Would someone explain what that man is doing in my dressing-gown?

CURTAIN

ACT II

Scene and time are continuous with the previous Act.

HECTOR What is that man doing in my dressing-gown?

DINAH Oh, Hector, this is the younger of the two Butchard boys.

HECTOR And since when have you entertained the tradesmen to breakfast?

DINAH Butchard, darling; with a D.... Aunt Cicely's boys.

HECTOR Aunt Cicely's name was Bartholomew.

DINAH Only after she married the bishop. The carpet manufacturer was Butchard. This is Job, the younger of the two small boys who used to play with us at Bude, you remember.

JOB How are you, Hector? I can hardly blame you for not remembering me.

HECTOR Your hair used to be red.

DINAH No, darling, Alan was the red one.

HECTOR But I remember most distinctly——

DINAH You were only five last time you saw him, so you can't remember very much.

JOB And I have done nothing to make myself memorable, I'm afraid. I know all about you, of course.

HECTOR I hope you don't boast about me. I hate being boasted about by people I don't know.

JOB On the contrary; I keep you dark.

HECTOR You keep me dark?

JOB One looks very shabby against a brilliant relation. I can't even live up to your bath-slippers, my dear Hector. As for your bed, I have never felt so embarrassed as I did in its embrace. During our brief relationship it was one well-bred and silent protest.

DINAH (*hastily*) I refused to let Job go out again last night. He took me home from the hospital affair, and it was very late and bitterly cold.

HECTOR I can see it was very late. You are not looking your best this morning, Dinah.

CLAMP (*instantly*) You don't look too chippy yourself, Hector. Temperature, I

shouldn't wonder.

DINAH Are you ill, Hector? Is that why you cut your visit short?

HECTOR I cut it short because I was bored. Bored. Bored.

JOB Cousin Hector, you thrill me. I never met anyone who was bored with such passion that he fled from it at seven in the morning.

HECTOR (*beginning to take off his coat*) You have obviously never stayed in a house with Shatty Pixton. She came down last night, and as soon as I heard that she was coming I said to Tina: 'If that woman is to be here I shall go.' Tina thought I was merely being amusing. But she will know differently by now. Or will in about an hour, when she wakens up. It is too bad of Tina. She knows very well what I think of Shatty and all her poisonous crowd. It surprises me that she would even have them under her roof. They are not in the same world as Tina.

CLAMP (*for JOB'S benefit*) Tina is the Duchess of Frisby; spelt Featherstoneborough.

[*Enter* MRS BINT.]

MRS BINT What will Mr Hector have for breakfast?

HECTOR Coffee. Nothing but coffee.

DINAH But Hector, you must have a proper breakfast if you left Friston so early. Have you had anything at all?

HECTOR I had early-morning tea. Even that choked me.

DINAH Mrs Bint will make you some fresh scones. They won't take a moment.

HECTOR Will you stop fussing, Dinah. I'll have coffee. A great deal of coffee. And then I shall go to bed. (*To JOB*) You *have* finished with my bed?

JOB Oh, quite, quite. I am afraid the room is very untidy. I shall go and clear up.

HECTOR Mrs Bint will do that.

[*Exit* MRS BINT *to the kitchen, taking with her the remains of breakfast.*]

JOB But I'm still wearing your dressing-gown. I had better——

HECTOR You may wear it a little longer.

JOB Thank you.

HECTOR It will conduce to a cosy atmosphere while you explain yourself.

JOB Explain myself?

HECTOR You are my long-lost cousin, and you have been dancing with Dinah. That

leaves some gaps to be filled, doesn't it?

DINAH You won't forget that you have that dentist's appointment at ten, will you, Job?

JOB Oh, that is for tomorrow.

DINAH (*staggered by his refusal of her lifeline*) Then it is the tailor today.

JOB No, I have no appointment this morning.

DINAH (*dismayed*) But you said most distinctly——

HECTOR Don't be so possessive, Dinah. I know that you saw him first, but he is equally related to me. Things which are equal to one another are equal to the same thing. I forget whether that is an axiom or a theorem.

JOB It's equally embarrassing either way.

HECTOR You and Miss Clamp run along to your hospital, and leave us to look after ourselves.

CLAMP He has known me for four years, and he still calls me Miss Clamp. It's by way of protest.

HECTOR Protest against what?

CLAMP The existence of women like me.

DINAH I must speak to Mrs Bint. Clamp, be an angel and (*indicating the telephone*) tell them I shall be a little late.

[*Exit DINAH to kitchen.*]

JOB (*as CLAMP dials a number; to HECTOR, who is considering him*) Am I coming back to you?

HECTOR Your name used to be John, surely?

JOB Yes; it still is. Job is merely the way I used to say my name when I was small, and my version stuck.

CLAMP (*at telephone*) A message for the matron. Tell her that Doctor Partridge will not be——Hullo? Who are you, may I ask?... Oh. Are you hanging round that telephone board again, Doctor Simmons? (*JOB'S ears prick at the name*) Let me tell you, that girl is engaged to a detective sergeant, six foot two in his socks.

HECTOR (*who has taken a letter from the mantelpiece and is opening it*) The contrast between the private amusements of the medical profession and their more public moments has always struck me as being highly entertaining.

JOB (*with one ear on the telephone conversation*) Nothing to the Church.

CLAMP (*at the telephone*) Of course she's coming! She's just going to be a little late.

JOB I had an uncle who used to make breakfast a hell for everyone, an hour before he preached a moving sermon on patience and brotherly love.

HECTOR What uncle was that?

CLAMP (*at the telephone*) Sober? Don't be silly. Did you ever know her when she wasn't sober?

JOB Oh, a brother of my father's.

CLAMP (*at the telephone*) *What!*

JOB (*hastily; talking for the sake of talking, while he watches CLAMP'S face as she listens to SIMMONS'S story*) He had a living in Devon. Quite a character, he was. Wrote some books, I believe. Volumes of sermons, or something like that. They like to write something so that they can appear as the frontispiece. Ever noticed how like actors they look?

HECTOR Who?

JOB The clergy. Fundamentally, I suppose, it is the same thing. It's just a toss-up whether the inspiration is God or the prompt corner.

HECTOR You're not an actor, then?

JOB Good God, no. Do I look like one?

HECTOR It had crossed my mind. Which of the Dominions do you come from?

JOB If not an actor, then certainly a remittance man.

HECTOR Not at all. Only, long-lost cousins usually come from the bounds of Empire.

JOB I'm from Siam.

HECTOR You needn't be defiant about it. I have learned to accept the improbable with equanimity.

JOB I'm an architect.

HECTOR Oh. Bungalows in Bangkok.

JOB Something like that.

CLAMP (*contemplating JOB with a new eye, and slowly replacing the receiver*) Do you know a coffee-bar called Toni's—in Bangkok?

JOB Very well. That is where the woman was murdered.

CLAMP What woman?

JOB Oh, some woman who knew too much. She was put out of the way to prevent her talking.

CLAMP All women don't talk.

JOB No?

CLAMP No!

[Enter DINAH; and from the expression on her face the interview with MRS BINT would appear to have been satisfactory.]

DINAH Clamp, don't wait for me. There is no need for you to be late too. Now that Hector has brought back the car I can drive myself. (To JOB) And perhaps I can give Job a lift into town. (To CLAMP) Did you get the hospital?

CLAMP Yes. I talked to Doctor Simmons.

DINAH (*arrested*) Doctor Simmons!

CLAMP (*smoothly*) He's hanging round that switchboard girl, you know.

DINAH (*doubtfully*) Yes. Yes; did he say—did he say if there was anything urgent?

CLAMP He said a lot, but nothing of medical interest. His mind seems to be still full of last night.

DINAH (*viciously*) If his stomach is still full of last night he could hardly be talking sense.

CLAMP (*with an air of taking no sides*) It seems to have been a very wet night altogether.

HECTOR I've always understood that that was the aim of a Hospital Ball; that and charity. It must be so comforting when one is being sick in hospital to know that the utensil was paid for by the sickness of the staff.

CLAMP One of my dreams, Hector, is to have you as a patient. There's a new gadget in the south clinic that I never use without thinking of you. (*Taking her leave*) Well, I hope to know you better, Mr—Mr——

DINAH Butchard.

CLAMP Mr Butchard. You seem to be an enterprising young man. (*With the faintest flick of an eyelash in the direction of* HECTOR) It's a breed that seems to be growing scarce these days.

DINAH Wait, Clamp, I'll come along with you after all, I think.

CLAMP (*airily*) Don't let me hurry you, Dinah. Now you've got the car——

DINAH (*in a last appeal*) Job, can't we give you a lift to town?

JOB Thank you, Dinah, but now that Hector has arrived so providentially I look forward to making his acquaintance.

DINAH But Hector is going to bed——

HECTOR Will you very kindly not interfere, Dinah. If Job and I choose to have breakfast together——

DINAH But he's had his breakfast.

HECTOR Then he can smoke while I have mine——

DINAH You know you hate people smoking while you are eating.

HECTOR I wish you wouldn't be so possessive, Dinah darling.

DINAH I'm not possessive. I'm just being sensible. If you want to go to bed, what use is there in Job's staying? And if you go to bed there won't be anyone to drive him into town, and——

HECTOR There is a public service of omnibuses, I believe. And a fleet of taxi-cabs at the end of a telephone wire. Really, Dinah! Run along to your hospital, my dear girl, and leave your find with me. It's my turn now.

DINAH Oh, very well. Perhaps it is best that way, because you wouldn't have much chance of seeing each other otherwise. Job is leaving town tomorrow, to visit some other cousins. In Orkney.

HECTOR Does anyone live in Orkney? I thought it was one of those islands that are always evacuating themselves on to the mainland.

JOB (*since something seems to be expected of him*) At the last census the population was fifty-three thousand and seven.

CLAMP What was the seven for?

JOB Accuracy.

CLAMP I thought perhaps it was for luck.

HECTOR But fifty thousand people can't *all* gather gulls' eggs. What do they do?

JOB Well, my cousins burn seaweed.

HECTOR Bonfires. How nice!

JOB No; they smell. In fact, they smell so badly that I don't think I can bring myself to go at all.

DINAH Job! Think—think how you will disappoint the little one with the stammer.

JOB But I always catch a stammer if I stay with one for any length of time. No, on

second thoughts, between the smell and the stammer, I don't think I shall go after all.

CLAMP (*ironic*) I shouldn't. You might find the climate trying—after Siam.

[*Exit* CLAMP.]

DINAH Nonsense. It's bracing and——(*Noticing that CLAMP has gone*) Oh, I must go. Clamp——(*Her thought is obviously: I can't allow CLAMP to get away*) I shall be so late. Oh, Job——

JOB Yes?

HECTOR Did you get the new notepaper, Dinah?

DINAH Yes, it's coming tomorrow.

HECTOR The *pale* grey, I hope.

DINAH Yes, the pale grey.

HECTOR And what did the man say about the radiator?

DINAH He said it would be quite simple, but rather expensive.

HECTOR If it is a simple affair, how can it be expensive? The thing is a contradiction in terms. If it is not going to be any trouble to do, how——

DINAH I don't *know*, Hector darling. That is what the engineer said. I must go.

HECTOR But didn't you——

DINAH Yes, we discussed it for ages, back and fore and up and down, and that's the answer. I must go. I have a lot to say to you, Job, but I can't say it now.

JOB Save it up till you have more time.

DINAH Yes, I'll save it up.

[*Exit* DINAH.]

JOB What a charming woman.

HECTOR Who?

JOB Dinah.

HECTOR Do you think so? Most people find her a little *farouche*. She seems extremely distrait this morning. Late nights don't agree with her. Or perhaps it is you. Do you have an odd effect on people?

JOB Not when I'm sober.

HECTOR Some people are definitely allergic. I can tell when Shatty Pixton has come into a room without turning my head.

JOB What is so repellent about Miss Pixton?

HECTOR (*after a swift review of* MISS PIXTON'S *repellencies*) She gives imitations.

JOB (*visualising the imitation*) Oh! (*The tone says: 'That is surely not all?'*)

HECTOR She also reviews books.

JOB Distressing; but not necessarily damning.

HECTOR And she has the most evil tongue in London.

JOB That certainly is a distinction. But a great poet like you should be above things like that, surely? Were they so very bad?

HECTOR Was what bad?

JOB The imitation, the review, and the gossip.

HECTOR (*a little staggered, but mollified by the 'great poet'; with exquisite pomp*) There are some things no man can forgive.

JOB (*full of honey*) Quite, quite.

HECTOR (*liking the honey*) I suppose you don't know a game called Labels?

JOB No. No, that has not been one of my amusements.

HECTOR Each person writes a label—preferably in rhyme—and the rest tie it, metaphorically speaking, to the appropriate person. Well, Deenie Stystable—Lord Manning's sister, you know—told me that they were playing it one day at Wiskett—do you know Wiskett? A lovely place looking out on the Vale of Aylesbury—and Shatty's label read:

'A frightful little blister
Who lives on his sister'.

JOB And did they guess correctly?

HECTOR Of course. Everyone knows that Shatty hates me like poison. (*Since* JOB *offers no immediate comment*) I didn't think that in the least funny.

JOB (*in a voice that would make anyone but* HECTOR *stand from under*) No; I don't think it is funny either.

HECTOR It is intolerable that my devotion to Dinah should be so—so——

[*Enter* MRS BINT *with coffee and scones.*]

HECTOR (*eyeing the covered scone dish with anticipation*) What I should like, Mrs Bint, would be some toast melba. I have no appetite, but I feel the need of some sustenance.

MRS BINT I made you a few scones, sir. I thought maybe——

HECTOR Oh, no. No food.

MRS BINT Very little, dainty ones, they are. Wouldn't stick in the throat of a fly.

HECTOR Oh, very well. I don't want to bother you to make toast if you have already gone to the trouble of baking.

MRS BINT Of course, if you're really pining, as you might say, for that sawdust-tasting stuff, it won't take a minute to——

HECTOR (*hastily*) No, no. Leave the scones. I'll make do with them.

MRS BINT (*with a baleful glance at JOB*) I'll just tidy up your room, sir.

HECTOR (*to JOB*) Would you like more coffee?

JOB Yes, I should. Very much. Mrs Bint makes excellent coffee.

HECTOR Another cup for Mr Butchard, please.

[*Exit MRS BINT to the kitchen.*]

HECTOR I wish her brother wasn't a lawyer.

JOB Mrs Bint's!

HECTOR No, Shatty's. What she says in print is always vetted by her brother, and what she says in the course of a game is not actionable.

JOB No libel on a Label.

HECTOR No.

[*Enter MRS BINT. As well as the extra cup, she is carrying a string-bag, half the size of a potato sack, filled with letters. She puts the cup on the table and deposits the sack on the floor at HECTOR'S feet without remark. It is apparently a routine proceeding. She then retires into the bedroom corridor with her duster.*]

JOB (*having stared at the letter-bag*) Forgive my bluntness, my dear Hector, but do you run a tipster's business on the side?

HECTOR Oh, no. That is just the weekly mail.

JOB My congratulations. I had no idea that anyone's poetry could raise such public enthusiasm.

HECTOR Poetry? You don't imagine that they write to me because of my poems, do you?

JOB Have you a side-line?

HECTOR I have a Page. Don't you read me in the *Daily Clarion* on Wednesdays?

JOB I don't see much of the Press these days. In Siam, you see, they only took *The Times* at the Club. And the Prince got only the *Bystander*.

HECTOR The Prince?

JOB The man I was building the palace for. What do you write about in your page?

HECTOR Well, if I see a woman with a funny hat, I talk about that. And they like God, in moderation. And royalty. And fashionable parties. And people arriving at Southampton. Who was the Prince that you——

JOB (*indicating the sack*) But what is all that about? Have you appealed for something?

HECTOR Oh, no. They just write and tell me how their asparagus is coming on, and ask advice about little Jimmy's tonsils, and whether they'd better tell Ida how Basil is carrying on in the evenings when she is working. Ever since the Reformation the British have felt the lack of a confessional, and now they have one. From the Press point of view, it's the greatest discovery since the invention of printing.

JOB And do you answer them?

HECTOR My secretary does.

JOB (*with a glance round*) Your secretary?

HECTOR The *Clarion* send a girl down from the office. They intended me to work at the office originally, but I declined. A desk between the Gardening and the Fashions——! She did her nails all day, the Fashions. Milson-Bleeson at the *Telegram* has a room to himself, and a private lavatory. And Bines, at the *Revally*, has a whole floor. But of course he's daily. By the time I've had another year at it I shall have a better room than Milson-Bleeson's. Perhaps you could design it for me. I didn't know you had been doing important work in Siam.

JOB Oh, interesting, but not so important. Every house a royalty lives in is called a palace in the East. Usually it's just a villa of forty or fifty rooms. Actually the one I did for the Prince had sixty-four, but that's a bit above the average. What kind of room had you in mind?

HECTOR Well, Milson-Bleeson's looks like something out of an Embassy. I should like mine to look like something out of the White House.

JOB I see. Simple and distinguished. The ideal background.

HECTOR (*impervious to irony*) Yes. Of course, I might succeed Milson-Bleeson on the *Telegram*.

JOB Is the gentleman slipping?

HECTOR Yes. His heart is always breaking. His heart breaks at least four times a page. Even for the British public that is a little too sentimental. Dinah was dreadfully sentimental too.

JOB Dinah?

HECTOR When she did my letters. She——

JOB You mean Dinah worked for the paper once?

HECTOR No, no; not exactly. But when I first refused to work in that office of theirs the *Clarion* were very peeved, and said that I should have to find my own secretary.

JOB (*in a dangerous voice*) And couldn't you find a secretary?

HECTOR (*blissfully unaware*) Oh, Dinah loved doing it. It gave some interest to her evenings. But she was always running amok and wanting to investigate. The result of a scientific training on a naturally sentimental mind.

JOB What did she want to investigate?

HECTOR Oh, if a man wrote that he hadn't the money for a pair of boots, perhaps. She could never see that a man who hadn't the price of a pair of boots could be of no interest to the *Clarion*. We run the page for circulation purposes, not as a private charity.

JOB We?

HECTOR (*conceding*) They, then. (*With a return to pomp at the hint of criticism*) Though I hope that as long as I am on the paper I am loyal to it. (*With a return to earth*) Even if I go to the *Telegram*, of course, I should insist on having that room of Milson-Bleeson's redecorated. You are not going back to Siam, are you?

JOB Oh, no. I came home to do a country house for a rich old woman who died before I got here. Leaving me with the plans of the most beautiful house I ever did, and no one to build it.

HECTOR Perhaps I could get Deenie Stystable to build one. Is it large?

JOB Oh, no. Only eleven rooms.

HECTOR Five per cent of eleven rooms isn't much.

JOB Five per cent?

HECTOR My commission. But, still. You could line it with priceless woods, couldn't you?

JOB Actually I think I shall build it for myself. It is much too beautiful to waste on any client.

HECTOR Where are you living just now? At a hotel?

JOB No. At rooms I had in my student days. Squalid, but full of sentiment, and good enough till I find a house I like.

HECTOR A flat, you mean.

JOB Oh, no. A house. There is no cachet in a flat. An architect—in fact, any man who works in the arts—needs a setting. A background, a designed proportion, vistas, detail, a beauty made to measure. Not just a—just a cell in a piece of honeycomb. Forgive me; I left my cigarettes in my coat pocket.

[Exit JOB to the bedroom corridor.]

[HECTOR looks dubiously round the flat.

[At the door JOB PASSES MRS BINT, carrying sheets and duster under one arm, and in the other hand his boots.

[HECTOR puts out his hand and absent-mindedly takes a letter from the sack, but his thoughts are obviously still with this new idea of himself as the inhabitant of a piece of honeycomb.]

MRS BINT (pausing) Your bed's ready, Mr Hector. Will you be requiring lunch, sir?

HECTOR I should like some kidneys about two o'clock, I think.

MRS BINT It's an awkward day for kidneys. You wouldn't like a nice ripe steak, maybe?

HECTOR No, I should like kidneys. Grilled. If our regular butcher cannot supply them, go on telephoning till you find someone who can.

MRS BINT Very good, sir. And how many will there be for lunch?

HECTOR Oh, I don't think——(His eye comes to rest on JOB'S boots: cracked, shapeless, and indescribably muddy. Unbelieving, he straightens himself to have a better view) Where, in heaven's name, did you get these?

MRS BINT They belong to the gentleman, sir.

HECTOR Am I to understand that these are the gentleman's dancing-pumps?

MRS BINT Oh, he didn't have evening things, sir.

HECTOR You mean he went to the ball in those?

MRS BINT I couldn't say, sir. That's what he came home in.

HECTOR (*taking the boots distastefully into a nearer view*) Great heavens, they're patched!

MRS BINT (*grimly*) Not enough.

HECTOR (*recollecting himself*) Thank you, Mrs Bint. (*As she is going to the door*) What time did Mr Butchard arrive yesterday?

MRS BINT Well—well, I couldn't exactly say, sir.

HECTOR (*coldly*) Why couldn't you?

MRS BINT (*anxious for the well-loved black sheep*) I don't usually wait up for Miss Dinah.

HECTOR Wait up?

MRS BINT When she's out late.

HECTOR Do you mean that it wasn't until this morning that you——(*Pulling himself up once more*) Oh, very well, Mrs Bint. Thank you.

[*Exit MRS BINT, and JOB comes back with his cigarettes.*]

HECTOR (*regarding JOB with a new eye, suspicion seething in him; conversationally*) I could have given you cigarettes.

JOB Thank you, but it's so long since I smoked a good cigarette that I should probably be sick.

HECTOR Don't they keep good tobacco?

JOB They?

HECTOR In Siam.

JOB Oh, in my part of the country men didn't smoke. It's considered womanish. So I used to get secret supplies from an old planter in the village who smoked nothing but the ten-a-penny brands.

HECTOR What did he plant?

JOB (*hastily rejecting both rubber and tea, just in case*) French beans.

HECTOR In Siam!

JOB (*firmly*) Yes. They make a kind of chutney out of them. You can get it at Fortnum's, I believe.

HECTOR (*threatening*) I must ask for it.

JOB (*happily*) Yes, do.

HECTOR Did you enjoy the ball?

JOB What ball?

HECTOR Last night.

JOB Oh, the hospital affair. I didn't go to it.

HECTOR But you took my sister home from it!

JOB (*aware of the change of atmosphere, but not of its cause*) Yes. That was all.

HECTOR Do you mind telling me how you met Dinah in the first place?

JOB I just discovered her. In a reference book. It was my first evening in London, you see, and I wanted some company, but there were so many Partridges in the telephone book, and I couldn't ring them all up because I had only tuppence——

HECTOR Why had you only tuppence?

JOB The rest of my money was French. I got off the boat at Marseilles, and walked home across France. And the banks were shut, and my landlady thought French notes much too pretty to be real money. And then I remembered that at least one of you was a public character. (*Watching with delight* HECTOR'S *reaction*) So I looked up Dinah in a public library.

HECTOR Dinah!

JOB Yes, of course. You can always find a doctor. It told me all about her qualifications——quite a clever girl, Dinah, isn't she?——but not her private address. So I rang up the hospital where she was said to work, and got my money's worth.

HECTOR Your money's worth?

JOB Value for my last tuppence. They said Doctor Partridge was there at that moment, and they were having a dance, and wouldn't I come along. So along I went, frayed trousers, cracked boots, empty pockets, and all. But I needn't have worried. They're used to down-and-outs in hospital. There's a little sister there with chestnut hair that made me long to have typhoid.

HECTOR Why typhoid?

JOB I've always understood that that required the most constant nursing. And when Dinah had finished being the belle of the ball——

HECTOR Dinah!

JOB Certainly. Don't you take her to dances? (*Meaning: 'Don't you know that she is always the belle of a ball?'*)

HECTOR (*stiffly*) I don't dance, and Dinah does not care to. She goes to hospital balls only because people would consider her impolite if she didn't.

JOB (*heartily*) People certainly considered her beautiful when she did.

HECTOR (*having decided that anyone who invites suspicion so freely and refutes it so impudently must be genuine, however odd his story; testily*) My dear Job! Dinah is a good creature, and I am very fond of her, but she has never had more than the family share of good-looks. (*He turns to his letter*)

JOB Ah, but when a woman is happy—Have you never seen a bride with a face like a turnip looking like Helen of Troy?

HECTOR (*without heat*) I think brides are revolting. (*Indicating the sack of letters*) Have you?

JOB (*picking a letter automatically*) She was happy last night. (*Remembering it for the first time*) She put her empty cup down on the counter and smiled at me.

HECTOR What counter?

JOB Oh, they had a sort of canteen—cafeteria—(*Reading*) ‘Darling Hector’—Oh, I beg your pardon. (*Offering him the letter*)

HECTOR (*not taking it*) Why?

JOB It seems to be a personal letter.

HECTOR Oh, no. Just someone who wants my photograph, probably.

JOB (*staring*) What for? I mean, what do they do with it?

HECTOR (*suggesting, indifferently*) Frame it, keep it under their pillows—(*With a shrug which says: ‘How should I know?’*) Read it.

JOB (*reading*) ‘I want you to know that I have put your photograph on a little altar I have made.’ (*That was one you didn’t think of,* HECTOR) ‘Whenever I want to be alone I go there and look at it and feel better.’ There are eight pages. Do you think God likes this understudying of yours, Hector?

HECTOR The *Clarion* likes it; that is all that concerns me. (*As JOB’S silence might imply disapproval*) Can I help it if women are silly about me?

JOB (*thoughtfully; dropping the letter back and taking another*) No; I suppose if it wasn’t you it would be some Pekingese or other. (*Referring to HECTOR’S letter*) What have you got?

HECTOR (*dropping his letter back and taking another*) A free meal. I must try the place sometime.

JOB A meal for a mention?

HECTOR Yes.

JOB (*having looked at his letter*) Could you mention Mouldem corsets, do you

think?

HECTOR What do they offer?

JOB Their Mr Francis would like to show you over their model factory in the country. Ten acres of gardens and the prettiest girls in five counties.

HECTOR Do they think I have nothing to do with my time but inspect factories?

JOB I suppose poetry is a full-time job. (*He drops the letter and takes another*)

HECTOR Being a successful poet is. One has obligations. To one's publisher, if not to anyone else. No one buys the work of poets who sit at home. By the way, is your Prince Whatshisname any relation of the King of Siam?

JOB The son of a first cousin.

HECTOR (*charmed*) Indeed. Educated in England?

JOB No.

HECTOR How unfortunate.

JOB In Japan.

HECTOR *How* unfortunate. Does he come to this country at all?

JOB No, he doesn't think it is safe.

HECTOR Safe! England! Japanese propaganda.

JOB No, it's his own idea. He saw the place on a map, and thinks it is much too small. It might be swept into the sea at any moment. (*Referring to the letter in his hand*) Someone is coming to the office on Friday morning to knock your block off.

HECTOR Why?

JOB (*studying the letter*) You have been putting ideas into his wife's head.

HECTOR What! What ideas?

JOB Making the best of herself. Apparently you have revealed the existence of the *belle laide*. (*Reading*) 'My wife was born plain, and I married her plain, and washing her hair and gaping'—no, 'gawping'—'in a mirror isn't going to do her nor me no good.'

HECTOR Medieval. Quite medieval. You know, the average Briton would have purdah tomorrow if he could.

JOB The average Briton has a very hard fist.

HECTOR Oh, I don't go to the office on Fridays. Besides, our doorman is the ex-heavyweight champion of the Coldstream Guards.

JOB What a come-down.

HECTOR Being a doorman?

JOB No. Being nursemaid to a set of scribblers.

HECTOR (*with dignity*) Most scribblers tip very generously. By the way, (*feeling for his wallet*) I can change those French notes for you if you give them to me.

JOB (*happily*) Oh, Pierre changed them, thank you.

HECTOR Who is Pierre?

JOB The barman at the Nutmeg Tree.

HECTOR And what is the Nutmeg Tree?

JOB Oh, one of the low dives that Dinah and I stopped off at on our way home last night.

HECTOR (*jealous again*) Not much wonder she is looking tired this morning. You really should be more considerate, Job. Dinah is a working woman, not a person of leisure like you, and her evening's amusement must be governed by the fact that she has duty waiting for her in the morning. At an early hour in the morning.

JOB Reprehensible of me. But there were no rags to warn me.

HECTOR Rags?

JOB Rags after twelve. How was I to know she was Cinderella? You should have seen how lovely she looked by three o'clock.

HECTOR (*tartly*) She looks anything but lovely this morning. And I expect her patients will find her anything but intelligent. (*Referring to the letter in his hand*) Why, do you imagine, do people think that I can buy them grand pianos?

JOB I don't know. Perhaps because your face is both kind and musical. I suppose (*offering his cigarette-case*) I need not offer you one of my cigarettes?

HECTOR (*discarding his letter*) Thank you, I have my cigarettes made for me. (*Catching sight of something inside the lid of JOB'S case*) What is that?

JOB What?

HECTOR The photograph.

JOB Oh, that? That is my house. The one I was going to build for the old millionairess.

HECTOR But it is built!

JOB No. That is just a model. Making that model has been my sole amusement of late. (*There is a note of sincerity in this last*)

HECTOR (*taking the case and looking at the photograph*) But it is beautiful!

JOB Your surprise is hardly tactful, Hector.

HECTOR One of the most beautiful things I have ever seen. You are a genius, Job.

JOB As near as makes no difference.

HECTOR (*gloating*) Beautiful!

JOB (*watching him*) I'm glad you like it. When it is finished I shall ask you to come and stay. Which room will you have?

HECTOR But you seriously mean to build this beautiful thing for yourself? You can't!

JOB Why can't I? Wouldn't you like to have a cousin who had a famous house? A famous house that everyone envied, that the glossier magazines took photographs of, that people fought to come and stay in?

HECTOR (*having looked a little longer*) Clare would like this.

JOB Who is Clare?

HECTOR A great friend of mine.

JOB I thought you were going to wish it on to Deenie Some-one-or-other?

HECTOR Oh, Deenie Stystable. Oh, I thought then that it was just another house. I didn't know then that you could build. Do you realise that a genius for domestic architecture is one of the rarest of human qualities? Why, there hasn't been a first-rate man for two hundred years! And here you turn up in my flat without warning, and turn out to be my cousin. With a piece of sheer beauty stuck in the lid of your cigarette-case. Why did you photograph it, by the way?

JOB I had to pa——(*He was about to say 'pawn'*) to part with the model. When I left Siam. I had a lot of bulky luggage. So I photographed it before it went. (*Hastily*) Before I went, I mean.

HECTOR Do you mind if I show this to Clare?

JOB (*with an effort appearing suitably bored*) I still don't know who Clare is.

HECTOR Clare Transom-Sills. A charming woman. Perhaps you remember her husband. He wrote books on mountaineering.

JOB Oh, a widow.

HECTOR What's wrong with that?

JOB I'm in favour of suttee.

HECTOR Don't be tiresome, Job. Clare has all the money in the world. She would give her right arm to possess a house like this. At the moment she rents a manor, all beams and inglenooks. She is at the olde-worlde stage of her development. But any

day now she is due to graduate to the eighteenth century—and this was made for her.

JOB (*mildly*) No, it was made for me.

HECTOR I thought you said it was commissioned by an old woman?

JOB Yes. But she died providentially. I should probably have stained my honour by palming something else off on her. That is my house; the best thing I shall ever do, very likely; and it is going to stay in the family.

HECTOR I wish I had the money to buy it.

JOB Never mind. I shall ask you to stay. Often. But why haven't you the money? The *Clarion* is no pauper; nor, if all reports are true, no piker.

HECTOR Oh, no, they pay well enough, I suppose. But that is all I have. Poetry is not a livelihood. I share the cost of this flat with Dinah, of course. (*Realising from JOB'S glance round that that is obviously not much; testily*) And I have heavy social expenses that Dinah hasn't.

JOB (*smoothly*) Quite, quite. (*Taking back the cigarette-case, laughing*) Well, I should marry your Mrs Whatsername and make her give it to you as a wedding-present.

HECTOR Wait a minute. Do you mean that you would be willing to build it for me?

JOB (*looking very sober and surprised*) My dear man, I was only joking.

HECTOR Yes, I know. But supposing that I had the money, would you be willing to let me build it?

JOB (*still serious and surprised*) But you don't seriously want a house like that, do you? I thought you were very contented here.

HECTOR Oh, I stay here for Dinah's sake. But there is a great deal in what you said about the setting for an artist. I feel that I haven't taken enough care in—in presenting myself, as it were. It is time that I returned hospitality; (*hastily*) elsewhere than at restaurants, I mean. And now that my last poem is a best seller, the public will have to be considered. They will have visualised a——

JOB But a house like that could only be built out of town. Would that be convenient for Dinah?

HECTOR Oh, Dinah would stay on here, of course. She has her work.

JOB Wouldn't she be lonely?

HECTOR Oh, at first, perhaps. But she would get over it. Make friends of her own.

JOB (*the dangerous undercurrent in his voice again*) Hasn't she any of her

own?

HECTOR Well, not intimates. (*In extenuation*) We have always been very devoted to each other, you see. We find each other sufficient. Our respective friends didn't mix very well; and so we don't have them here.

JOB I see. Well, I'm flattered that you like my work so much, Hector, but I still want it more than you do. After all, you've only just had the notion, and I have lived with it.

HECTOR (*explaining what JOB has known for some time*) But once I want a thing, I have no happiness until I get it. I've been like that ever since I was a baby. They had to give me a bear once, I cried so hard for it. Five days I cried.

JOB (*shaking his head*) I even know where I'm going to build the thing. I know just the hillock, with the sheltering wood behind, a slope to the stream, and a fifty-mile view. I'm not going to put any second-best building in that spot!

HECTOR Of course not! Put it there for me! Look, Job——

JOB What! Give up my chosen spot——

HECTOR Look, Job; let us go round and show Clare the photograph. That doesn't commit you to anything.

JOB (*with a great air of reluctance*) But that would be very odd. She'll think I'm trying to sell her a house.

HECTOR No, she won't. Just leave it to me. We'll show it to her casually. Offer her your cigarettes. By the way, I must give you some of mine. You can't offer her those. She might think you were a pauper.

JOB Would that make a difference?

HECTOR Well, she's a darling, but she is apt to gauge an artist by his fees. You go and have a shave——

JOB But what about my clothes? After tramping across France they don't look plutocratic. (*With an air of dissuading a child from a dangerous toy*) Look here, Hector, you don't really want that house, it's just a whim——

HECTOR You can explain about France. It's the kind of thing she expects artists to do. And I *never* have whims. (*The suggestion has put the finishing touch to his desire for the house*) What I want, I want.

JOB All right, but you'll have to lend me a clean handkerchief. And remember this: I never at any time said I would build that house for you.

HECTOR No, no. We won't think about that just now. I just want Clare to see——

[Enter DINAH, leaning on the arm of MRS BINT, one foot stockingless and bandaged.]

HECTOR Dinah!

DINAH I sprained my foot on the hospital steps.

JOB (*going forward to help her to a couch*) My poor Dinah!

HECTOR (*in the same breath, not moving*) Dinah, how careless of you.

[DINAH shows by her glance at HECTOR that she is aware of the difference of their greeting.]

MRS BINT I always said that troubles never come singly. Easy does it, easy does it.

HECTOR (*coldly*) What other troubles have you, Mrs Bint?

MRS BINT You'd be surprised! (*Settling* DINAH) There now.

DINAH Oh, thank you. Thank you very much. I'm sorry to be so silly.

MRS BINT I'll get you a nice cup of tea. There's nothing like tea, be it broken bone or broken heart, I always say.

DINAH No, no tea, thank you, Mrs Bint. I'm all right.

HECTOR Of course she's all right!

MRS BINT You're sure you wouldn't like just a——

DINAH No, nothing, thank you, nothing.

MRS BINT Well, if you happen to think of anything, there's always the bell.

[Exit MRS BINT.]

DINAH Perhaps Hector would get me my smelling-salts.

HECTOR Smelling salts! Since when have you owned smelling-salts?

DINAH Every woman owns smelling-salts.

HECTOR Not since 1900.

DINAH You'll find them in the left-hand little drawer of my table.

HECTOR (*going*) It's extraordinary the things one doesn't know about those nearest and dearest to one.

[Exit HECTOR to bedroom corridor.]

JOB Miss Clamp made a very neat bandage.

DINAH (*coldly*) Naturally. Now will you please tell me why you stayed when I made it easy for you to go?

JOB I told you. I wanted to meet Hector. Miss Clamp had painted such an arresting picture of him.

DINAH That is nonsense.

JOB On the contrary, it is the most literal truth.

DINAH Then it is only because Hector is a celebrity. You wanted to make his acquaintance so that you could make capital out of it.

JOB No one could make capital out of Hector.

DINAH Do you know what I think? I think you are just an adventurer.

JOB (*considering it*) Adventurer. Odd how that gay and courageous word has become an epithet of scorn. A group name for confidence men, three-card tricksters

DINAH Will you stop chattering and stick to the point!

JOB (*reproachful*) Chattering! Oh, Dinah!

DINAH To be quite frank and vulgar, will you tell me what your little game is?

JOB I'm playing Perseus.

DINAH What?

JOB The only difference between Perseus and me is that he had material reward for his time and trouble, but I, like a genuine artist, will be repaid only by pride in my work.

DINAH Will you stop talking in riddles, and tell me what you are doing here!

JOB (*with an air of patiently explaining the obvious*) Getting acquainted with the Gorgon.

[*Enter* HECTOR.]

HECTOR I can't find any smelling-salts.

DINAH Oh! I'm sorry, Hector; perhaps I put them in the other drawer.

HECTOR I've looked in the other drawer.

DINAH If they are not in the left-hand drawer, they are certainly in the right. A little green bottle.

HECTOR There is no little green bottle. I don't believe you have any smelling-salts at all.

DINAH Perhaps Job can find them.

HECTOR Oh, very well, I'll have another look.

DINAH Am I to understand that you are trying to break up my home?

JOB Oh, no. Just (*he finds a word*) fumigate it.

DINAH Your impudence leaves me breathless. But, why? What good is it going to do you to make trouble between Hector and me?

JOB Good heavens, I am not going to make trouble! I am just going to marry him off.

DINAH Marry! (*Recovering a little from the shock*) Hector will never marry. Have you picked a bride for him too?

JOB Yes.

DINAH A princess of Tartary, I suppose.

JOB No. Mrs Transom-Sills.

DINAH (*with a monosyllable of mockery*) Ha! Clare has been trying to marry Hector for the last five years.

JOB She never had the right sort of wedding-present before.

DINAH What sort has she now?

JOB A frame for Hector.

DINAH A frame? I don't know what you are talking about, and I still don't see what you are going to get out of all this.

JOB I told you. Artistic satisfaction.

DINAH Artistic blackmail, more likely. Well, you might blackmail Hector, if you can get anything on him, but you can't blackmail me. *Or* Clare Transom-Sills.

JOB (*agreeing*) No. I've always understood that men were the greater moral cowards. But I'm not in the blackmail business. My reward will be complete when I see the Gorgon turning some other house to stone.

DINAH But why, why? What business is it of yours? How dare you come, a stranger, and presume to interfere with our lives?

JOB If you saw a spider on someone's back, you would pick it off, wouldn't you?

DINAH Hector isn't a spider. He's a nice harmless—limpet. (*With a trace of smugness*) And if you think you are rescuing me from Hector by marrying him to Clare, you don't know any of us. As long as I am available, Clare will come second with Hector.

JOB (*contemplatively*) I hadn't thought of that.

[*Enter* HECTOR.]

HECTOR The only green bottle in all your possessions, Dinah, contains, if I am to believe the label, disinfectant. Would you care for that?

DINAH Don't bother any more, Hector. Thank you for looking. I'll get it myself in a moment.

JOB Let me look for it for you.

DINAH No, of course not.

JOB Please; I should like to. I may as well get used to doing things for you.

HECTOR Get used to it? Do you anticipate making a habit of it?

JOB Well, more or less. You see——Well, I'd better break it to you, Hector, that Dinah and I are thinking of getting married.

DINAH }

} WHAT!

HECTOR }

CURTAIN

ACT III

Scene and time are continuous with the previous Act.

JOB —Dinah and I are thinking of getting married.

DINAH }
 } WHAT!
HECTOR }

JOB (*sweetly*) You don't mind, do you, Dinah? I know we said we would keep it secret for a little. But after all, Hector is your brother. He would have to know sooner or later.

DINAH (*almost speechless*) You—*monster!*

HECTOR (*in a wild wail*) But you can't marry Dinah!

JOB Why can't I?

HECTOR (*incoherent with shock*) You don't know her. She doesn't know you. She has never considered getting married. She isn't the marrying kind.

DINAH You can save your breath, Hector, because——

JOB But we love each other! I think she is beautiful, and she thinks me a model of all the manly virtues, and we can't imagine a life spent apart from each other, so the obvious thing is to get married.

DINAH I am *not*——

HECTOR But you don't know anything about each other!

DINAH I tell you, I am not going to——

JOB If you mean about my snoring and Dinah putting cold cream on her face and things like that, then of course we don't. But as to her fitness to be my wife, I have no doubt: she dresses well, has a charming voice, good teeth, and a pleasant expression—when she is not looking like a shrew. And as for my fitness, (*apparently struck by a thought*) I hope, Hector, you don't think I am unable to keep your sister in the style to which she has been accustomed?

HECTOR No, no. You have a fortune at your finger-tips. But you must see——

DINAH A fortune! Since when has he had a fortune!

HECTOR —the whole idea is ridiculous.

DINAH If he talks about a fortune, don't believe him. He hasn't a penny in his pocket. Not a penny!

JOB (*amiably*) Well, you would have that last drink. Darling, I have given Hector ample evidence of my power to provide for you. Not chinchilla, of course. But anything up to the mink level can be considered standard equipment.

HECTOR If Dinah wants mink coats, I can give them to her. She does not have to get married for that.

JOB (*as one shocked*) Of course not. Such a thought would never cross my mind. Have you a mink coat, Dinah?

DINAH No. (*Hastily*) I never wanted one. I can buy my own furs. Yes, and jewels, and perfume, and silly thin stockings, and everything else that a woman is supposed to want. I have never needed a man to *provide* for me.

JOB But you *would* like to find a little package by your plate in the morning, every now and then.

HECTOR (*bewildered, furious, and jealous*) Dinah is always very grumpy in the mornings. (*As an afterthought*) She doesn't care for packages.

DINAH (*stung by the 'grumpy'*) How do you know?

HECTOR And I consider it an underhand business to invade a man's house under the guise of friendliness and to bribe his sister to marry——

DINAH Bribe! *Bribe!* For Heaven's sake, Hector. The man couldn't give me a Woolworth's thimble.

HECTOR Then why do you want to marry him?

DINAH I don't want to! I'm not going to! If you would listen for half a moment I could tell you. I wouldn't marry him if he were the last man in the world.

JOB (*reproachful*) Oh, Dinah, *what* a cliché!

DINAH I wouldn't marry him if he were the last man in the world and I was the world's prize nymphomaniac.

JOB That's better. Oh, come, Dinah! Just because I let the cat out of the bag when we had arranged to keep it a secret, you needn't——

HECTOR And *why* was it to be kept secret?

DINAH Listen, Hector. Just listen quietly and get this into your head. There isn't any 'it'. There isn't any secret. There isn't anything between us at all!

HECTOR My dear Dinah, a man doesn't just invent a story like that, without foundation.

DINAH I tell you, the word marriage was never even mentioned!

JOB (*surprised*) Was that necessary?

DINAH (*staggered by his impudence*) What!

JOB (*vox humana*) Dinah, did last night mean nothing to you?

HECTOR Dinah, I insist on knowing what all this is about.

DINAH Are you going to take this man's word instead of mine?

HECTOR Job is our cousin, and a gentleman, and a first-rate artist, and I hardly think that he——

DINAH How do you know that he is a first-rate artist?

HECTOR I have seen his work, and as an artist I can appreciate it.

DINAH You have seen his work? (*To JOB*) I thought you said you were an architect.

JOB I am. I am going to build Hector's new house for him.

DINAH (*largo rallentando*) Hector's new house!

HECTOR (*hastily*) No, no. That is only a suggestion so far. Job has designed one of the most beautiful houses imaginable, and I—I naturally admired it.

DINAH I didn't know that you wanted to build a house, Hector.

HECTOR That is all in the air at the moment, and quite irrelevant. What we are discussing——

DINAH But where would you get the money?

JOB If Mrs Transom-Sills likes it enough when I show her the photograph——

DINAH *Clare!*

JOB Oh, I beg your pardon. Perhaps, strictly speaking, that is not my business.

DINAH Hector, you can't do that!

HECTOR Do what?

DINAH Take a present like that from Clare.

JOB Oh, of course not. It would only be a loan.

DINAH (*looking doubtfully at HECTOR*) A loan?

HECTOR (*full of virtue*) Naturally.

DINAH But you could never——(*'Pay it back', she is going to say*)

JOB (*neatly timing his next blow*) You would *like* Hector to have a house in the country, wouldn't you?

DINAH In the country!

JOB He could have you for week-ends. You're not one of those doctors that are called out on Sundays, are you? The country is lovely for week-ends.

DINAH You seem to have arranged a lot of my life this morning, Hector.

HECTOR Darling, all that is entirely in the air.

DINAH In Clare's pocket, you mean.

HECTOR It was tactless of Job to mention it.

DINAH Very.

HECTOR (*growing heated as she grows cool*) And I don't like your attitude, Dinah. All that I am proposing is to build a house. A normal and quite praiseworthy proceeding which hardly calls for comment from a woman who has entangled herself overnight. I am still waiting for an explanation of this extraordinary scene.

DINAH (*surveying him*) You sound just like a schoolmaster. The kind they burlesque in music-halls. But I'm not your pupil, you know, Hector. *Nor* your stooge. I am Dinah Partridge; free, white, and twenty-one; with a profession, a bank book, and a telephone number. If I entangled myself every night of my life, and had a different scene with a different lover every morning, why should I explain to anyone?

HECTOR You would have to explain sooner or later.

DINAH To whom?

HECTOR The Medical Council, I presume. In the meantime, I, as your brother, seek an explanation, not because I am interested in your moral welfare, but because I am anxious about your mental health.

DINAH That's a pretty roundabout way of saying you think I've taken leave of my senses. Have you inquired about Job's mental health? How do you know Siam wasn't an asylum? Ask him what evidence he has that he has ever been in Siam?

HECTOR He has ample evidence in his pocket that he has a sane and constructive mind.

DINAH Nonsense. The maddest lunatic I ever knew was a mathematical genius. You never saw Job till this morning, you know nothing about him, and yet you take his word in preference to your own sister's! Why?

HECTOR Because you know him better than I do, and you found no signs of lunacy in him until he had blurted out your secret.

JOB (*before she can recover; very sweet and apologetic*) I am terribly sorry I said anything, Dinah. You must forgive me. I was so pleased, so happy, I didn't stop to think.

DINAH (*yelling at him*) Will you hold your tongue, you mischief-making devil!

HECTOR (*shocked*) Dinah! I think you really *have* taken leave of your senses.

DINAH (*controlled again*) I shall in about two minutes. (*Regarding them both with disfavour*) What a pair for a good decent woman to be landed with!

JOB I think perhaps it would make things better if I were to go.

DINAH You mean you'll go away?

JOB Until you send for me.

DINAH (*doubtful that she understands*) Go out of this flat, I mean?

JOB Certainly.

DINAH (*relief giving way to suspicion*) And *now* what have you in your mind?

JOB Oh, Dinah, darling. You must know that the dearest wish of my heart is for your happiness.

DINAH I don't think you have a heart.

JOB (*all sweet reason*) If you have decided that last night was just an evening's amusement, then I am the last man to force you to an interest that seems to you unacceptable in the sober light of morning.

DINAH You are rapidly forcing me to an interest in murder.

JOB I'm glad you thought of that first, and not suicide.

DINAH Why?

JOB It completes my picture of you. When you find lions in the path you don't run away, you beat them over the head. You really would be a lovely woman to marry.

DINAH (*coldly*) Would you like Mrs Bint to help you pack.

JOB Thank you, but I always tie my own ties. (*Pausing at the corridor entrance*) Perhaps after all, it was a mistake to try to stand in your shoes, Hector.

HECTOR Why, may I ask?

JOB They are four sizes too small.

[*Exit JOB.*]

HECTOR (*looking after him, contemplatively*) I don't think I altogether like that remark. I wish the fellow wasn't a genius.

DINAH (*with detached interest*) Have you ever knocked anyone down, Hector?

HECTOR Certainly not. Physical force proves nothing.

DINAH It improves the occasion, now and then.

HECTOR I find you altogether beyond my understanding this morning, Dinah. I only hope that you are not sickening for something.

DINAH That would be an inconvenience, wouldn't it? Tell me, Hector, are you serious about building a house in the country?

HECTOR (*made brave by her apparent mildness*) If I can raise a loan.

DINAH I don't know Clare Transom-Sills very well, but I am quite sure she wouldn't give you a sum like that without—security. What security are you going to offer her?

HECTOR The house itself will be that.

DINAH (*with no apparent emotion*) You're not thinking of marrying Clare, are you?

HECTOR No, certainly not; certainly not. (*It is obvious that that is exactly what he is thinking of doing*)

DINAH (*after a pause; reverting to the matter of the house*) Then if you fail to pay and she claims the house as security, what would you do?

HECTOR Oh, I shall always keep this place as a *piéd à terre*. Somewhere to change for the theatre, and so forth. (*He is beginning to feel happier*) The country is all very well—green grass and God's clean air and all that—but getting into tails at half-past five for dinner in town at seven-thirty is quite unthinkable. Besides, there is you, Dinah darling. You may have been a little foolish last night—Job is undoubtedly attractive, and it is probably some time since you met someone who didn't smell of iodine—but I am devoted to you, you know that. I can't remember a time when you weren't the foundation of my existence.

DINAH No, I suppose you can't. You have singularly little faith in the foundation.

HECTOR Faith?

DINAH I am terrified of what Mrs Benson will say.

HECTOR And who is Mrs Benson?

DINAH The woman on the fourth floor who lost her jewellery. If she happens to say that I took it, you'll no doubt ask me to hand it back.

HECTOR That is being entirely un-adult, and you know it. What possible reason would Mrs Benson have for suspecting you of stealing her jewellery!

DINAH Just as much reason as Job had for saying that I was going to marry him.

HECTOR Oh, come, Dinah. I don't want to be hard on you, but you must certainly have—have led him on.

DINAH (*springing up to protest, but controlling herself*) For a poet, your vocabulary can be singularly vulgar.

HECTOR It would be in the worst of taste to deal poetically with a vulgar matter. I am not blaming you at all, Dinah. I know you work hard and see few people outside the medical profession, which has neither wit nor manners. And Job is, as I said, a personable creature with no little charm. I find it quite forgivable that you should lose your head a little——

DINAH Are you going to condone my lapse, Hector?

HECTOR Flippancy does not suit you, my dear.

DINAH With practice it will.

HECTOR (*ignoring her*) Now that you have made it clear to Job that the whole thing was a misunderstanding, nothing more need be said by anyone. (*His relief is almost comic*)

DINAH (*absent-mindedly picking a letter from the string-bag*) Did we upset you much, Hector?

HECTOR (*missing the quality of her solicitude*) I admit you upset me very gravely. I have always trusted and admired you, Dinah. Extravagantly. The pinnacle I keep you on may be too high——

DINAH I didn't know you kept me anywhere.

HECTOR ——but your mind has always seemed the perfect complement to mine.

DINAH Hector! You won't let emotion run away with you? This is the first time you have ever mentioned my mind.

HECTOR And I hope you will not let its grace and sobriety be infected by a cheap flippancy. A detestable quality in women.

DINAH What quality in women do you find most desirable, Hector? Apart from an appreciation of your poetry, I mean.

HECTOR (*losing his poise again*) You are impossible this morning, Dinah. I hardly recognise you.

DINAH That isn't surprising.

HECTOR Here am I, doing my best to smooth over a disgraceful scene—the kind of scene I never imagined I should see acted in my own home. A scene, moreover, if not instigated by you, then directly traceable to your conduct last night. And you treat my magnanimity with a levity I consider deplorable.

DINAH Can you spare one of your neckties, do you think?

HECTOR (*coming to earth at once*) Any man who can beg for a necktie is dead to shame.

DINAH It isn't a man; it's a girl. She wants to sleep on it.

HECTOR What!

DINAH To put it under her pillow, you know. Like bride's cake. (*Dropping her letter back*) I think a slipper would do more good. Applied in the right place.

HECTOR (*who rather likes having his neckties slept on*) As a doctor you should know that physical punishment does nothing but harm.

DINAH (*with a fleeting glance at him*) I am beginning to wonder. (*Having a thought*) And you know, it occurs to me for the first time that we are for ever preaching the evils of frustration, we declare and believe that frustration is the source of all mental and most bodily ills, and yet we do nothing about the greatest frustration of all: the person who is prevented from applying the slipper where it seems to be needed. Think of it, Hector. The thwartings, the ingrowing resentment, the vain longings, the inflamed imagination busy with beautiful massacres——

HECTOR You had better write a book about it.

DINAH I think I shall. That will make us both authors.

HECTOR Why do you say it like that?

DINAH Like what?

HECTOR There is a——a resentment in your attitude this morning, Dinah, that is new and disconcerting to someone who loves you. I am not aware of having done anything to merit resentment.

DINAH (*lightly*) It's what you haven't done, Hector, what you haven't done.

HECTOR (*quickly*) So you do resent something!

DINAH Not resent; deplore, shall we say?

HECTOR (*stiffly*) And what do you deplore?

DINAH Never in twenty years have you picked a spider off my back.

HECTOR You didn't drink anything *odd* last night, did you, Dinah? At those 'low dives' that Job said you visited. You know, in America during Prohibition people went mad, and blind even, through drinking bad——

DINAH (*dryly*) Don't worry, Hector. I'm seeing very clearly this morning. And once Job is out of the house there will be no fear of my sanity.

HECTOR I think you are treating him rather badly, you know, Dinah.

DINAH (*smoothly*) You think I should marry him?

HECTOR (*as if pricked by a pin*) Certainly not! (*Recovering*) That is all settled. But since the misunderstanding must have been largely your fault, it is—unbecoming to treat the victim of it as if he were a criminal.

DINAH I know Job a great deal better than you do——

HECTOR I am sure you do.

DINAH (*with a glance for his tone*)—and I think that boiling oil would be much too good for him.

HECTOR I repeat, you had nothing against Job until he gave away the fact that you had a—flirtation with him last night. You are being vindictive and childish, and quite unlike the Dinah I know.

DINAH What Dinah do you know?

HECTOR Job is an artist, with all an artist's sensitivity; a genius, perhaps; and——

DINAH Talking of genius, if he builds houses, how could you have seen his work?

HECTOR He has a photograph; the photograph of a model.

DINAH How do you know it isn't the model of a police-station in Alberta?

HECTOR Really, Dinah. It is one of the most original and satisfying conceptions imaginable.

DINAH Perhaps it is something left over from the World's Fair.

HECTOR When you see it you may change your attitude. I hope you will. After all, the man is our guest——

DINAH (*putting it bluntly into words*) In fact, Job has something you want, and therefore I must be nice to him.

[JOB *appears in the doorway, wearing a shabby suit, but still with the bath slippers on his feet.*]

JOB Was I wearing boots, last night, Dinah?

DINAH Will you ring for Mrs Bint, Hector, please?

JOB Oh, no. Please don't bother to do that. I shall fetch them myself.

DINAH Mrs Bint doesn't like people in her kitchen.

JOB She has never yet experienced the Butchard charm. I get it from my mother. Do you remember your Aunt Cicely, Hector?

HECTOR (*anxious to be pleasant*) Vaguely, vaguely. A very beautiful woman. I have seen photographs of her.

DINAH (*with heavy meaning*) Photographs are mostly fakes.

JOB (*smiling seraphically on her*) By the way, you have no objection to your servants being tipped, have you?

DINAH None whatever.

JOB Thank you.

DINAH What are you going to tip her with?

JOB Of course. I squandered all my worldly wealth on you, didn't I? Lend me ten shillings, will you, Hector?

HECTOR Delighted.

JOB (*as* HECTOR *is producing the note*) It will be nice to see a British note again.

DINAH I'm sure it will.

[JOB *takes the note, smiles at her, and goes out to the kitchen.*]

HECTOR Why do you insist that he has no money? He could hardly squander much in Siam. And the Prince must have paid him well.

DINAH The Prince?

HECTOR The man he built the palace for.

DINAH Oh. Yes.

HECTOR Then what makes you think that he——

DINAH He lost it all. He told me.

HECTOR Lost it? How?

DINAH Oh, some teak forest, or something. It burned down. And he spent a lot, too. He used to have Saturday-night nautches.

HECTOR Saturday night what?

DINAH Nautches. You know, dancing girls and——and——(*she cannot think of anything more at the moment*) orgies.

HECTOR If you were not the most truthful person in the world, Dinah, I should suspect you of making that up to discredit the man.

DINAH Oh, I could tell you much worse than that about him.

HECTOR Then don't. (*Kindly*) I think you have been listening to travellers' tales, my dear. Very few men can resist telling them.

DINAH (*stung by the patronage*) And I, of course, am just a poor little innocent.

HECTOR I think you are very unworldly sometimes. To anyone who knows the world, Job is obviously both prosperous and respectable.

DINAH *As well as a genius? Don't you think that is a little weeny bit too much?*

HECTOR (*ignoring her*) Your down-and-out has that indefinable air of apology. Unmistakable. And talking of apologies, there was a quite unwarrantable remark of yours——

[*There is the sound of MRS BINT'S voice and JOB'S in gay conversation in the hall beyond. Enter JOB carrying a tray on which is a half-bottle of champagne and two glasses. He is wearing his boots, and is carrying the bedroom slippers under the tray arm so as to leave a hand for door-opening.*]

DINAH Well, I'm——(*Words fail her*)

JOB (*putting the tray down on the table matter-of-factly*) Mrs Bint has great charm, I think. (*Taking the slippers from under his arm*) And so have your bath slippers, Hector. Exquisite. Spanish, are they?

HECTOR No, Mexican.

JOB Have you been to Mexico?

HECTOR No. No. (*Feeling that he must defend his comparative provincialism*) Travel has been overdone lately, I think.

JOB You must try Siam one day. So colourful, and such scope for the imagination. (*Making for the bedroom*)

DINAH Will you tell me what the champagne is for?

JOB Oh, Mrs Bint thought that you should have that. What-with-your-ankle-and-all.

DINAH Mrs Bint thought!

JOB Well, it may have been a case of thought transference.

DINAH I don't want any champagne.

JOB And you'll need it anyhow to celebrate.

DINAH Celebrate what?

JOB Getting rid of an incubus.

HECTOR My dear Job, you mustn't think of yourself as an incubus.

JOB (*airy and reassuring*) Oh, I don't.

[*Exit JOB to bedroom.*]

HECTOR (*slightly at a loss, but deciding that he must mean that only* DINAH

considers him an incubus) Well, he seems very light-hearted about your bad manners. It seems to me that he is carrying off the situation very well, and you are doing nothing to help him. (*As DINAH is still staring at the door through which JOB has disappeared, and is apparently not listening*) What are you thinking?

DINAH (*still staring at the door*) I'm wishing I had learned to play chess. Tell me, Hector, do you like me very much?

HECTOR What an odd question.

DINAH You really do care for me, don't you?

HECTOR I'm devoted to you.

DINAH Then let's both go away before he comes back.

HECTOR Dinah! Great heavens, what a——

DINAH The car is still at the door, isn't it? Then help me as far as the lift. I must get out of this room.

HECTOR But, Dinah, that's ridiculous!

DINAH Please, Hector! He's very unconventional himself. He won't mind. If we're not here when he comes back he'll go away quietly and everything will be——

HECTOR I never heard a crazier——

DINAH (*losing control; her quick, conspiratorial tones giving way to rage*) Can't you feel anything at all, you insensitive stick of a creature! Can't you feel the air in the room bulging, bulging——

HECTOR Dinah!

DINAH —like something that is going to burst at any moment!

HECTOR (*light dawning*) Oh, darling, what a brute I've been. What a blind brute! But I understand now. It's all clear.

DINAH What is clear?

HECTOR All your oddities, your wild talk, your bad temper. Of course, it's your foot!

DINAH (*relaxing into despair; drawling*) Yes, Hector, it's my foot.

HECTOR It's when you said the room was bulging that it dawned on me. That is just how I felt when I had that gumboil. You had better have the foot X-rayed, hadn't you?

DINAH Yes, I shall have it X-rayed.

HECTOR I'll drive you in to hospital when——(*As JOB comes in carrying hat and*

overcoat) Oh, there you are. How are you going to get into town? Shall we give you a lift as far as the hospital? Dinah is going to have her foot seen to.

JOB Oh, no, thank you, I'll get a bus. If you will advance me the fourpence, or whatever it is.

HECTOR Shall I give you a fiver?

JOB No, bus conductors don't like them. Give me half a crown.

HECTOR But——

JOB Just half a crown. Well, Dinah darling, it was fun while it lasted.

HECTOR Will you have lunch with me at my club tomorrow? The Addison. Two-fifteen?

JOB I'm afraid not.

HECTOR The day after, then?

JOB No, I'm afraid not.

HECTOR Then when can we go and see Clare? You set a time.

JOB I think in the circumstances, Hector, it would be better if we called that arrangement off.

HECTOR You mean, because of the misunderstanding with Dinah you want to back out of building the house? Oh, but Job, you can't do that. I know Dinah behaved badly, but she is not herself this morning. She——

JOB It is not because of anything Dinah said. (*To DINAH*) I have had a bad attack of conscience, Dinah.

DINAH So you ought.

JOB I like your brother so well that I can't find it in my heart to deceive him any longer.

DINAH (*protesting wildly*) Oh, no, Job!

HECTOR Deceive me?

JOB This is going to hurt you, Hector, much more than it will hurt me. I have always wanted a poet in the family. And you are so obviously destined for the Abbey.

DINAH Job, please!

JOB Hector, you have to know it. I am not the little boy you used to play with at Bude.

HECTOR You're not my cousin? Who are you, then?

JOB A waif. (*As HECTOR stares at this exceedingly solid waif*) You see, I was very drunk last night, and Dinah picked me up and brought me to your beautiful home.

HECTOR Dinah! Why should she do a thing like that?

JOB She was very drunk too.

HECTOR *Dinah* was! I don't believe it.

JOB (*in a tolerant, you-know-best manner*) Does she bring strange men home when she is sober?

HECTOR Dinah, is this true?

DINAH (*in level tones*) Quite true.

HECTOR You were *intoxicated*?

DINAH I was drunk.

HECTOR And you brought a stranger home to spend the night here?

DINAH No, to sleep off the night.

HECTOR Don't quibble. You brought this man home and gave him my bed.

DINAH I needed my own.

HECTOR And you had the impudence to—to——

DINAH And I introduced him to you as our cousin. I'm not going to quarrel with you, Hector. That is just what he wants.

HECTOR Quarrel! You cannot quarrel unless there are two sides to a question.

DINAH I see. Just a lecture. Well, you can save the lecture too. If I overwork, and get drunk, and waken up with a headache and a hanger-on, that is no one's business but my own.

HECTOR It is my business if you use my home for entertaining your vagrants. If you want male society so badly that you have to go to the gutter for it, it would be——

DINAH (*flaring*) Hector! How dare you!

HECTOR How dare *you* palm off a good-for-nothing nobody as a genius!

DINAH It was you who decided that he was a genius.

JOB (*happily*) But I am a genius.

HECTOR (*turning to him*) Were you ever in Siam at all?

JOB Never.

HECTOR Or built a palace for a Prince?

JOB Alas, no.

HECTOR No, of course you didn't. You have probably never done an honest day's work in your life. (*To DINAH*) And because I come home unexpectedly and interrupt your disgraceful amour——

DINAH Oh, don't be ridiculous!

HECTOR —You lie like a shoplifter. You——

DINAH Hector, I am sufficiently ashamed of my backslidings. There is no need for you to get excited about them.

HECTOR No need! No need! (*His voice running up and cracking at the enormity of it*) Why, I almost introduced him to Clare! You not only lie yourself out of a predicament, but you lie other people into one.

DINAH (*seeing it for the first time*) If you had been a more understanding sort of person, I wouldn't have had to lie at all. But if you must talk about it, I suggest that we postpone this discussion until——

HECTOR Understanding! Am I supposed to find it funny that my sister gets intoxicated——

DINAH Drunk.

HECTOR —and brings a complete stranger home to occupy my bed.

DINAH No; not funny, but——

HECTOR You take part in a horrible escapade (*this is almost too much for JOB*), you lie with a facility that indicates either a depraved natural capacity or a great deal of practice, and then you have the impudence to suggest that if I were more sympathetic——

DINAH (*shouting at him*) Oh, don't be so smug! (*Into the sudden silence, in a quieter voice*) My God, Hector, you must be the smuggest thing in human form since Nero. I can't think why I bother to keep you around.

HECTOR (*not sure that he can believe his ears*) Keep me around!

DINAH For twenty years I've wiped your nose, and pulled your socks up, and parted your hair for you, and——(*She catches JOB'S eye, and her flood of oratory dries up abruptly. Conciliatory*) All right, Hector. Forget I said that. I'm upset this morning.

HECTOR Forget you said it! What do you think I am made of? Putty?

DINAH (*flaring again*) Yes. No! You're nothing as solid and kind as putty. I *like* putty. It—it responds. You're just an empty skin filled with hot air.

HECTOR A balloon, in fact.

DINAH Yes. The kind that has a silly face painted on it. A woman can't live with a balloon for twenty years and go on liking it. I don't know why I haven't put a cigarette-end to you long ago.

HECTOR You seem to be doing it now. But let me remind you that once you have used the cigarette-end, there is no getting back the balloon.

DINAH Who wants it back? What good is it? What can you do with a balloon but keep on patting it? I'm tired of patting you, Hector. I want someone to pat me for a change.

HECTOR Dinah, this is outrageous nonsense, and you know it. Have I ever said an unkind word, or done an unkind thing to you?

DINAH You cut off my doll's head.

HECTOR What!

DINAH You said she was Ann Boleyn. I tied her head on again, but her eyes wouldn't work any more. And ever since, it's been like that. If you wanted something of mine to be Ann Boleyn it had to be Ann Boleyn, or life in the same house as you wasn't worth living.

HECTOR Really, Dinah, that is a——

DINAH Because you write a lot of highfalutin' capers that no one can understand

HECTOR *Dinah!*

DINAH —you patronise your poor low-brow sister, who does nothing more intellectual than save lives, but when there is proof-reading to be done——

HECTOR Never in my life have I asked you to read proofs!

DINAH Oh, no, you never ask me. They just lie around in mute appeal. And you always have neuralgia at proof-reading time, or an invitation to Cornwall, or an inspiration for a new poem that would be ruined by the drudgery of proof-reading. So the poor fool Dinah does it.

HECTOR If you didn't want to correct my proofs there was not the slightest reason why you should.

DINAH Of course not. Except that I'm a fool. But the fact that I'm a poor fool doesn't make you any the less of a poor specimen.

HECTOR If you think that by reviling me you can obscure your own misdemeanours, you are mistaken, my dear sister. You merely add to your iniquities. First you behave like a street-woman, and now you prove to be a shrew, and, if I

may say so, a monster of ingratitude.

DINAH Ingratitude? What am I supposed to be grateful for?

HECTOR All those years I have stayed by you, lived with——

DINAH Stayed by me? What do you think this is? A sinking ship?

HECTOR ——lived with you in this small flat because I was all you had.

DINAH Because the rent was sure, you mean.

HECTOR Dinah! Are you accusing me of mercenariness?

DINAH And because no one else would put up with your selfishness. I used to be sorry for you when they didn't like you; you looked so like a child someone has taken a sweet from; but I'll never be sorry for you any more, Hector.

HECTOR You won't have to. Be assured of that. I am going to someone who does not find me either an object of pity or a monument of selfishness. If I had known the thoughts you were harbouring in your mind, Dinah, I would have gone long ago.

DINAH I wasn't harbouring anything. They just came out in a rash.

HECTOR It will no doubt be a relief to you to have the flat free for your own uses without the necessity of lying about it (*this with a stare at JOB*), so I shall leave now.

DINAH (*stung to fury again by his reference to her purple life*) Well, go, you silly little old maid, and don't talk so much about it.

[HECTOR *is lingering with a subconscious hope of capitulation on her part.*]

DINAH And you can tell Clare that she has my sympathy. I hope she puts you across her knee and spansks you.

HECTOR Will you please have my things sent to Clinton Terrace—all of them. I shall take the car, and Clare's chauffeur will bring it back to you.

DINAH (*sweetly*) Perhaps he'll bring back your share of the last two quarters' rent as well.

HECTOR Certainly.

DINAH If Clare happens to have the cash.

[HECTOR *goes out, banging the door behind him.*]

DINAH Oh, Hector! Come back. (*To JOB*) Call him back.

JOB (*moving between her and the door*) What, already! Oh, Dinah!

DINAH He's gone without his coat. (*Rising*) He'll catch his death of cold. (*Making for the door*) Hector! (*Her ankle gives way, and she stumbles into JOB'S*

arms) Oh, damn!

JOB (*holding her; surprised*) Have you really sprained your ankle?

DINAH Of course I've sprained my ankle, you fool!

JOB (*full of compunction*) Dinah, my dear. (*He picks her up and deposits her on the couch*) Yes, I should have known that you wouldn't do that. (*Fake an injury and miss a morning's work, he means*)

DINAH (*a little bewildered by her sudden passage through the air; to herself more than to him*) I thought that only happened in films.

JOB What did? (*He is opening the champagne*)

DINAH Men carrying women about.

JOB You've been living too long with Hector.

DINAH (*not listening; still busy with her own thoughts*) It's my private belief that all this is just a nightmare. Presently I'll wake up and have breakfast and go to hospital just as usual. Things like this could never happen to me.

JOB That's what they all say.

DINAH Who?

JOB People things happen to.

DINAH (*still detached*) Have you said it?

JOB Often.

DINAH (*taking the glass of champagne he offers her*) But I could never have got drunk—I don't drink, you know—and taken home someone I didn't know at all, and got rid of Hector at last, and——

JOB So you wanted to get rid of him?

DINAH Oh, no. Only in a dream. When I'm awake I'm devoted to Hector. I'm very proud of him. (*She takes a sip or two of her champagne*) Poor Clare. (*This with a small chuckle*) But she's very fond of him. (*Between sips*) And she's clever, you know. She'll ride him on the snaffle. It will do him good to fetch and carry for a change. It is all my fault, you know. I spoiled him. He was very sweet when he was young. Have you got a sister? (*Before he can answer*) But of course I needn't ask.

JOB Why? Is the number branded on my——

DINAH Nothing you say might be the truth. It's a great bar to any kind of social intercourse. (*Beginning to be aware of him again*) How could I have quarrelled with my brother over an impudent good-for-nothing like you?

JOB I gather that your doll's head had a lot to do with it.

DINAH (*not listening*) I can't think why Clamp likes you.

JOB Does she?

DINAH She doesn't like many men.

JOB So I deduced. I am touched by her approval. Did you tell her the whole sad story?

DINAH I had to. Simmons had told her first. I expect Simmons has told the whole hospital by this time. There's one comfort: they won't believe it any more than I do. They'll think it's just one of Simmons' stories.

JOB But Miss Clamp? Doesn't she talk?

DINAH (*simply*) Clamp hates Simmons.

JOB I see. What a power for good hate can be. It's a difficult world for reformers.

DINAH Simmons was right when he called you 'a frightful man'. I had no idea so much frightfulness could be compressed into one morning.

JOB But not blackmail?

DINAH Not so far.

[*The telephone rings.*]

JOB (*as DINAH struggles to rise*) Shall I? (*At the telephone*) Hullo?... No, it's Job.... (*Without bothering to cover the mouthpiece*) Miss Clamp wants to know what has happened?

DINAH Tell her that my brother has left me, and I am on the point of being blackmailed by the Other Man. (*She is mellowing rapidly*)

JOB (*at the telephone*) She says to tell you that her brother has left her and she is on the point of being blackmailed by the Other Man.... (*Having listened with a growing smile*) She says: 'Congratulations, and (*replacing the receiver*) could I blackmail you into asking me to lunch?'

DINAH No, you couldn't. As soon as you finish that drink you are leaving this house, and I hope that I never see you again. Perhaps Hector will come back. Do you think so?

JOB Not to you. You shouldn't have called him an old maid. But he'll come back to me, I think.

DINAH To *you*!

JOB Yes. He wants that house.

DINAH But—is it a real house?

JOB Real? That house has been my hobby for the last two years.

DINAH Oh. I thought it was probably something cut out of a magazine. Or picked out of someone's pocket, for all I knew.

JOB All my crimes have been unskilled ones.

DINAH And would you build it for Hector?

JOB If I managed to stay sober long enough.

DINAH (*a little dismayed*) Oh, dear. I hope I haven't put Hector off you. I painted a dreadful picture of your life in Siam. (*Beginning to laugh to herself*) I said you had Saturday-night nautches.

JOB Oh, well, he knows now that I was never in Siam, so that needn't—(*What she has said penetrates his consciousness*) I had WHAT!

DINAH (*her laughter growing*) Saturday-night nautches.

[He joins in her laughter with a roar. They laugh together hysterically. As she sobers up, she moves her feet half-consciously to make room on the couch for him to sit, and he, automatically and still laughing, takes the proffered seat.]

DINAH (*just before the curtain comes down*) What is your name, Job?

CURTAIN

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Sweet Coz* by Gordon Daviot]