

IN MEMORY
OF JERRY WEINSTEIN
WHO LAUGHED

AND TO
JOHN DEXTER
WHO HELPED SO MUCH
TO MAKE THE LAUGHTER

CHARACTERS

Black Comedy was first presented at Chichester by the National Theatre on 27 July 1965, and subsequently at the Old Vic Theatre, London, with the following cast:

BRINDSLEY MILLER	Derek Jacobi
CAROL MELKETT	Louise Purnell
MISS FURNIVAL	Doris Hare
COLONEL MELKETT	Graham Crowden
HAROLD GORRINGE	Albert Finney
SCHUPPANZIGH	Paul Curran
CLEA	Maggie Smith
GEORG BAMBERGER	Michael Byrne

BRINDSLEY MILLER: A young sculptor (mid-twenties), intelligent and attractive, but nervous and uncertain of himself.

CAROL MELKETT: His fiancée. A young debutante; very pretty, very spoiled; very silly. Her sound is that unmistakable, terrifying deb quack.

MISS FURNIVAL: A middle-aged lady. Prissy and refined. Clad in the blouse and sack skirt of her gentility, her hair in a bun, her voice in a bun, she reveals only the repressed gestures of the middle-class spinster – until alcohol undoes her.

COLONEL MELKETT: CAROL's commanding father. Brisk, barky, yet given to sudden vocal calms which suggest a deep and alarming

instability. It is not only the constant darkness which gives him his look of wide-eyed suspicion.

HAROLD GORRINGE: The bachelor owner of an antique-china shop, and **BRINDSLEY**'s neighbour, **HAROLD** comes from the North of England. His friendship is highly conditional and possessive: sooner or later, payment for it will be asked. A specialist in emotional blackmail, he can become hysterical when slighted, or (as inevitably happens) rejected. He is older than **BRINDSLEY** by several years.

SCHUPPANZIGH: A German refugee, chubby, cultivated, and effervescent. He is an entirely happy man, delighted to be in England, even if this means being employed full time by the London Electricity Board.

CLEA: **BRINDSLEY**'s ex-mistress. Mid-twenties; dazzling, emotional, bright and mischievous. The challenge to her to create a dramatic situation out of the darkness is ultimately irresistible.

GEORG BAMBERGER: An elderly millionaire art collector, easily identifiable as such. Like the Electrician, he is a German.

THE SET: The action of the play takes place in **BRINDSLEY**'s apartment in South Kensington, London. This forms the ground floor of a large house now divided into flats. **HAROLD GORRINGE** lives opposite; **MISS FURNIVAL** lives above.

There are four ways out of the room. A door at the left, upstage, leads directly across the passage to **HAROLD**'s room. The door to this, with its mat laid tidily outside, can clearly be seen. A curtain, upstage centre, screens **BRINDSLEY**'s studio: when it is parted we glimpse samples of his work in metal. To the right of this an open stair shoots steeply up to his bedroom above, reached through a door at the top. To the left, downstage, a trap in the floor leads down to the cellar.

It is a gay room, when we finally see it, full of colour and space and new shapes. It is littered with marvellous objects - mobiles, mannikins, toys, and dotty bric-à-brac - the happy paraphernalia of a free and imaginative mind. The total effect is of chaos tidied in honour of an occasion, and of a temporary elegance created by the furniture borrowed from **HAROLD GORRINGE** and arranged to its best advantage.

This consists of three elegant Regency chairs in gold leaf; a Regency chaise-longue to match; a small Queen Anne table bearing a fine

opaline lamp, with a silk shade; a Wedgwood bowl in black basalt; a good Coalport vase containing summer flowers; and a fine porcelain Buddha.

The only things which actually belong to **BRINDSLEY** are a cheap square table bearing the drinks; an equally cheap round table in the middle of the room, shrouded by a cloth and decorated with the Wedgwood bowl; a low stool downstage centre, improved by the Buddha; a record player; and his own artistic creations. These are largely assumed to be in the studio awaiting inspection; but one of them is visible in this room. On the dais stands a bizarre iron sculpture dominated by two long detachable metal prongs, and hung with metal pieces which jangle loudly if touched. On the wall hang paintings, some of them presumably by **CLEA**. All are non-figurative: colourful geometric designs, splashes, splodges and splats of colour; whirls and whorls and wiggles - all testifying more to a delight in handling paint than to an ability to achieve very much with it.

THE TIME: 9.30 on a Sunday night.

THE LIGHT: On the few occasions when a lighter is lit, matches are struck or a torch is put on, the light on stage merely gets dimmer. When these objects are extinguished, the stage immediately grows brighter.

BLACK COMEDY

[*Complete darkness. Two voices are heard: BRINDSLEY and CAROL. They must give the impression of two people walking round a room with absolute confidence, as if in the light. We hear sounds as of furniture being moved. A chair is dumped down.*]

BRINDSLEY: There! How do you think the room looks?

CAROL [*quacking*]: Fabulous! I wish you could always have it like this. That lamp looks divine there. And those chairs are just the right colour. I told you green would look well in here.

BRINDSLEY: Suppose Harold comes back?

CAROL: He is not coming back till tomorrow morning.

[BRINDSLEY paces nervously.]

BRINDSLEY: I know. But suppose he comes tonight? He's mad about his antiques. What do you think he'll say if he goes into his room and finds out we've stolen them?

CAROL: Don't dramatize. We haven't stolen *all* his furniture. Just three chairs, the sofa, that table, the lamp, the bowl, and the vase of flowers, that's all.

BRINDSLEY: And the Buddha. That's more valuable than anything. Look at it.

CAROL: Oh, do stop worrying, darling.

BRINDSLEY: Well, you don't know Harold. He won't even let anyone touch his antiques.

CAROL: Look, we'll put everything back as soon as Mr Bamberger leaves. Now stop being dreary.

BRINDSLEY: Well, frankly, I don't think we should have done it. I mean - *anyway*, Harold or no.

- CAROL: Why not, for heaven's sake? The room looks divine now. Just look at it!
- BRINDSLEY: Darling. Georg Bamberger's a multi-millionaire. He's lived all his life against this sort of furniture. Our few stolen bits aren't going to impress him. He's coming to see the work of an unknown sculptor. If you ask me, it would look much better to him if he found me exactly as I really am: a poor artist. It might touch his heart.
- CAROL: It might – but it certainly won't impress Daddy. Remember, he's coming too.
- BRINDSLEY: As if I could forget! Why you had to invite your monster father tonight, I can't think!
- CAROL: Oh, not again!
- BRINDSLEY: Well, it's too bloody much. If he's going to be persuaded I'm a fit husband for you, just by watching a famous collector buy some of my work, he doesn't deserve to have me as a son-in-law!
- CAROL: He just wants some proof you can earn your own living.
- BRINDSLEY: And what if Bamberger *doesn't* like my work?
- CAROL: He will, darling. Just stop worrying.
- BRINDSLEY: I can't. Get me a whisky.
- [*She does. We hear her steps, and a glass clink against a bottle – then the sound of a soda siphon.*]
- I've got a foreboding. It's all going to be a disaster. An AI, copper-bottomed, twenty-four-carat disaster!
- CAROL: Look, darling, you know what they say. Faint heart never won fair ladypegs!
- BRINDSLEY: How true.
- CAROL: The trouble with you is you're what Daddy calls a Determined Defeatist.
- BRINDSLEY: The more I hear about your Daddy, the more I hate him. I loathe military men anyway . . . and in any case, he's bound to hate me.
- CAROL: Why?

- BRINDSLEY: Because I'm a complete physical coward. He'll smell it on my breath.
- CAROL: Look, darling, all you've got to do is stand up to him. Daddy's only a bully when he thinks people are afraid of him.
- BRINDSLEY: Well, I am.
- CAROL: You haven't even met him.
- BRINDSLEY: That doesn't make any difference.
- CAROL: Don't be ridiculous. [*Hands him a drink*] Here.
- BRINDSLEY: Thanks.
- CAROL: What can he do to you?
- BRINDSLEY: For one thing, he can refuse to let me marry you.
- CAROL: Ah, that's sweetpegs!
- [*They embrace.*]
- BRINDSLEY: I like you in yellow. It brings out your hair.
- CAROL: Straighten your tie. You look sloppy.
- BRINDSLEY: Well, you look divine.
- CAROL: Really?
- BRINDSLEY: I mean it. I've never seen you look so lovely.
- CAROL: Tell me, Brin, have there been many before me?
- BRINDSLEY: Thousands.
- CAROL: Seriously!
- BRINDSLEY: Seriously – none.
- CAROL: What about that girl in the photo?
- BRINDSLEY: She lasted about three months.
- CAROL: When?
- BRINDSLEY: Two years ago.
- CAROL: What was her name?
- BRINDSLEY: Clea.
- CAROL: What was she like?
- BRINDSLEY: She was a painter. Very honest. Very clever. And just about as cosy as a steel razor-blade.
- CAROL: When was the last time you saw her?
- BRINDSLEY [*evasively*]: I told you . . . two years ago.

CAROL: Well, why did you still have her photo in your bedroom drawer?

BRINDSLEY: It was just there. That's all. Give me a kiss . . . [Pause.]

No one in the world kisses like you.

CAROL [murmuring]: Tell me something . . . did you like it better with her - or me?

BRINDSLEY: Like what?

CAROL: Sexipogs.

BRINDSLEY: Look, people will be here in a minute. Put a record on. It had better be something for your father. What does he like?

CAROL [crossing to the record player]: He doesn't like anything except military marches.

BRINDSLEY: I might have guessed . . . Wait - I think I've got some! That last record on the shelf. The orange cover. It's called 'Marching and Murdering with Sousa', or something.

CAROL: This one?

BRINDSLEY: That's it.

CAROL [getting it]: 'The Band of the Coldstream Guards.'

BRINDSLEY: Ideal. Put it on.

CAROL: How'd you switch on?

BRINDSLEY: The last knob on the left. That's it . . . Let us pray! . . . Oh God, let this evening go all right! Let Mr Bamberger like my sculpture and buy some! Let Carol's monster father like me! And let my neighbour Harold Gorringe never find out that we borrowed his precious furniture behind his back! Amen.

[A Sousa march; loud. Hardly has it begun, however, when it runs down - as if there is a failure of electricity. The sound stops.]

Brilliant light floods the stage. The rest of the play, save for the times when matches are struck, or for the scene with SCHUPPENZIG, is acted in this light, but as if in pitch darkness.

They freeze: CAROL by the end of the sofa; BRINDSLEY by the drinks table. The girl's dress is a silks flag of chic wrapped round her greyhound's body. The boy's look is equally cool: narrow, contained and sexy. Throughout the evening, as things slide into disaster for

him, his crisp, detached shape degenerates progressively into sweat and rimple - just as the elegance of his room gives way relentlessly to its usual near-stump appearance. For the place, as for its owner, the evening is a progress through disintegration.]

God! We've blown a fuse!

[The structure and appearance of BRINDSLEY's room is described in the note at the beginning of the play.]

CAROL: Oh no!

BRINDSLEY: It must be. [He blunders to the light switch, feeling ahead of him, trying to part the darkness with his hands. Finding the switch, he flicks it on and off.]

CAROL: It is!

BRINDSLEY: Oh no!

CAROL: Or a power cut. Where's the box?

BRINDSLEY: In the hall.

CAROL: Have you any candles?

BRINDSLEY: No. Damn!

CAROL: Where are the matches?

BRINDSLEY: They should be on the drinks table. [Feeling round the bottles] No. Try on the record player.

[They both start groping about the room, feeling for matches.]

Damn, damn, damn, damn, damn, damn!

[CAROL sets a maracca rattling off the record player.]

CAROL: There! [Finding it] No . . .

[The telephone rings.]

BRINDSLEY: Would you believe it! [He blunders his way towards the sound of the bell. Just in time he remembers the central table - and stops himself colliding into it with a smile of self-congratulation.] All right: I'm coming! [Instead he trips over the dais, and goes sprawling - knocking the phone onto the floor. He has to grope for it on his knees, hauling the receiver back to him by the wire. Into receiver.] Hallo? . . . [In sudden horror] Hallo! . . . No, no, no, no - I'm fine, just fine! . . . You? . . . [His hand over the receiver: to CAROL] Darling - look in the bedroom, will you?

CAROL: I haven't finished in here yet.
 BRINDSLEY: Well, I've just remembered there's some fuse wire in the bedroom. In that drawer where you found the photograph. Go and get it, will you?
 CAROL: I don't think there is. I didn't see any there.
 BRINDSLEY [snapping]: Don't argue. Just look!
 CAROL: All right. Keep your hairpiece on!
 [During the following she gropes her way cautiously up the stairs - head down, arms up the banisters, silken bottom thrust out with the effort.]
 BRINDSLEY [controlling himself]: I'm sorry. I just know it's there, that's all. You must have missed it.
 CAROL: What about the matches?
 BRINDSLEY: We'll have to mend it in the dark, that's all. Please hurry, dear.
 CAROL [climbing]: Oh God, how dreary!
 BRINDSLEY [taking his hand off the receiver and listening to hear CAROL go]: Hallo? ... Well, well, well, well! How are you? Good. That's just fine. Fine, fine! ... Stop saying what?
 [CAROL reaches the top of the stairs - and from force of habit pulls down her skirt before groping her way into the bedroom.]
 BRINDSLEY [hand still over the receiver]: Carol? ... Darling? ... [Satisfied she has gone; in a rush into the telephone, his voice low] Clea! What are you doing here? I thought you were in Finland ... But you've hardly been gone six weeks ... Where are you speaking from? ... The air terminal? ... Well, no, that's not a good idea tonight. I'm terribly busy, and I'm afraid I just can't get out of it. It's business.
 CAROL [calling from the bedroom door, above]: There's nothing there except your dreary socks. I told you.
 BRINDSLEY [calling back]: Well, try the other drawers! ... [He rises as he speaks, turning so that the wire wraps itself around his legs.]
 [CAROL returns to her search.]

[Low and rapid, into phone] Look: I can't talk now. Can I call you tomorrow? Where will you be? ... Look, I told you no, Clea. Not tonight. I know it's just around the corner, that's not the point! You can't come round ... Look, the situation's changed. Something's happened this past month -
 CAROL [off]: I can't see anything. Brin, please! -
 BRINDSLEY: Clea, I've got to go ... Look, I can't discuss it over the phone ... Has it got to do with what? Yes, of course it has. I mean you can't expect things to stay frozen, can you?
 CAROL [emerging from the bedroom]: There's nothing here. Haven't we any matches at all?
 BRINDSLEY: Oh stop wailing! [Into phone] No, not you. I'll call you tomorrow. Good-bye. [He hangs up sharply - but fails to find the rest of the telephone so that he bangs the receiver hard on the table first. Then he has to disentangle himself from the wire. Already BRINDSLEY is beginning to be fussed.]
 CAROL [descending]: Who was that?
 BRINDSLEY: Just a chum. Did you find the wire?
 CAROL: I can't find anything in this. We've got to get some matches! -
 BRINDSLEY: I'll try the pub. Perhaps they'll have some candles as well.
 [Little screams are heard approaching from above. It is MISS FURNIVAL groping her way down in a panic.]
 MISS FURNIVAL [squealing]: Help! Help! ... Oh please someone help me!
 BRINDSLEY [calling out]: Is that you, Miss Furnival?
 MISS FURNIVAL: Mr Miller? ...
 BRINDSLEY: Yes?
 MISS FURNIVAL: Mr Miller!
 BRINDSLEY: Yes!
 [She gropes her way in. BRINDSLEY crosses to find her, but narrowly misses her.]
 MISS FURNIVAL: Oh, thank God, you're there; I'm so frightened!
 BRINDSLEY: Why? Have your lights gone too?

MISS FURNIVAL: Ycs!

BRINDSLEY: It must be a power cut.
 [He finds her hand and leads her to the chair downstage left.]

MISS FURNIVAL: I don't think so. The street lights are on in the front. I saw them from the landing.

BRINDSLEY: Then it must be the main switch of the house.

CAROL: Where is that?

[MISS FURNIVAL gasps at the strange voice.]

BRINDSLEY: It's in the cellar. It's all sealed up. No one's allowed to touch it but the electricity people.

CAROL: What are we going to do?

BRINDSLEY: Get them - quick!

CAROL: Will they come at this time of night?

BRINDSLEY: They've got to.

[BRINDSLEY accidentally touches MISS FURNIVAL'S breasts. She gives a little scream. BRINDSLEY gropes his way to the phone.]

Have you by any chance got a match on you, Miss Furnival?

MISS FURNIVAL: I'm afraid I haven't. So improvident of me. And I'm absolutely terrified of the dark!

BRINDSLEY: Darling, this is Miss Furnival, from upstairs. Miss Furnival - Miss Melkett.

MISS FURNIVAL: How do you do?

CAROL [extending her hand into the darkness]: How do you do?

MISS FURNIVAL: Isn't this frightful?

[BRINDSLEY picks up the phone and dials 'O'.]

CAROL: Perhaps we can put Mr Bamberger off.

BRINDSLEY: Impossible. He's dining out and coming on here after. He can't be reached.

CAROL: Oh, flip!

BRINDSLEY [sitting on the dais, and speaking into the phone]: Hallo, Operator, can you give me the London Electricity Board, please? Night Service . . . I'm sure it's in the book, Miss, but I'm afraid I can't see . . . There's no need to apologize. No, I'm not blind - I just can't see! We've got a fuse . . . No we haven't got any matches!

[Desperate] Miss, please: this is an emergency! . . . Thank you! . . . [To the room] London is staffed with imbeciles!

MISS FURNIVAL: Oh, you're so right, Mr Miller.

BRINDSLEY [rising, frantic: into the phone]: Miss, I don't want the number: I can't dial it! . . . Well, have you ever tried to dial a number in the dark? . . . [Trying to keep control] I just want to be connected . . . Thank you. [To MISS FURNIVAL] Miss Furnival, do you by any remote chance have any candles?

MISS FURNIVAL: I'm afraid not, Mr Miller.

BRINDSLEY [mouthing nastily at her]: 'I'm afraid not, Mr Miller' . . . [Briskly, into phone] Hallo? Look, I'd like to report a main fuse at 18 Scarlatti Gardens. My name is Miller. [Exasperated] Yes, yes! All right . . .! [Madly: to the room] Hold on! Hold bloody on! . . .

MISS FURNIVAL: If I might suggest - Harold Gorringe opposite might have some candles. He's away for the weekend, but always leaves his key under the mat.

BRINDSLEY: What a good idea. That's just the sort of practical thing he would have. [To CAROL] Here - take this . . . I'll go and see, love. [He hands her the telephone in a fumble - then makes for the door - only to collide snarply with his sculpture.] Bugger!

MISS FURNIVAL: Are you all right, Mr Miller?

BRINDSLEY: I knew it! I bloody knew it. This is going to be the worst night of my life! . . . [He collides with the door.]

CAROL: Don't panic, darling. Just don't panic!
 [He stumbles out and is seen groping under HAROLD'S mat for the key. He finds it and enters the room opposite.]

MISS FURNIVAL: You're so right, Miss Melkett. We must none of us panic.

CAROL [on the phone]: Hallo? Hallo? [To MISS FURNIVAL] This would have to happen tonight. It's just Brindsley's luck.

MISS FURNIVAL: Is it something special tonight then, Miss Melkett?

CAROL: It couldn't be more special if it tried.

MISS FURNIVAL: Oh, dear. May I ask why?

CAROL: Have you ever heard of a German called Georg Bamberger?

MISS FURNIVAL: Indeed, yes. Isn't he the richest man in the world?
 CAROL: Yes. [*into phone*] Hallo? ... [*To MISS FURNIVAL*] Well, he's coming here tonight.
 MISS FURNIVAL: Tonight!
 CAROL: In about twenty minutes, to be exact. And to make matters worse, he's apparently stone deaf.
 MISS FURNIVAL: How extraordinary! May I ask why he's coming?
 CAROL: He saw some photos of Brindsley's work and apparently got madly excited about it. His secretary rang up last week and asked if he could come and see it. He's a great collector. Brin would be absolutely *made* if Bamberger bought a piece of his.
 MISS FURNIVAL: Oh, how exciting!
 CAROL: It's his big break. Or was - till a moment ago.
 MISS FURNIVAL: Oh, my dear, you *must* get some help. Jiggle that thing.
 CAROL [*jiggling the phone*]: Hallo? Hallo? ... Perhaps the Bomb's fallen, and everyone's dead.
 MISS FURNIVAL: Oh, please don't say things like that - even in levity.
 CAROL [*someone answers her at last*]: Hallo? Ah! This is Number 18, Scarlati Gardens. I'm afraid we've had the most dreary fuse. It's what's laughingly known as the Main Switch. We want a *little man*! ... Well, they can't *all* have flu ... Oh, please try! It's screamingly urgent ... Thank you. [*She hangs up.*] Sometime this evening, they hope. That's a lot of help.
 MISS FURNIVAL: They're not here to help, my dear. In my young days you paid your rates and you got satisfaction. Nowadays you just get some foreigner swearing at you. And if they think you're of the middle class, that only makes it worse.
 CAROL: Would you like a drink?
 MISS FURNIVAL: I don't drink, thank you. My dear father, being a Baptist minister, strongly disapproved of alcohol.
 [*A scuffle is heard amongst milk bottles off, followed by a stifled oath.*]
 COLONEL MELKETT [*off*]: Damn and blast!! ... [*Barking*] Is there anybody there?

CAROL [*calling*]: In here, daddypegs!
 COLONEL: Can't you put the light on, dammit? I've almost knocked myself out on a damn milk bottle.
 CAROL: We've got a fuse. Nothing's working.
 [*COLONEL MELKETT appears, holding a lighter which evidently is working - we can see the flame, and, of course, the lights go down a little.*]
 MISS FURNIVAL: Oh what a relief! A light!
 CAROL: This is my father, Colonel Melkett, Miss Furnival. She's from upstairs.
 COLONEL: Good evening.
 MISS FURNIVAL: I'm taking refuge for a moment with Mr Miller. I'm not very good in the dark.
 COLONEL: When did this happen?
 [*MISS FURNIVAL, glad for the light, follows it pathetically as the COLONEL crosses the room.*]
 CAROL: Five minutes ago. The main just blew.
 COLONEL: And where's this young man of yours?
 CAROL: In the flat opposite. He's trying to find candles.
 COLONEL: You mean he hasn't got any?
 CAROL: No. We can't even find the matches.
 COLONEL: I see. No organization. Bad sign!
 CAROL: Daddy, please. It could happen to any of us.
 COLONEL: Not to me.
 [*He turns to find MISS FURNIVAL right behind him and glares at her balefully. The poor woman retreats to the sofa and sits down.*]
 [*COLONEL MELKETT gets his first sight of BRINDSLEY'S sculpture.*]
 What the hell's that?
 CAROL: Some of Brindsley's work.
 COLONEL: Is it, by Jove? And how much does that cost?
 CAROL: I think he's asking fifty pounds for it.
 COLONEL: My God!
 CAROL [*nervously*]: Do you like the flat, Daddy? He's furnished it very well, hasn't he? I mean it's rich, but not gaudypegs.
 COLONEL: Very elegant - good; I can see he's got excellent taste.

[*Seeing the Buddha*] Now that's what I understand by a real work of art - you can see what it's meant to be.

MISS FURNIVAL: Good heavens!

CAROL: What is it?

MISS FURNIVAL: Nothing . . . It's just that Buddha - it so closely resembles the one Harold Gorringe has.

[*CAROL looks panic-stricken.*]

COLONEL: It must have cost a pretty penny, what? He must be quite well off . . . By Jove - it's got pretty colours. [*He bends to examine it.*]

CAROL [*softly*]: Miss Furnival: You know Mr Gorringe?

MISS FURNIVAL: Oh, very well indeed! We're excellent friends. He has such lovely things . . . [*For the first time she notices the sofa on which she is sitting*] Oh . . .

CAROL: What?

MISS FURNIVAL: This furniture . . . [*Looking about her*] Surely - ? - my goodness! -

CAROL [*hastily*]: Daddy, why don't you look in there? It's Brin's studio. There's something I particularly want you to see before he comes back.

COLONEL: What!

CAROL: It - it - er - it's a surprise, go and see.

COLONEL: Very well, Dumpling. Anythin' to oblige. [*To MISS FURNIVAL*] Excuse me.

[*He goes off into the studio, taking his lighter with him. The light instantly gets brighter on stage. CAROL sits beside the spinster on the sofa, crouching like a conspirator.*]

CAROL [*slow and urgent*]: Miss Furnival, you're a sport, aren't you?

MISS FURNIVAL: I don't know. What is this furniture doing in here? It belongs to Harold Gorringe.

CAROL: I know. We've done something absolutely frightful. We've stolen all his best pieces and put Brin's horrid old bits into his room.

MISS FURNIVAL: But why? It's disgraceful!

CAROL [*sentimentally*]: Because Brindsley's got nothing, Miss Furnival. Nothing at all. He's as poor as a church mouse. If Daddy had seen this place as it looks normally, he'd have forbidden our marriage on the spot. Mr Gorringe wasn't there to ask - so we just took the chance.

MISS FURNIVAL: If Harold Gorringe knew that anyone had touched his furniture or his porcelain, he'd go out of his mind! And as for that Buddha - [*pointing in the wrong direction*] - it's the most precious piece he owns. It's worth hundreds of pounds.

CAROL: Oh, please, Miss Furnival - you won't give us away, will you? We're desperate! And it's only for an hour . . . Oh, please! please!

MISS FURNIVAL [*giggling*]: Very well! . . . I won't betray you!

CAROL: Oh, thank you!

MISS FURNIVAL: But it'll have to go back exactly as it was, just as soon as Mr Bamberger and your father leave.

CAROL: I swear! Oh, Miss Furnival, you're an angel! Do have a drink. Oh, no, you don't. Well, have a bitter lemon.

MISS FURNIVAL: Thank you. That I won't refuse.

[*The COLONEL returns, still holding his lighter. The stage darkens a little.*]

COLONEL: Well, they're certainly a surprise. And that's supposed to be sculpture?

CAROL: It's not supposed to be. It is.

COLONEL: They'd make good garden implements. I'd like 'em for turnin' the soil.

[*MISS FURNIVAL giggles.*]

CAROL: That's not very funny, Daddy.

[*MISS FURNIVAL stops giggling.*]

COLONEL: Sorry, Dumpling. Speak as you find.

CAROL: I wish you wouldn't call me Dumpling.

COLONEL: Well, there's no point wastin' this. We may need it!

[*He snaps off his lighter. MISS FURNIVAL gives her little gasp as the stage brightens.*]

CAROL: Don't be nervous, Miss Furnival. Brin will be here in a minute with the candles.

MISS FURNIVAL: Then I'll leave, of course. I don't want to be in your way.

CAROL: You're not at all. [*Hearing him*] Brin? —

[BRINDSLEY comes out of HAROLD'S room — returns the key under the mat.]

BRINDSLEY: Hallo?

CAROL: Did you find anything?

BRINDSLEY [*coming in*]: You can't find anything in this! If there's candles there, I don't know where they are. Did you get the electric people?

CAROL: They said they might send someone around later.

BRINDSLEY: How much later?

CAROL: They don't know.

BRINDSLEY: That's a lot of help. What a look-out! Not a bloody candle in the house. A deaf millionaire to show sculpture to — and your monster father to keep happy. Lovely!

COLONEL [*grimly lighting his lighter*]: Good evenin'.

[BRINDSLEY jumps.]

CAROL: Brin, this is my father — Colonel Melkett.

BRINDSLEY [*wildly embarrassed*]: Well, well, well, well, well! ...

[*Panic*] Good evening, sir. Fancy you being there all the time! I — I'm expecting some dreadful neighbours, some neighbour monsters, monster neighbours, you know ... They rang up and said they might look round ... Well, well, well! ...

COLONEL [*darkly*]: Well, well.

MISS FURNIVAL [*nervously*]: Well, well!

CAROL [*brightly*]: Well!

[*The COLONEL rises and advances on BRINDSLEY who retreats before him across the room.*]

COLONEL: You seem to be in a spot of trouble.

BRINDSLEY [*with mad nervousness*]: Oh, not really! Just a fuse — nothing really, we have them all the time ... I mean, it won't be

the first fuse I've survived, and I dare say it won't be the last! [*He gives a wild braying laugh.*]

COLONEL [*relentless*]: In the meantime, you've got no matches. Right?

BRINDSLEY: Right.

COLONEL: No candles. Right?

BRINDSLEY: Right.

COLONEL: No basic efficiency, right?

BRINDSLEY: I wouldn't say that, exactly ...

COLONEL: By basic efficiency, young man, I mean the simple state of being At Attention in life, rather than At Ease. Understand?

BRINDSLEY: Well, I'm certainly not at ease.

COLONEL: What are you goin' to do about it?

BRINDSLEY: Do?

COLONEL: Don't echo me, sir. I don't like it.

BRINDSLEY: You don't like it ... I'm sorry.

COLONEL: Now look you here. This is an emergency. Anyone can see that.

BRINDSLEY: No one can see anything: that's the emergency! [*He gives his braying laugh again.*]

COLONEL: Spare me your humour, sir, if you don't mind. Let's look at the situation objectively. Right?

BRINDSLEY: Right.

COLONEL: Good. [*He snaps off the lighter.*] Problem: Darkness. Solution: Light.

BRINDSLEY: Oh very good, sir.

COLONEL: Weapons: Matches: none! Candles: none! What remains?

BRINDSLEY: Search me.

COLONEL [*triumphantly*]: Torches. Torches, sir! what?

BRINDSLEY: Of a set of early Christians.

COLONEL: What did you say?

BRINDSLEY: I'm sorry. I think I'm becoming unhunged. Very good. Torches — brilliant.

COLONEL: Routine. Well, where would you find one?
 BRINDSLEY: The pub. What time is it?
 [The COLONEL lights his lighter, but now not at the first try. The stage light flickers up and down accordingly.]
 COLONEL: Blasted thing. It's beginnin' to go. [He consults his watch.] Quarter to ten. You can just make it, if you hurry.
 BRINDSLEY: Thank you, sir. Your clarity of mind has saved the day!
 COLONEL: Well, get on with it, man.
 BRINDSLEY: Yes, sir! Back in a minute!
 [The COLONEL sits in the Regency chair, downstage right.]
 CAROL: Good luck, darling.
 BRINDSLEY: Thank you, my sweet.
 [She blows him a kiss. He blows her one back.]
 COLONEL [irritated]: Stop that at once!
 [BRINDSLEY starts for the door - but as he reaches it, HAROLD GORRINGE is heard, off.]
 HAROLD [broad Lancashire accent]: Hallo? Hallo? Anyone there?
 BRINDSLEY [freezing with horror]: HAROLD!!
 HAROLD: Brindsley?
 BRINDSLEY [meant for CAROL]: It's Harold! He's back!
 CAROL: Oh no!
 BRINDSLEY: THE FURNITURE!!
 HAROLD: What's going on here?
 [HAROLD appears. He wears a smart raincoat and carries a weekend suitcase. His hair falls over his brow in a flossy attempt at elegance.]
 BRINDSLEY: Nothing, Harold. Don't go in there - come in here. We've had a fuse. It's dark - it's all over the house.
 HAROLD: Have you phoned the electric? [Reaching out.]
 BRINDSLEY [reaching out and grabbing him]: Yes. Come in here.
 HAROLD [grabbed]: Ohh! . . . [He takes BRINDSLEY'S hand and enters the room cosily on his arm.] It's rather cosy in the dark, isn't it?
 BRINDSLEY [desperately]: Yes! I suppose so . . . So you're back from your weekend then . . .
 HAROLD: I certainly am, dear. Weekend! Some weekend! It rained the whole bloody time. I feel damp to my knickers.

BRINDSLEY [nervously]: Well, have a drink and tell us all about it.
 HAROLD: Us? [Disengaging himself] Who's here, then?
 MISS FURNIVAL [archly]: I am, Mr Gorringe.
 HAROLD: Ferny?
 MISS FURNIVAL: Taking refuge, I'm afraid. You know how I hate the dark.
 COLONEL [attempting to light his lighter]: Blasted thing! . . . [He succeeds.] There we are! [Raising it to GORRINGE'S face, with distaste] Who are you?
 BRINDSLEY: May I present my neighbour. This is Harold Gorringe - Colonel Melkett.
 HAROLD: How do?
 COLONEL: How d'ye do?
 BRINDSLEY: And this is Miss Carol Melkett, Harold Gorringe.
 CAROL [giving him a chilly smile]: Hallo! . . .
 [HAROLD nods coldly.]
 BRINDSLEY: Here, let me take your raincoat, Harold.
 [He is wearing a tight, modish, grey suit and a brilliant strawberry shirt.]
 HAROLD [taking it off and handing it to him]: Be careful, it's sopping wet.
 [Adroitly, BRINDSLEY drops the coat over the Wedgwood bowl on the table.]
 COLONEL: You got no candles, I suppose?
 HAROLD: Would you believe it, Colonel, but I haven't! Silly me!
 [BRINDSLEY crosses and blows out the COLONEL'S lighter, just as HAROLD begins to look round the room. The stage brightens.]
 COLONEL: What the devil did you do that for?
 BRINDSLEY: I'm saving your wick, Colonel. You may need it later and it's failing fast.
 [The COLONEL gives him a suspicious look. BRINDSLEY moves quickly back, takes up the coat and drops it over the right end of the sofa, to conceal as much of it as possible.]
 HAROLD: It's all right. I've got some matches.
 CAROL [alarmed]: Matches!

HAROLD: Here we are! I hope I've got the right end. [*He strikes one.*]
 [BRINDSLEY immediately blows it out from behind, then moves swiftly to hide the Wedgwood bowl under the table and drop the tablecloth over the remaining end of the sofa. MISS FURNIVAL sits serenely unknowing between the two covers.]

Hey, what was that?

BRINDSLEY [*babbling*]: A draught. No match stays alight in this room. It's impossible. Cross currents, you know! Old houses are full of them. They're almost a permanent feature in *this* house...

HAROLD [*bewildered*]: I don't know what you're on about. [*He strikes another match.*]

[BRINDSLEY again blows it out as he tips over to sit in the chair downstage left, but this time is seen.]

HAROLD: What's up with you?

BRINDSLEY: Nothing!

HAROLD: Have you got a dead body in here or something?

BRINDSLEY: NO! [*He starts his maniacal laughter.*]

HAROLD: Here, have you been drinking?

BRINDSLEY: No. Of course not.

[HAROLD strikes another match. BRINDSLEY dashes up. All these strikings and blowings are of course accompanied by swift and violent alterations of the light.]

HAROLD [*exasperated*]: Now look here! What's up with you?

BRINDSLEY [*inspired*]: Dangerous!

HAROLD: What?

BRINDSLEY [*frantically improvising*]: Dangerous! It's dangerous!... We can all die! Naked flames! Hideous accidents can happen with naked flames!

HAROLD: I don't know what you're on about - what's up with you?

[BRINDSLEY clutches HAROLD and backs him bewilderedly across to the centre table.]

BRINDSLEY: I've just remembered! It's something they always warn you about. In old houses the fuse-box and the gas meter are in the same cupboard. They are here!

COLONEL: So what about it?

BRINDSLEY: Well... electrical blowouts can damage the gas supply. They're famous for it! They do it all the time! And they say you've got to avoid naked flames till they're mended.

COLONEL [*suspicious*]: I've never heard of that.

HAROLD: Me neither.

BRINDSLEY: Well, take my word for it. It's fantastically dangerous to burn a naked flame in this room!

CAROL [*catching on*]: Brin's absolutely right. In fact, they warned me about it on the phone this evening when I called them. They said, 'Whatever you do, don't strike a match till the fuse is mended.'

BRINDSLEY: There, you see! - it's terribly dangerous.

COLONEL [*grimly*]: Then why didn't you warn me, Dumppling?

CAROL: I - I forgot.

COLONEL: Brilliant!

MISS FURNIVAL: Oh goodness, we must take care!

BRINDSLEY: We certainly must!... [*Pause.*] Let's all have a drink. Cheer us up!...

CAROL: Good idea! Mr Gorringe, would you like a drink?

HAROLD: Well, I must say, that wouldn't come amiss. Not after the journey I've had tonight. I swear to God there was thirty-five people in that compartment if there was one - babes in arms, toddlers, two nuns, three yapping poodles, and not a sausage to eat from Leamington to London. It's a bloody disgrace.

MISS FURNIVAL: You'd think they'd put on a restaurant car, Mr Gorringe.

HAROLD: Not them, Ferny. They don't care if you perish once they've got your fare. Excuse me. I'll just go and clean up.

BRINDSLEY [*panic*]: You can do that here!

HAROLD: Well, I must unpack anyway.

BRINDSLEY: Do it later.

HAROLD: No, I hate to keep clothes in a suitcase longer than I absolutely have to. If there's one thing I can't stand, it's a creased suit.

BRINDSLEY: Five more minutes won't hurt, surely?
 HAROLD: Ooh, you aren't half bossy!
 CAROL: What will you have? Winnie, Vera or Ginette?
 HAROLD: Come again?
 CAROL: Winnie Whisky, Vera Vodka, or dear old standby Ginette.
 HAROLD [*yielding*]: I can see you're the camp one! . . . If it's all the same to you, I'll have a drop of Ginette, please, and a little lime juice.
 COLONEL [*irritated*]: Young man, do I have to keep reminding you that you are in an emergency? You have a guest arrivin' any second.
 BRINDSLEY: Oh God, I'd forgotten!
 COLONEL: Try the pub. Try the neighbours. Try who you damn well please, sir - but *get a torch!*
 BRINDSLEY: Yes . . . Yes! . . . Carol, can I have a word with you, please?
 CAROL: I'm here.
 [*She gropes towards him and BRINDSLEY leads her to the stairs.*]
 COLONEL: What now?
 BRINDSLEY: Excuse us just a moment, please, Colonel.
 [*He pulls her quickly after him, up the stairs.*]
 MISS FURNIVAL [*as they do this*]: Oh, Mr Gorringe, it's so exciting. You'll never guess who's coming here tonight.
 HAROLD: Who?
 MISS FURNIVAL: Guess.
 HAROLD: The Queen!
 MISS FURNIVAL: Oh, Mr Gorringe, you are ridiculous!
 [*BRINDSLEY arrives at the top of the stairs, then opens the bedroom door and closes it behind them.*]
 BRINDSLEY: What are we going to do?
 CAROL [*behind the door*]: I don't know!
 BRINDSLEY [*behind the door*]: Think!
 CAROL: But -
 BRINDSLEY: Think!
 COLONEL: Is that boy touched or somethin'?

HAROLD: Touched? He's an absolute poppet.
 COLONAL: A what?
 HAROLD: A duck. I've known him for years, ever since he came here. There's not many secrets we keep from each other, I can tell you.
 COLONEL [*frostily*]: Really?
 HAROLD: Yes, really. He's a very sweet boy.
 [*BRINDSLEY and CAROL emerge from behind the bedroom door.*]
 BRINDSLEY: We'll have to put all Harold's furniture back in his room.
 CAROL: Now?
 BRINDSLEY: We'll have to! I can't get a torch till we do.
 CAROL: We can't!
 BRINDSLEY: We must. He'll go mad if he finds out what we've done.
 HAROLD: Well, come on, Ferny: don't be a tease. Who is it? Who's coming?
 MISS FURNIVAL: I'll give you a clue. It's someone with money.
 HAROLD: Money? . . . Let me think.
 COLONEL [*calling out*]: Carol!
 CAROL: Look, can't you just tell him it was a joke?
 BRINDSLEY: You don't know him. He can't bear anyone to touch his treasures. They're like children to him. He cleans everything twice a day with a special swansdown duster. He'd wreck everything. Would you like him to call me a thief in front of your father?
 CAROL: Of course not!
 BRINDSLEY: Well, he would. He gets absolutely hysterical. I've seen him.
 COLONEL [*mildly*]: Brindsley!
 CAROL: Well, how the hell can we do it?
 HAROLD: It's no good. You can't hear up there.
 BRINDSLEY [*stripping off his jacket*]: Look, you hold the fort. Serve them drinks. Just keep things going. Leave it all to me. I'll try and put everything back in the dark.
 CAROL: It won't work.

BRINDSLEY: It's got to!

COLONEL [roaring]: Brindsley!!

BRINDSLEY [dashing to the door]: Coming, sir ... [With false calm] I'm just getting some empties to take to the pub.

COLONEL: Say what you like. That boy's touched.

BRINDSLEY [to CAROL, intimately]: Trust me, darling.

[They kiss.]

COLONEL: At the double, Miller.

BRINDSLEY: Yes, sir! Yes, sir! [He rushes out and in his anxiety he misses his footing and falls neatly down the entire flight of stairs. Picking himself up.] I'm off now, Colonel! Help is definitely on the way.

COLONEL: Well, hurry it up, man.

BRINDSLEY: Carol will give you drinks. If Mr Bamberger arrives, just explain the situation to him.

HAROLD [feeling for his hand]: Would you like me to come with you?

BRINDSLEY: No, no, no - good heavens: stay and enjoy yourself!

[HAROLD kisses his hand. BRINDSLEY pulls it away.]

I mean, you must be exhausted after all those poodles. A nice gin and lime will do wonders. I shan't be a minute. [He reaches the door, opens it, then slams it loudly, remaining on the inside. Steadily he opens it again, stands dead still for a moment, centre, silently indicating to himself the position of the chairs he has to move - then he finds his way to the first of the Regency chairs, downstage left, which he lifts noiselessly.]

CAROL [with bright desperation]: Well now, drinks! What's everyone going to have? It's Ginette for Mr Gorringe and I suppose Winnie for Daddy.

COLONEL: And how on earth are you going to do that in the dark?

CAROL: I remember the exact way I put out the bottles.

[BRINDSLEY bumps into her with the chair and falls back, gored by its leg.]

CAROL: It's very simple.

HAROLD: Oh look, luv, let me strike a match. I'm sure it's not that dangerous, just for a minute! [He strikes a match.]

CAROL: Oh no! ...

[BRINDSLEY dicks down, chair in hand, and Carol blows out the match.]

Do you want to blow us all up, Mr Gorringe? ... All poor Mr Bamberger would find would be teeny weensy bits of us. Very messypegs!

[She snatches the box of matches, feels for the ice bucket, and drops them into it. BRINDSLEY steals out, Felix-the-cat-like, with the chair as CAROL fumblingly starts to mix drinks. He sets it down, opens HAROLD's door, and disappears inside it with the chair.]

HAROLD: Bamberger? Is that who's coming? Georg Bamberger?

MISS FURNIVAL: Yes. To see Mr Miller's work. Isn't it exciting?

HAROLD: Well, I never! I read an article about him last week in the Sunday paper. He's known as the mystery millionaire. He's almost completely deaf - deaf as a post - and spends most of his time in doors alone with his collection. He hardly ever goes out, except to a gallery or a private studio. That's the life! If I had money that's what I'd do. Just collect all the china and porcelain I wanted.

[BRINDSLEY returns with a poor, broken-down chair of his own and sets it down in the same position as the one he has taken out. The second chair presents a harder challenge. It sits right across the room, upstage right. Delicately he moves towards it - but he has difficulty finding it. We watch him walk round and round it in desperately narrowing circles till he touches it and with relief picks it up.]

MISS FURNIVAL: I've never met a millionaire. I've always wondered if they feel different to us. I mean their actual skins.

COLONEL: Their skins?

MISS FURNIVAL: Yes. I've always imagined they must be softer than ours. Like the skins of ladies when I was a girl.

CAROL: What an interesting idea.

HAROLD: Oh, she's very fanciful is Ferny. Real imagination, I always say.

MISS FURNIVAL: Very kind of you, Mr Gorringe. You're always so generous with your compliments.

[As she speaks her next speech starting smugly into the darkness, hands clasped in maidenly gentility, the second Regency chair is being moved slowly across what should be her field of vision, two inches from her face. During the following, BRINDSLEY unfortunately mis-aims and carries the chair past the door, bumps into the wall, retreats from it, and inadvertently shuts the door softly with his back. Now he cannot get out of the room. He has to set down the chair, grope for the door handle, turn it, then open the door - then re-find the chair which he has quite lost. This takes a long and frantic time. At last he triumphs, and staggers from the room, nearly exhausted.]

But this is by no means fancy. In my day, softness of skin was quite the sign of refinement. Nowadays, of course, it's hard enough for us middle classes to keep ourselves decently clothed, let alone soft. My father used to say, even before the bombs came and burnt our dear little house at Wendover: 'The game's up, my girl. We middle classes are as dead as the dodo.' Poor Father, how right he was.

[Note: *Hopefully, if the counterpoint of farce action goes well, MISS FURNIVAL may have to ad-lib a fair bit during all this, and not mind too much if nobody hears her. The essential thing for all four actors during the furniture-moving is to preserve the look of ordinary conversation.*]

COLONEL: Your father was a professional man?

MISS FURNIVAL: He was a man of God, Colonel.

COLONEL: Oh.

[BRINDSLEY returns with a broken-down rocking-chair of his own. He crosses gingerly to where the COLONEL is sitting.]

How are those drinks coming, Dumppling?

CAROL: Fine, Daddy. They'll be one minute.

COLONEL [speaking directly into BRINDSLEY'S face]: Let me help you.

[BRINDSLEY staggers back, startled.]

CAROL: You can take this bitter lemon to Miss Furnival if you want.

[BRINDSLEY sets down the rocker immediately next to the COLONEL'S chair.]

COLONEL: Very well.

[He rises just as BRINDSLEY'S hand pulls it from beneath him. With his other hand BRINDSLEY pulls the rocker into the identical position. The COLONEL moves slowly across the room, arms outstretched for the bitter lemon. Unknowingly BRINDSLEY follows him, carrying the third chair. The COLONEL collides gently with the table. At the same moment BRINDSLEY reaches it upstage of him, and searches for the Wedgwood bowl. Their hands narrowly miss. Then the YOUNG MAN remembers the bowl is under the table. Deftly he reaches down and retrieves it - and carrying it in one hand and the chair in the other, triumphantly leaves the room through the arch unconsciously provided by the outstretched arms of CAROL and the COLONEL, giving and receiving a glass of Scotch - which they think is lemonade.]

CAROL: Here you are, Daddy. Bitter lemon for Miss Furnival.

COLONEL: Right you are, Dumppling. [To MISS FURNIVAL] So your father was a minister, then?

MISS FURNIVAL: He was a saint, Colonel. I'm only thankful he never lived to see the rudeness and vulgarity of life today.

[The COLONEL sets off to find her but goes much too far to the right.]

HAROLD [he sits on the sofa beside her]: Oooh, you're so right, Ferny. Rudeness and vulgarity - that's it to a T. The manners of some people today are beyond belief. Honestly. Did I tell you what happened in my shop last Friday? I don't think I did.

MISS FURNIVAL: No, Mr Gorrings, I don't think so.

[Her voice corrects the COLONEL'S direction. During the following he moves slowly up toward her.]

HAROLD: Well, I'd just opened up - it was about quarter to ten and I was dusting off the teapots - you know, Rockingham collects the dust something shocking! - when who should walk in but that Mrs Levitt, you know - the ginger-haired bit I told you about, the one who thinks she's God's gift to bachelors.

COLONEL [finding her head with his hand and presenting her with the Scotch]: Here's your lemonade.

MISS FURNIVAL: Oh, thank you. Most kind.

[Throughout HAROLD's story, MISS FURNIVAL nurses the glass, not drinking. The COLONEL finds his way slowly back to the chair he thinks he was sitting on before, but which is now a rocker. BRINDSLEY re-appears triumphantly carrying one of the original Regency chairs he took out. He moves slowly across the room getting his bearings.]

HAROLD: Anyway, she's got in her hand a vase I'd sold her last week - it was a birthday present for an old geezer she's having a bit of a ding dong with somewhere in Earls Court, hoping to collect all his lolly when he dies, as I read the situation. I'm a pretty good judge of character, Ferny, as you know - and she's a real grasper if ever I saw one.

[The COLONEL sits heavily in the rocking-chair which overbalances backward, spilling him onto the floor.]

COLONEL: Dammit to hell!

CAROL: What's the matter, Daddy?

[A pause. BRINDSLEY sits down panic-stricken on the chair he has carried in. The COLONEL feels the chair and sets it on its feet.]

COLONEL [unbelieving]: It's a blasted rockin'-chair! I didn't see a blasted rockin'-chair here before!...

[Astounded, the COLONEL remains on the floor. BRINDSLEY rises and moves the chair to the original position of the second chair he moved.]

HAROLD: Oh yes, you want to watch that. It's in a pretty ropery condition. I've told Brin about it several times. Anyway, this vase. It's a nice bit of Kang Tsi, blue and white with a good orange-peel glaze, absolutely authentic - I'd let her have it for twenty-five pounds, and she'd got infinitely the best of the bargain, no arguments about that! -

[HAROLD rises and leans against the centre table to tell his story more effectively. The COLONEL seats himself again, gingerly.]

Well, in she prances, her hair all done up in one of them bouffon hair-dos, you know, tarty - French-like - it would have looked fancy on a girl half her age with twice her looks -

[BRINDSLEY mistakenly lifts the end of the sofa. MISS FURNIVAL gives a little scream at the jolt.]

HAROLD: Exactly! You know the sort.

[BRINDSLEY staggers in the opposite direction downstage onto the rostrum.]

And d'you know what she says to me? 'Mr Gorringe,' she says, 'I've been cheated.'

MISS FURNIVAL: No!

HAROLD: Her very words. 'Cheated.'

[BRINDSLEY collides with the sculpture on the dais. It jangles violently.]

[To it] Hush up, I'm talking!

CAROL [covering up]: I'm frightfully sorry.

[HAROLD whirls round, surprised.]

HAROLD: Anyway - 'Oh, I say, and how exactly has that occurred, Mrs Levitt?' 'Well,' she says, 'quite by chance I took this vase over to Bill Everett in the Portobello, and he says it's not what you called it at all, Chinese and very rare. He says it's a piece of nineteenth-century English trash!'

[BRINDSLEY finds the lamp on the downstage table and picks it up. He walks with it round the rocking-chair, on which the COLONEL is now sitting again.]

'Does he?' I say. 'Does he?' I keep calm. I always do when I'm riled. 'Yes,' she says. 'He does. And I'd thank you to give me my money back!'

[The wire of the lamp has followed BRINDSLEY round the bottom of the rocking-chair. It catches. BRINDSLEY tugs it gently. The chair moves. Surprised, the COLONEL jerks forward. BRINDSLEY tugs it again, much harder. The rocking-chair is pulled forwards, spilling the COLONEL out of it, again onto the floor, and then falling itself on top of him. The shade of the lamp comes off. During the ensuing dialogue BRINDSLEY gets to his knees and crawls right across the room following the flex of the lamp. He finds the plug, pulls it out, and - still on his knees - re-traces his steps, winding up the wire around his arm, and becoming helplessly entangled in it. The COLONEL remains on the floor, now really alarmed.]

MISS FURNIVAL: How dreadful, Mr Gorringe. What did you do?

HAROLD: I counted to ten, and then I let her have it. 'In the first place,' I said, 'I don't expect my customers to go checking up on my honesty behind my back. In the second, Bill Everett is ignorant as Barnsley dirt, he doesn't know Tang from Ting. And in the third place, that applies to you, too, Mrs Levitt.'

MISS FURNIVAL: You didn't!

HAROLD: I certainly did - and worse than that. 'You've got in your hand,' I said, 'a minor masterpiece of Chinese pottery. But in point of fact,' I said, 'you're not even fit to hold a 1953 Coronation mug. Don't you ever come in here again,' I said, '- don't you cross my threshold. Because, if you do, Mrs Levitt, I won't make myself responsible for the consequences.'

CAROL [*with two drinks in her hand*]: My, Mr Gortinge, how splendid of you. Here's your gin and lime. You deserve it. [*She hands him the bitter lemon.*]

HAROLD [*accepting it*]: Ta. I was proper blazing, I didn't care.

CAROL: Where are you? Where are you, Daddy? Here's your Scotch.

COLONEL: Here, Dumppling!

[*He gets up dazedly and stumbles his way to the glass of gin and lime. BRINDSLEY meanwhile realizes he has lost the shade of the lamp. On his knees, he begins to look for it.*]

HAROLD: Carrotty old bitch - telling me about pottery! Oooh!! [*He shakes himself indignantly at the recollection of it.*]

MISS FURNIVAL: Do you care for porcelain yourself, Colonel?

COLONEL: I'm afraid I don't know very much about it, madam. I like some of that Chinese stuff - you get some lovely colours, like on that statue I saw when I came in here - very delicate.

HAROLD: What statue's that, Colonel?

COLONEL: The one on the packing case, sir. Very fine.

HAROLD: I didn't know Brin had any Chinese stuff. What's it of then, this statue?

[BRINDSLEY freezes.]

CAROL [*desperately*]: Well, we've all got drinks, I'd like to propose

Daddy's regimental toast. Raise your glasses everyone! 'To the dear old Twenty-fifth Horse. Up the British, and Death to the Enemy'!

MISS FURNIVAL: I'll drink to that! Up the British!

HAROLD: Up the old Twenty-fifth!!

[*Quickly BRINDSLEY finds the Buddha, moves it from the packing case to the table, then gets HAROLD's raincoat from the sofa, and wraps the statue up in it, leaving it on the table.*]

COLONEL: Thank you, Dumppling. That was very touchin' of you. Very touchin' indeed. [*He swallows his drink.*] Dammit, that's gin!

HAROLD: I've got lemonade!

MISS FURNIVAL: Oh! Horrible! ... Quite horrible! That would be alcohol, I suppose! ... Oh dear, how unpleasant! ...

HAROLD [*to MISS FURNIVAL*]: Here, luv, exchange with me. No - you get the lemonade - but I get the gin. Colonel - COLONEL: Here, sir.

[*Seizing her chance MISS FURNIVAL downs a huge draft of Scotch. They all exchange drinks. BRINDSLEY resumes his frantic search for the shade.*]

HAROLD: Here, Ferny.

[*The COLONEL hands her the gin and lime. He gets instead the bitter lemon from HAROLD. HAROLD gets the Scotch.*]

MISS FURNIVAL: Thank you.

HAROLD: Well, let's try again. Bottoms up!

COLONEL: Quite.

[*They drink. Triumphantly, BRINDSLEY finds the shade. Unfortunately at the same moment the COLONEL spits out his lemonade in a fury all over him, as he marches towards him on his knees.*]

Look here - I can't stand another minute of this! [*He fishes his lighter out of his pocket and angrily tries to light it.*]

CAROL: Daddy, please!

COLONEL: I don't care, Dumppling. If I blow us up, then I'll blow us up! This is ridiculous! ...

[His words die in the flame. He spies BRINDSLEY kneeling at his feet, wound about with lampwire.]

What the devil are you doin' there?

BRINDSLEY [blowing out his lighter]: Now don't be rash, Colonel! Isn't the first rule of an officer 'Don't involve your men in unnecessary danger'? [Quickly he steals, still on his knees, to the table downstage right.]

COLONEL: Don't be impertinent. Where's the torch?

BRINDSLEY: Er ... the pub was closed.

HAROLD: You didn't go to the pub in that time, surely? You couldn't have done.

BRINDSLEY: Of course I did.

MISS FURNIVAL: But it's five streets away, Mr Miller.

BRINDSLEY: Needs must when the Devil drives, Miss Furnival. Whatever that means. [Quickly he lifts the table, and steals out of the room with it and the wrecked lamp.]

COLONEL [who thinks he is still kneeling at his feet]: Now look here: there's somethin' very peculiar goin' on in this room. I may not know about art, Miller, but I know men. I know a liar in the light, and I know one in the dark.

CAROL: Daddy!

COLONEL: I don't want to doubt your word, sir. All the same, I'd like your oath you went out to that public house. Well?

CAROL [realizing he isn't there, raising her voice]: Brin, Daddy's talking to you!

COLONEL: What are you shoutin' for?

BRINDSLEY [rushing back from HAROLD'S room, still entangled in the lamp]: Of course! I know! He's absolutely right. I was - just thinking it over for a moment.

COLONEL: Well? What's your answer?

BRINDSLEY: I ... I couldn't agree with you more, sir.

COLONEL: What?

BRINDSLEY: That was a very perceptive remark you made there. Not everyone would have thought of that. Individual. You know. Almost witty. Well, it *was* witty. Why be ungenerous? ...

COLONEL: Look, young man, are you trying to be funny?

BRINDSLEY [ingratiatingly]: Well, I'll try anything once ...

HAROLD: I say, this is becoming a bit unpleasant, isn't it?

CAROL: It's becoming drearypegs.

COLONEL: Quiet, Dumping. Let me handle this.

BRINDSLEY: What's there to handle, sir?

COLONEL: If you think I'm going to let my daughter marry a born liar, you're very much mistaken.

HAROLD: Marry!

CAROL: Well, that's the idea.

HAROLD: You and this young lady, Brin?

CAROL: Arc what's laughingly known as engaged. Subject of course to Daddy's approval.

HAROLD: Well! [Furious at the news, and at the fact that BRINDSLEY hasn't confided in him] What a surprise! ...

BRINDSLEY: We were keeping it a secret.

HAROLD: Evidently. How long's this been going on, then?

BRINDSLEY: A few months.

HAROLD: You old slyboots.

BRINDSLEY [nervous]: I hope you approve, Harold.

HAROLD: Well, I must say, you know how to keep things to yourself.

BRINDSLEY [placatingly]: I meant to tell you, Harold ... I really did. You were the one person I was going to tell.

HAROLD: Well, why didn't you then?

BRINDSLEY: I don't know. I just never got around to it.

HAROLD: You saw me every day.

BRINDSLEY: I know.

HAROLD: You could have mentioned it at any time.

BRINDSLEY: I know.

HAROLD [huffy]: Well, it's your business. There's no obligation to share confidences. I've only been your neighbour for three years. I've always assumed there was more than a geographical closeness between us, but I was obviously mistaken.

BRINDSLEY: Oh, don't start getting huffy, Harold!

HAROLD: I'm not getting anything. I'm just saying it's surprising, that's all. Surprising and somewhat disappointing.

BRINDSLEY: Oh look, Harold, please understand –

HAROLD [*shrill*]: There's no need to say anything! It'll just teach me in future not to bank too much on friendship. It's silly me again! Silly, stupid, trusting me!

[MISS FURNIVAL rises in agitation and gropes her way to the drinks table.]

COLONEL: Good God!

CAROL [*whedding*]: Oh come, Mr Gorringe. We haven't told anybody. Not one single soultpegs. Really.

COLONEL: At the moment, Dumppling, there's nothing to tell. And I'm not sure there's going to be!

BRINDSLEY: Look, sir, we seem to have got off on the wrong foot. If it's my fault, I apologize.

MISS FURNIVAL [*groping about on the drinks table*]: My father always used to say, 'To err is human: to forgive divine.'

CAROL: I thought that was somebody else.

MISS FURNIVAL [*blithely*]: So many people copied him. [*She finds the open bottle of gin, lifts it and sniffs it eagerly.*]

CAROL: May I help you, Miss Furnival?

MISS FURNIVAL: No, thank you, Miss Melkett. I'm just getting myself another bitter lemon. That is – if I may, Mr Miller?

BRINDSLEY: Of course. Help yourself.

MISS FURNIVAL: Thank you, most kind! [*She pours more gin into her glass and returns slowly to sit upstage on the edge of the rostrum.*]

COLONEL: Well, sir, wherever you are –

BRINDSLEY: Here, Colonel.

COLONEL: I'll overlook your damn peculiar behaviour this once, but understand this, Miller. My daughter's dear to me. You show me you can look after her, and I'll consider the whole thing most favourably. I can't say fairer than that, can I?

BRINDSLEY: No, sir. Most fair, sir. Most fair. [*He pulls a hideous face one inch from the COLONEL'S.*]

CAROL: Of course he can look after me, Daddy. His works are

going to be world-famous. In five years I'll feel just like Mrs Michelangelo.

HAROLD [*softly*]: There wasn't a Mrs Michelangelo, actually.

CAROL [*irritated*]: Wasn't there?

HAROLD: No. He had passionate feelings of a rather different nature. CAROL: Really, Mr Gorringe. I didn't know that. [*She puts out her tongue at him.*]

BRINDSLEY: Look, Harold, I'm sorry if I've hurt your feelings.

HAROLD [*softly*]: You haven't.

BRINDSLEY: I know I have. Please forgive me.

CAROL: Oh, do, Mr Gorringe. Quarrelling is so dreary. I hope we're all going to be great friends.

HAROLD: I'm not sure that I can contemplate a friendly relationship with a viper.

MISS FURNIVAL: Remember: to err is human, to forgive divine!

COLONEL [*irritated*]: You just said that, madam.

[CLEA enters, wearing dark glasses and carrying an air-bag. She stands in the doorway, amazed by the dark. She takes off her glasses, but this doesn't improve matters.]

MISS FURNIVAL [*downing her gin happily*]: Did I?

CAROL: Brin's not really a viper. He's just artistic, aren't you, darling?

BRINDSLEY: Yes, darling.

[CAROL sends him an audible kiss across the astonished CLEA. He returns it, equally audibly.]

CAROL [*winningly*]: Come on, Mr Gorringe. It really is a case of forgive and forgettipegs.

HAROLD: Is it reallypegs?

CAROL: Have another Ginette and lime. I'll have one with you. [*She rises and mixes the drink.*]

HAROLD [*rising*]: Oh, all right. I don't mind if I do.

CAROL: Let me mix it for you.

HAROLD: Ta. [*He crosses to her, narrowly missing CLEA who is now crossing the room to the sofa, and gets his drink*] I must say there's nothing nicer than having a booze-up with a pretty girl.

CAROL [*starchily*]: You haven't seen me yet.

HAROLD: Oh, I just know it. Brindsley always had wonderful taste. I've often said to him, you've got the same taste in ladies as I have in porcelain. Ta.

[HAROLD and BRINDSLEY - one from upstage, one from across the room - begin to converge on the sofa. On the word 'modest' all three, CLEA in the middle, sit on it. BRINDSLEY of course imagines he is sitting next to HAROLD.]

BRINDSLEY: Harold!

CAROL: Oh don't be silly, Brin. Why be so modest? I found a photograph of one of his bits from two years ago, and I must say she was pretty stunning in a blowy sort of way.

HAROLD: Which one was that, then? I suppose she means Clea.

CAROL: Did you know her, Mr Gorringe?

HAROLD: Oh yes. She's been around a long time.

[BRINDSLEY nudges CLEA warningly - imagining she is HAROLD. CLEA gently bumps HAROLD.]

CAROL [surprised]: Has she?

HAROLD: Oh yes, dear. Or am I speaking out of turn?

BRINDSLEY: Not at all. I've told Carol all about Clea.

[He bungs CLEA again, a little harder - who correspondingly bumps against HAROLD.]

Though I must say, Harold, I'm surprised you call three months 'a long time'.

[CLEA shoots him a look of total outrage at this lie. HAROLD is also astonished.]

CAROL: What was she like?

BRINDSLEY [meaningfully, into CLEA's ear]: I suppose you can hardly remember her, Harold.

HAROLD [speaking across her]: Why on earth shouldn't I?

BRINDSLEY: Well, since it was two years ago, you've probably forgotten.

HAROLD: Two years?!

BRINDSLEY: Two years ago!

[He punches CLEA so hard that she rebound knocks HAROLD off the sofa, drink and all.]

HAROLD [picking himself up. Spitefully]: Well, now since you mention it, I remember her perfectly. I mean, she's not one you can easily forget!

CAROL: Was she pretty?

HAROLD: No, not at all. In fact, I'd say the opposite. Actually she was rather plain.

BRINDSLEY: She wasn't!

HAROLD: I'm just giving my opinion.

BRINDSLEY: You've never given it before.

HAROLD [leaning over CLEA]: I was never asked! But since it's come up, I always thought she was ugly. For one thing, she had teeth like a picket fence - yellow and spiky. And for another, she had bad skin.

BRINDSLEY: She had nothing of the kind!

HAROLD: She did. I remember it perfectly. It was like a new pink wallpaper, with an old grey crumbly paper underneath.

MISS FURNIVAL: Quite right, Mr Gorringe. I hardly ever saw her, but I do recall her skin. It was a strange colour, as you say - and very coarse . . . Not soft, as the skins of young ladies should be, if they are young ladies.

[CLEA rises in outrage.]

HAROLD: Aye, that's right. Coarse.

MISS FURNIVAL: And rather lumpy.

HAROLD: Very lumpy.

BRINDSLEY: This is disgraceful.

HAROLD: You knew I never liked her, Brindsley. She was too clever by half.

MISS FURNIVAL: And so tiresomely Bohemian.

CAROL: You mean she was as pretentious as her name?

[CLEA, who has been reacting to this last exchange of comments about her like a spectator at a tennis match, now reacts to CAROL openly.]

I bet she was. That photograph I found showed her in a dirndl and a sort of sultry peasant blouse. She looked like 'The Bartered Bride' done by Lloyds Bank.

[They laugh, BRINDSLEY hardest of all. Guided by the noise, CLEA aims her hand and slaps his face.]

BRINDSLEY: Ahh!

CAROL: What's wrong?

MISS FURNIVAL: What is it, Mr Miller?

BRINDSLEY [furious]: That's not very funny, Harold. What the hell's the matter with you?

[CLEA makes her escape.]

HAROLD [indignant]: With me?

BRINDSLEY: Well, I'm sure it wasn't the Colonel.

COLONEL: What wasn't, sir?

[BRINDSLEY, groping about, catches CLEA by the bottom, and instantly recognizes it.]

BRINDSLEY: Clea! . . . [In horror] Clea!

[CLEA breaks loose and moves away from him. During the following he tries to find her in the dark, and she narrowly avoids him.]

COLONEL: What?

BRINDSLEY: I was just remembering her, sir. You're all talking the most awful nonsense. She was beautiful . . . And anyway, Harold, you just said I was famous for my taste in women.

HAROLD: Aye, but it had its lapses.

BRINDSLEY [frantically moving about]: Rubbish! She was beautiful and tender and considerate and kind and loyal and witty and adorable in every way!

CAROL: You told me she was as cosy as a steel razor-blade.

BRINDSLEY: Did I? Surely not! No. What I said was . . . something quite different . . . Utterly different . . . entirely different . . . As different as chalk from cheese. Although when you come to think of it, cheese isn't all that different from chalk! [He gives his braying laugh.]

COLONEL: Are you sure you know what you're talking about?

[During this CLEA has reached the table, picked up a bottle of Scotch, and rejected it in favour of vodka, which she takes with her.]

CAROL: You said to me in this room when I asked you what she

was like, 'She was a painter. Very honest. Very clever, and just about as cosy' -

BRINDSLEY [stopping, exasperated]: As a steel razor-blade! Well then, I said it! So bloody what? . . .

CAROL: So nothing!

[He throws out his hands in a gesture of desperate exhaustion and bumps straight into CLEA. They instantly embrace, CLEA twining herself around him, her vodka bottle held aloft. A tiny pause.]

COLONEL: If that boy isn't touched, I don't know the meaning of the word!

CAROL: What's all this talk about her being kind and tender, all of a sudden?

BRINDSLEY [tenderly, holding CLEA]: She could be. On occasion. Very.

CAROL: Very rare occasions, I imagine.

BRINDSLEY: Not so rare. [He kisses CLEA again.] Not so rare at all. [He leads her softly past the irritated CAROL, towards the stairs.]

CAROL: Meaning what, exactly? . . . [Shouting] Brindsley, I'm talking to you!

BRINDSLEY [sotto voce, into CLEA's ear as they stand just behind HAROLD]: I can explain. Go up to the bedroom. Wait for me there.

HAROLD [in amazement: thinking he is being addressed]: Now? . . . Do you think this is quite the moment?

BRINDSLEY: Oh God! . . . I wasn't talking to you!

CAROL: What did you say?

HAROLD [to CAROL]: I think he wants you upstairs. [Stily] For what purpose, I can't begin to imagine.

COLONEL: They're going to do some more of that plotting, I dare say.

MISS FURNIVAL: Lover's talk, Colonel.

COLONEL: Very touching, I'm sure.

[BRINDSLEY pushes CLEA ahead of him up the stairs.]

MISS FURNIVAL: 'Journeys end in lovers meeting,' as my father always used to say.

COLONEL [*grimly*]: What a strikingly original father you seem to have had, madam!

[CAROL joins the other two on the stairs. *We see all three groping blindly up to the bedroom, BRINDSLEY'S hands on CLEA'S hips, CAROL'S on BRINDSLEY'S.*]

CAROL [*with a conspirator's stage whisper*]: What is it, darling? Has something gone wrong? What can't you move?

[*This next dialogue sotto voce.*]

BRINDSLEY: Nothing. It's all back - every bit of it - except the sofa, and I've covered that up.

CAROL: You mean, we can have lights?

BRINDSLEY: Yes... NO!!

CAROL: Why not?

BRINDSLEY: Never mind!

CAROL: Why do you want me in the bedroom?

BRINDSLEY: I don't! Go away!

CAROL: Charming!

BRINDSLEY: I didn't mean that.

COLONEL: There you are. They *are* plotting again. What the hell is going on up there?

BRINDSLEY: Nothing, Colonel. I've just remembered - there may be a torch under my bed. I keep it to blind the burglars with. Have another drink, Colonel!

[*He pushes CLEA into the bedroom and shuts the door.*]

COLONEL: What d'you mean another? I haven't had *one* yet.

MISS FURNIVAL: Oh! Poor Colonel! Let me get you one.

COLONEL [*rising*]: I can get one for myself, thank you. Let me get you another lemonade.

MISS FURNIVAL [*rising*]: No thank you, Colonel, I'll manage myself.

It's good practice!

[*They grope towards the drinks table. Above, CLEA and BRINDSLEY sit on the bed.*]

CLEA: So this is what they mean by a blind date! What the hell is going on?

BRINDSLEY [*sarcastic*]: Nothing! Georg Bamberger is only coming to see my work tonight, and we've got a main fuse.

CLEA: Is that the reason for all this furtive clutching?

BRINDSLEY: Look, I can't explain things at the moment.

CLEA: Who's that - [*debutante accent*] 'frightful gel'?

BRINDSLEY: Just a friend.

CLEA: She sounded more than that.

BRINDSLEY: Well, if you must know, it's Carol. I've told you about her.

CLEA: The Idiot Deb?

BRINDSLEY: She's a very sweet girl. As a matter of fact we've become very good friends in the last six weeks.

CLEA: How good?

BRINDSLEY: Just good.

CLEA: And have you become friends with her father too?

BRINDSLEY: If it's any of your business, they just dropped in to meet Mr Bamberger.

CLEA: What was it you wanted to tell me on the phone tonight?

BRINDSLEY: Nothing.

CLEA: You're lying!

BRINDSLEY: Ah, here comes the inquisition! Look, Clea, if you ever loved me, just slip away quietly with no more questions, and I'll come round later and explain everything, I promise.

CLEA: I don't believe you.

BRINDSLEY: Please darling... Please... Please... Please!!

[*They kiss, passionately, stretched out on the bed.*]

COLONEL [*pouring*]: At last... a decent glass of Scotch. Are you getting your lemonade?

MISS FURNIVAL [*cheerfully pouring herself an enormous gin*]: Oh yes, thank you, Colonel!

COLONEL: I'm just wonderin' if this Bamberger fellow is goin' to show up at all. He's half an hour late already.

HAROLD: Oh! That's nothing, Colonel. Millionaires are always late. It's their thing.

MISS FURNIVAL: I'm sure you're right, Mr Gorringe, That's how I imagine them. Hands like silk, and always two hours late.

CAROL: Brin's been up there a long time. What can he be doing?

HAROLD: Maybe he's got that Clea hidden away in his bedroom, and they're having a tête-à-tête!!

CAROL: What a flagrant suggestion, Mr Gorringe.

BRINDSLEY [*disengaging himself*]: No one in the world kisses like you.

CLEA: I missed you so badly, Brin. I had to see you. I've thought about nothing else these past six weeks. Brin, I made the most awful mistake walking out.

BRINDSLEY: Clea - please!

CLEA: I mean we've known each other for four years. We can't just throw each other away like old newspapers.

BRINDSLEY: I don't see why not. You know my politics, you've heard my gossip, and you've certainly been through all my entertainment section.

CLEA: Well, how about a second edition?

BRINDSLEY: Darling, we simply can't talk about this now. Can't you trust me just for an hour?

CLEA: Of course I can, darling. You don't want me down there?

BRINDSLEY: No.

CLEA: Then I'll get undressed and go quietly to bed. When you've got rid of them all, I'll be waiting.

BRINDSLEY: That's a terrible idea!

CLEA [*reaching for him*]: I think it's lovely. A little happy relaxation for us both.

BRINDSLEY [*falling off the bed*]: I'm perfectly relaxed!

CAROL: Brindsley!

CLEA: 'Too solemn for day, too sweet for night. Come not in darkness, come not in light.' That's me, isn't it?

BRINDSLEY: Of course not. I just can't explain now, that's all.

CLEA: Oh, very well, you can explain later . . . in bed!

BRINDSLEY: Not tonight, Clea.

CLEA: Either that or I come down and discover your sordid secret.

BRINDSLEY: There is no sordid secret!

CLEA: Then you won't mind my coming down!

CAROL, COLONEL [*roaring together*]: BRINDSLEY!!!

BRINDSLEY: Oh God!! . . . All right, stay. Only keep quiet . . . Blackmailing bitch! [*He emerges at the top of the stairs.*] Yes, my sweet?

CAROL: What are you doing up there? You've been an eternity!

BRINDSLEY: I . . . I . . . I'm just looking in the bathroom, my darling. You never know what you might find in that clever little cabinet!

COLONEL [*moving to the stairs*]: Are you trying to madden me, sir? Are you trying to put me in a fury?

BRINDSLEY: Certainly not, sir!!

COLONEL: I warn you, Miller, it's not difficult! In the old days in the regiment I was known for my furies! I was famous for my furies! . . . Do you hear?

CLEA: I may sing! [*She goes off into the bathroom.*]

BRINDSLEY: I may knock your teeth in!

COLONEL: What did you say?

CAROL: Brin! How dare you talk to Daddy like that!

BRINDSLEY: Oh!! I . . . I . . . I wasn't talking to Daddy like that . . .

CAROL: Then who were you talking to?

BRINDSLEY: I was talking to no one! Myself I was talking to! I was saying . . . 'If I keep groping about up here like this, I might knock my teeth in!'

COLONEL: Mad! . . . Mad! . . . Mad as the south wind! It's the only explanation - you've got yourself engaged to a lunatic.

CAROL: There's something going on up there, and I'm coming up to find out what it is. Do you hear me, Brin?

BRINDSLEY: Carol - no!

CAROL [*climbing the stairs*]: I'm not such a fool as you take me for. I know when you're hiding something. Your voice goes all deceitful - very, very foxi-pegs!

BRINDSLEY: Darling please. That's not very ladylike . . . I'm sure the Colonel won't approve of you entering a man's bedroom in the dark!

[*Enter SCHUPPANZIGH. He wears the overcoat and peaked cap of*

the London Electricity Board and carries a large tool-bag, similarly labelled.

CAROL: I'm comin' up, Brindsley, I'm comin' up!!!

BRINDSLEY [*scrambling down*]: I'm coming down ... We'll all have a nice cosy drink ...

SCHUPPANZIGH [*German accent*]: 'Allo please? Mr Miller? Mr Miller? I've come as was arranged.

BRINDSLEY: My God ... it's Bamberger!

CAROL: Bamberger?

BRINDSLEY: Yes, Bamberger. [BRINDSLEY rushes down the remaining stairs, pulling CAROL with him.]

SCHUPPANZIGH: You must have thought I was never coming! [*He takes off his overcoat and cap.*]

BRINDSLEY: Not at all. I'm delighted you could spare the time. I know how busy you are. I'm afraid we've had the most idiotic disaster. We've had a fuse.

HAROLD: You'll have to speak up, dear, He's stone deaf!

BRINDSLEY [*yelling*]: We've had a fuse -- not the best conditions for seeing sculpture.

SCHUPPANZIGH: Please not to worry. Here!

[*He produces a torch from his pocket and 'lights' it. The light on stage dims a little, as usual, to indicate this. All relax with audible sighs of pleasure. SCHUPPANZIGH at once places his tool-bag on the Regency chair, and puts his coat and cap on top of it, concealing the fact that it is one of HAROLD'S chairs.*]

CAROL: Oh, what a relief!

BRINDSLEY [*hastily dragging the sheet over the rest of the sofa*]: Do you always travel with a torch?

SCHUPPANZIGH: Mostly, yes. It helps to see details. [*Seeing the others*] You are holding a private view?

MISS FURNIVAL: Oh no! I was just going, I'd hate to distract you.

SCHUPPANZIGH: Please not on my account, dear lady, I am not so easily distracted.

MISS FURNIVAL [*charmed*]: Oh! ...

BRINDSLEY [*yelling in his ear*]: May I present Colonel Melkett?

COLONEL [*yelling in his other ear*]: A great honour, sir!

SCHUPPANZIGH [*hanging his ear, to clear it*]: No, no, mine -- mine!

BRINDSLEY: Miss Carol Melkett!

CAROL [*scratching in his ear*]: I say: hello. So glad you got here! It's terribly kind of you to take such an interest!

SCHUPPANZIGH: Not at all. *Vous êtes très gentil.*

CAROL [*yelling*]: What would you like to drink?

SCHUPPANZIGH [*bewildered*]: A little vodka, would be beautiful!

CAROL: Of course!

BRINDSLEY: Harold Gorrige -- a neighbour of mine!

HAROLD [*shouting*]: How do? Very honoured, I'm sure.

SCHUPPANZIGH: Enchanted.

HAROLD: I must say it's a real thrill, meeting you!

BRINDSLEY: And another neighbour, Miss Furnival!

SCHUPPANZIGH: Enchanted.

MISS FURNIVAL [*hooting in his ear*]: I'm afraid we've all been taking refuge from the storm, as it were. [*Exclaiming as she holds SCHUPPANZIGH'S hand.*] Oh! It is true! They are softer! Much, much softer!

SCHUPPANZIGH [*utterly confused as she strokes his hand*]: Softer? Please?

[BRINDSLEY and HAROLD pull her away, and she subsides onto the sofa.]

BRINDSLEY: Miss Furnival, please!

CAROL [*at the drinks table*]: Darling, where's the vodka?

BRINDSLEY: It's on the table.

CAROL: No, it isn't.

BRINDSLEY: It must be!

[*Above, CLEA re-enters wearing the top half of BRINDSLEY'S pajamas and nothing else. She gets into bed, still clutching the vodka bottle and carrying a plastic toothbrush.*]

CAROL: Well, see for yourself. There's Winnie and Ginette, and Vera has quite vanished, the naughty girl!

- BRINDSLEY: She can't have done.
- SCHUPPANZIGH: Please don't concern yourselves. I am pressed for time. If I might just be shown where to go.
- BRINDSLEY: Of course. It's through the studio there. Darling, if you would just show our guest into the studio - *with his torch*.
- CAROL: What? ...
- BRINDSLEY [*sotto voce*]: *The sofa!* ... Get him out of here!
- CAROL: Oh yes! ...
- SCHUPPANZIGH [*sighting the sculpture*]: Oh! Good gracious! What an extraordinary object!
- BRINDSLEY: Oh, that's just a spare piece of my work I keep in here!
- SCHUPPANZIGH: Spare, maybe, but fascinating!
- BRINDSLEY: You really think so?
- SCHUPPANZIGH [*approaching it*]: I do! Ja!
- BRINDSLEY: Well, in that case you should see my main collection. It's next door. My fiancé will show you!
- [MISS FURNIVAL *sits on the sofa. She is now quite drunk.*]
- SCHUPPANZIGH: One amazement at a time, if you please! In this gluttonous age it is easy to get visual indigestion - hard to find visual Alka Seltzer ... Permit me to digest this first!
- BRINDSLEY: Oh, by all means ... Good, yes ... There's no hurry - no hurry at all ... Only ... [*Inspired*] Why don't you digest it *in the dark?*
- SCHUPPANZIGH: I beg your pardon?
- BRINDSLEY: You'll never believe it, sir, but I actually made that piece to be appreciated in the dark. I was working on a very interesting theory. You know how the Victorians said, 'Children should be seen and not heard'? Well, I say, 'Art should be felt and not seen.'
- SCHUPPANZIGH: Amazing.
- BRINDSLEY: Yes, isn't it. I call it my theory of Factual Tactility. If it doesn't stab you to the quick - it's not art. Look! Why don't you give me that torch, and try for yourself?
- SCHUPPANZIGH: Very well, I will!! [*He hands BRINDSLEY the torch.*]

- BRINDSLEY: Thank you!
- [*He turns off the torch and hands it to CAROL. At the same moment MISS FURNIVAL quietly lies down, her full length on the sofa.*]
- Now just stretch out your arms and feel it all over, sir. [*He steals towards the studio.*] Have a good long feel!
- [SCHUPPANZIGH *embraces the metal sculpture with a fervent clasp. He pulls at the two metal prongs.*]
- Do you see what I mean? [*Silently he opens the curtains.*]
- SCHUPPANZIGH: Amazing! ... Absolutely incredible! ... It's quite true ... Like this, the piece becomes a masterpiece at once.
- BRINDSLEY [*astorished*]: It does??
- SCHUPPANZIGH: But of course! I feel it here - and here - the two needles of man's unrest! ... Self-love and self-hate, leading to the same point! That's the meaning of the work, isn't it?
- BRINDSLEY: Of course. You've got it in one! You're obviously a great expert, sir!
- [*Quietly he pulls the sofa into the studio, bearing on it the supine MISS FURNIVAL, who waves good-bye as she disappears.*]
- SCHUPPANZIGH: Not at all. *Vous êtes très gentil* - but it is evident! ... Standing here in the dark, one can feel the vital thrust of the argument! The essential anguish! The stress and the torment of our times! It is simple but not simple-minded! Ingenious, but not ingenuous! Above all, it has real moral force! Of how many modern works can one say that, good people?
- CAROL: Oh, none, none at all really!
- SCHUPPANZIGH: I hope I do not lecture. It can be a fault with me.
- CAROL: Not at all! I could listen all night, it's so profound.
- HAROLD: Me too. Really deep!
- COLONEL: I don't know anything about this myself, sir, but it's an honour to listen to you.
- [*He starts off upstage in search of the sofa, seating himself tentatively in the air, then moving himself along in a sitting position, trying to find it with his rear end. At the same moment BRINDSLEY emerges from the studio, closes the curtains behind him, and gropes his way to*

the upstage corner where there stands a small packing case. This he carried forward, hopefully to do duty for the missing sofa. Just as he places it on the ground the travelling COLONEL sits on it, trapping BRINDSLEY'S hand beneath his weight. During the following, BRINDSLEY tries frantically to free himself.]

- SCHUPPANZIGH: *Vous êtes très gentil!*
- HAROLD: You mean to say you see all that in a bit of metal?
- SCHUPPANZIGH: A tiny bit of metal, that's the point. A miracle of compression! You want my opinion, this boy is a genius. A master of the miniature. In the space of a matchbox he can realize anything he wants — the black virginity of Chartres! The white chorale of the Acropolis! *Wunderbar!*
- CAROL: Oh how super!
- SCHUPPANZIGH: You should charge immense sums for work like this, Mr Miller. They should be very very expensive! This one, for example, how much is this?
- BRINDSLEY: Fifty —
- CAROL: Five hundred guineas!
- SCHUPPANZIGH: Ah so! Very cheap.
- HAROLD: Cheap!
- CAROL: I think so, Mr Gorrings. Well . . . so will you have it then?
- SCHUPPANZIGH: Me?
- BRINDSLEY: Darling . . . aren't you rushing things just a little? Perhaps you would like to see the rest of my work.
- SCHUPPANZIGH: Alas, I have no more time. To linger would be pleasant, but alas, I must work . . . Also, as Moses discovered, it is sufficient to glimpse milk and honey. One does not have to wolf them down!
- BRINDSLEY: Well.
- COLONEL: Well . . .
- HAROLD: Well . . .
- CAROL: Well . . . Would you like it then?
- SCHUPPANZIGH: Very much.
- COLONEL [*rising*]: BRINDSLEY is freed at last! For five hundred guineas?

- SCHUPPANZIGH: Certainly — if I had it!
- HAROLD: According to the Sunday paper, you must be worth at least seventeen million pounds.
- SCHUPPANZIGH: The Sunday papers are notoriously ill-informed. According to my bank statement, I was worth one hundred pounds, eight shillings and fourpence.
- HAROLD: You mean you've gone broke?
- SCHUPPANZIGH: No. I mean I never had any more.
- COLONEL: Now look, sir, I know millionaires are supposed to be eccentric, but this is gettin' tiresome.
- CAROL: Daddy, shh! —
- SCHUPPANZIGH: Millionaires? Who do you think I am?
- COLONEL: Dammit, man! — You must know who you are!
- CAROL: Mr Bamberger, is this some kind of joke you like to play?
- SCHUPPANZIGH: Excuse me. That is not my name.
- BRINDSLEY: It isn't?
- SCHUPPANZIGH: No. My name is Schuppanzigh. Franz Schuppanzigh. Born in Weimar 1905. Student of philosophy at Heidelberg, 1934. Refugee to this country, 1938. Regular employment ever since with the London Electricity Board!
- [*All rise.*]
- CAROL: Electricity?
- MISS FURNIVAL: Electricity!
- BRINDSLEY: You mean you're not? —
- HAROLD: Of course he's not!
- SCHUPPANZIGH: But who did you imagine I was?
- HAROLD [*stirious*]: How dare you? [*He snatches the electrician's torch.*]
- SCHUPPANZIGH [*retreating before him*]: Please? —
- HAROLD: Of all the nerve, coming in here, giving us a lecture about needles and virgins, and all the time you're simply here to mend the fuses!
- COLONEL: I agree with you, sir. It's monstrous!
- SCHUPPANZIGH [*bewildered*]: It is?
- [*The COLONEL takes the torch and shines it pitilessly in the man's face.*]

COLONEL: You come in here, a public servant, and proceed to harangue your employers, unasked and uninvited.

SCHUPPANZIGH [*bewildered*]: Excuse me. But I *was* invited.

COLONEL: Don't answer back. In my day you would have been fired on the spot for impertinence.

CAROL: Daddy's absolutely right! Ever since the Beatles, the lower classes think they can behave exactly as they want.

COLONEL [*handing the torch to BRINDSLEY*]: Miller, will you kindly show this feller his work?

BRINDSLEY: The mains are in the cellar. There's a trap-door. [*Indicating*] Do you mind?

SCHUPPANZIGH [*snatching the torch furiously*]: Why should I mind? It's why I came, after all! [*He takes his coat, cap and bag off HAROLD's Regency chair . . . Seizing it*] Now there is a really beautiful chair!

[BRINDSLEY starts at the chair aghast - and in a twinkling seats himself in it to conceal it.]

BRINDSLEY [*exasperated*]: Why don't you just go into the cellar?

SCHUPPANZIGH: *How?* Where is it?

BRINDSLEY [*to CAROL*]: Darling, will you open the trap, please.

CAROL: Me? [*Understanding - as he indicates the chair*] Oh - yes! [*She kneels and struggles to open the trap.*]

COLONEL [*to BRINDSLEY*]: Well, I must say, that's very gallant of you, Miller.

BRINDSLEY: I've got a sudden touch of lumbago, sir. It often afflicts me after long spells in the dark.

CAROL [*very sympathetic*]: Oh, darling! Has it come back?

BRINDSLEY: I'm afraid it has, my sweet.

HAROLD [*opening the trap*]: Here, let me. I'm not as frail as our wilting friend. [*To SCHUPPANZIGH*] Well, down you go, you!

SCHUPPANZIGH [*struggling*]: So. Farewell. I leave the light of Art for the dark of Science.

HAROLD: Let's have a little less of your lip, shall we?

SCHUPPANZIGH: Excuse me.

[SCHUPPANZIGH descends through the trap, taking the torch with

him. HAROLD slams the trap-door down irritably after him, and of course the lights immediately come up full. There is a long pause. All stand about embarrassed. Suddenly they hear the noise of MISS FURNIVAL singing 'Rock of Ages' in a high drunken voice from behind the curtain. Above, attracted by the noise of the slam, CLEA gets out of bed, still clutching the vodka and toothbrush, opens the door, and stands at the top of the stairs listening.]

BRINDSLEY: None of this evening is happening.

CAROL: Cheer up, darling. In a few minutes everything will be all right. Mr Bamberger will arrive in the light - he'll adore your work and give you twenty thousand pounds for your whole collection.

BRINDSLEY [*sarcastic*]: Oh, yes!

CAROL: Then we can buy a super Georgian house and live what's laughingly known as happily ever after. I want to leave this place just as soon as we're married.

[CLEA hears this. Her mouth opens wide.]

BRINDSLEY [*nervously*]: Sssh!

CAROL: Why? I don't want to live in a slum for our first couple of years - like other newlyweds.

BRINDSLEY: Sssh! Sssh! . . .

CAROL: What's the matter with you?

BRINDSLEY: The gods listen, darling. They're given me a terrible night so far. They may do worse.

CAROL [*cooing*]: I know, darling. You've had a filthy evening. Poor babykins. But I'll fight them with you. I don't care a fig for those naughty old Goddipegs! [*Looking up*] Do you hear? Not a single little fig!

[CLEA aims at the voice and sends a jet of vodka splashing down over

CAROL.]

Ahh!!!

BRINDSLEY: What is it?

CAROL: It's raining!

BRINDSLEY: Don't be ridiculous.

CAROL: I'm all wet!

BRINDSLEY: How can you be?

[CLEA throws vodka over a wider area. HAROLD gets it.]

HAROLD: Hey, what's going on?

BRINDSLEY: What?

COLONEL: What the devil's the matter with you all? What are you hollerin' for? [He gets a slug of vodka in the face.] Ahh!!

BRINDSLEY [inspired]: It's a leak — the water mains must have gone now.

HAROLD: Oh good God!

BRINDSLEY: It must be!

[Mischievously, CLEA raps her bottle loudly on the top stair. There is a terrified silence. All look up.]

HAROLD: Don't say there's someone else here.

BRINDSLEY: Good Lord!

COLONEL: Who's there?

[Silence from above.]

Come on! I know you're there!

BRINDSLEY [improvising wildly]: I — I bet you it's Mrs Punnet.

[CLEA looks astonished.]

COLONEL: Who?

BRINDSLEY [for CLEA's benefit]: Mrs Punnet. My cleaning woman.

HAROLD: Cleaning woman?

BRINDSLEY: She does for me on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

CAROL: Well, what would she be doing here now?

BRINDSLEY: I've just remembered — she rang up and said she'd look in about six to tidy up the place.

COLONEL: Damn it, man, it's almost eleven.

HAROLD: She's not that conscientious. She couldn't be!

CAROL: Not these days!

COLONEL: Well, we'll soon see. [Calling up] Mrs Punnet?

BRINDSLEY [desperately]: Don't interrupt her, sir. She doesn't like to be disturbed when she's working. Why don't we just leave her to potter around upstairs with her duster?

COLONEL: Let us first just see if it's her. Is that you, Mrs Punnet? ...

[CLEA keeps still.]

COLONEL [roaring]: MRS PUNNET!

CLEA [deciding on a cockney voice of great antiquity]: 'Allo! Yes?

BRINDSLEY [weakly]: It is. Good heavens, Mrs Punnet, what on earth are you doing up there?

CLEA: I'm just giving your bedroom a bit of a tidy, sir.

BRINDSLEY: At this time of night?

[The mischief in CLEA begins to take over.]

CLEA: Better late than never, sir, as they say. I know how you like your bedroom to be nice and inviting when you're giving one of your parties.

BRINDSLEY: Yes, yes, yes, of course ...

COLONEL: When did you come, madam?

CLEA: Just a few minutes ago, sir. I didn't like to disturb you, so I come on up 'ere.

HAROLD: Was it you pouring all that water on us, then?

CLEA: Water? Good 'eavens, I must have upset something. It's as black as Newgate's Knocker up 'ere. Are you playing one of your saucy games, Mr Miller?

BRINDSLEY: No, Mrs Punnet. We've had a fuse. It's all over the house.

CLEA: Oh! A fuse! I thought it might be one of them saucy games in the dark, sir: Sardines or Piccadilly. The kind that end in a general squeeze-up. I know you're rather partial to kinky games, Mr Miller, so I just wondered. [She starts to come down the stairs.]

BRINDSLEY [distinctly]: It is a fuse, Mrs Punnet. The man's mending it now. The lights will be on *any minute!*

CLEA: Well, that'll be a relief for you, won't it? [She dashes the vodka accurately in his face, passes him by and comes into the room.]

BRINDSLEY: Yes, of course. Now why don't you just go on home?

CLEA: I'm sorry I couldn't come before, sir. I was delayed, you see. My Rosie's been taken queer again.

BRINDSLEY: I quite understand! [*He gropes around trying to hide her, but she continuously evades him.*]

CLEA [*relentlessly*]: It's her tummy. There's a lump under her belly button the size of a grapefruit.

HAROLD: Oh, how nasty!

CLEA: Horrid. Poor little Rosie. I said to her this evening, I said, 'There's no good your being mulish, my girl. You're going to the hospital first thing tomorrow morning and getting yourself ultra-violated!'

BRINDSLEY: Well, hadn't you better be getting back to poor little Rosie! She must need you, surely? - And there's really nothing you can do here tonight.

CLEA [*meaningfully*]: Are you sure of that, sir?

BRINDSLEY: Positive, thank you.

[*They are close now.*]

CLEA: I mean, I know what this place can be like after one of your evenings. A gypsy caravan isn't in it. Gin bottles all over the floor! Bras and panties in the sink! And God knows what in the -

[BRINDSLEY muzzles her with his hand. She bites it hard, and he drops to his knees in silent agony.]

COLONEL: Please watch what you say, madam. You don't know it, but you're in the presence of Mr Miller's fiancée.

CLEA: Fiancée?

COLONEL: Yes, and I am her father.

CLEA: Well, I never . . . Oh, Mr Miller! I'm so 'appy for you! . . . Fiancée! Oh sir!, And you never told me!

BRINDSLEY: I was keeping it a surprise.

CLEA: Well, I never! Oh, how lovely! . . . May I kiss you sir, please?

BRINDSLEY [*on his knees*]: Well, yes, yes, of course . . .

[*CLEA gropes for his ear, finds it and twists it.*]

CLEA: Oh sir, I'm so pleased for you! And for you, Miss, too!

CAROL: Thank you.

CLEA [*to COLONEL MELKETT*]: And for you, sir.

COLONEL: Thank you.

CLEA: You must be Miss Clea's father.

COLONEL: Miss Clea? I don't understand.

[*Triumphantly she sticks out her tongue at BRINDSLEY, who collapses his length on the floor, face down, in a gesture of total surrender. For him it is the end. The evening can hold no further disasters for him.*]

CLEA [*to CAROL*]: Well, I never! So you've got him at last! Well done, Miss Clea! I never thought you would - not after four years . . .

BRINDSLEY: No - no - no - no . . .

CLEA: Forgive me, sir, if I'm speaking out of turn, but you must admit four years is a long time to be courting one woman. Four days is stretching it a bit nowadays!

BRINDSLEY [*weakly*]: Mrs Punnet, please!

CAROL: Four years!

CLEA: Well, yes, dear. It's been all of that and a bit more really, hasn't it? [*In a stage whisper*] And of course it's just in time. It was getting a bit prominent, your little bun in the oven.

[*CAROL screeches with disgust. BRINDSLEY covers his ears.*]

Oh, Miss, I don't mean that's why he popped the question. Of course it's not. He's always been stuck on you. He told me so, not one week ago, in this room. [*Sentimentally*] 'Mrs Punnet,' he says, 'Mrs Punnet, as far as I'm concerned you can keep the rest of them - Miss Clea will always be on top of the heap for me.' 'Oh,' I says, 'then what about that debutante bit, Carol, the one's you're always telling me about?' 'Oh, 'er,' he says, 'she's just a bit of Knightsbridge candyfloss. A couple of licks and you've 'ad 'er.'

[*There is a long pause. CLEA is now sitting on the table, swinging her vodka bottle in absolute command of the situation.*]

COLONEL [*Sainily; at last grappling with the situation*]: Did you say four years, madam?

CLEA [*in her own voice, quiet*]: Yes, Colonel. Four years, in this room.

HAROLD: I know that voice. It's Clea!

MISS FURNIVAL [*surprised*]: Clea!

CAROL [*horrified*]: Clea!

BRINDSLEY [*unconvincingly*]: Clea!
 CLEA: Surprised, Brin?
 CAROL [*understanding*]: Clea! . . .
 COLONEL: I don't understand anything that's going on in this room!
 CLEA: I know. It is a very odd room, isn't it? It's like a magic dark room, where everything happens the wrong way round. Rain falls indoors, the Daily comes at night, and turns in a second from a nice maid into nasty mistress.
 BRINDSLEY: Be quiet, Clea!
 CLEA: At last! One real word of protest! Having you finished lying, then? Have you eaten the last crumb of humble pie? Oh you coward, you bloody coward! Just because you didn't want to marry me, did you have to settle for this lot?
 CAROL: Marry!
 COLONEL: Marry?
 CLEA: Four years of meaning to end in this triviality! Miss Laughingly-Known-As and her Daddipegs!
 CAROL: Stop her! She's disgusting!
 COLONEL: How can I, for God's sake?
 CAROL: Well, where's all that bloody resource you keep talking about?
 [*The COLONEL goes to her but takes CLEA's hand by mistake.*]
 COLONEL: Now calm down, Dumpling. Keep your head . . . There - hold my hand, that's it, now Daddy's here. Everything is under control. All right?
 CLEA: Are you sure that is your daughter's hand you're holding, Colonel?
 COLONEL: What? Carol, isn't this your hand?
 CAROL: No.
 CLEA: You must have lived with your daughter for well over twenty years, Colonel. What remarkable use you've made of your eyes.
 [*There is another pause. The COLONEL moves away in embarrassment.*]
 CLEA [*wickedly*]: All right! Kinky game time! . . . Let's all play Guess the Hand.

HAROLD: Oh good God!
 CLEA: Or would you rather Guess the Lips, Harold?
 CAROL: How disgusting!
 CLEA: Well, that's me, dear. [*CAROL's accent*] I'm Queen Disgusting! [*She seizes CAROL's hand and puts it into HAROLD'S.*] Who's that?
 CAROL: I don't know.
 CLEA: Guess.
 CAROL: I don't know, and I don't care.
 CLEA: Oh go on. Have a go!
 CAROL: It's Brin, of course: You can't trick me like that! It's Brindsley's stupid hand.
 HAROLD: I'm afraid you're wrong. It's me.
 CAROL [*struggling*]: It's not. You're lying.
 HAROLD [*holding on*]: I'm not. I don't lie.
 CAROL: You're lying! . . . You're lying!
 HAROLD: I'm not.
 [*CAROL breaks away and blunders onstage. She is becoming hysterical.*]
 CLEA: You try it, Harold. Take the hand on your right.
 HAROLD: I'm not playing. It's a bloody silly game.
 CLEA: Go on . . . [*She seizes his hand and puts it into BRINDSLEY'S.*] Well?
 HAROLD: It's Brin.
 BRINDSLEY: Yes.
 CLEA: Well done! [*She sits on the low stool.*]
 CAROL [*outraged*]: How does he know that? How does he know your hand and I don't?
 BRINDSLEY: Calm down, Carol.
 CAROL: Answer me! I want to know!
 BRINDSLEY: Stop it!
 CAROL: I won't!
 BRINDSLEY: You're getting hysterical!
 CAROL: Leave me alone! I want to go home.
 [*And suddenly MISS FURNIVAL gives a sharp short scream and blunders out through the curtains.*]

MISS FURNIVAL: Prams! Prams! Prams – in the supermarket! . . .

[*They all freeze. She is evidently out of control in a world of her own fears. She speaks quickly and strangely.*]

All those hideous wire prams full of babies and bottles – ‘Cornflakes over there’ is all they say – and then they leave you to yourself. Biscuits over there – cat food over there – fish cakes over there – Airwick over there! Pink stamps, green stamps, free balloons – television dinners – pay as you go out – oh, Daddy, it’s awful! . . . And then the Godless ones, the heathens in their leather jackets – laughing me to scorn! But not for long. Oh, no! Who shall stand when He appeareth? He’ll strike them from their motor-cycles! He’ll dash their helmets to the ground! Yes, verily, I say unto thee – there shall be an end of gasoline! An end to cigarette puffing and jostling with hips . . . Keep off . . . Keep off! Keep off! . . .

[*She runs drunkenly across the room and collides with HAROLD.*]

HAROLD: Come on, Ferny, I think it’s time we went home.

MISS FURNIVAL [*pulling herself together*]: Yes. You’re quite right . . . [*With an attempt at grandeur*] I’m sorry I can’t stay any longer. Mr Miller; but your millionaire is unpardonably late. So typical of modern manners . . . Express my regrets, if you please.

BRINDSLEY: Certainly.

[*Leaning heavily on HAROLD’S arm she leaves the room. He shuts the door after them.*]

Thank you, Clea. Thank you very much.

CLEA: Any time.

BRINDSLEY: You had no right.

CLEA: No?

BRINDSLEY: You walked out on me. [*He joins her on the low stool.*]

CLEA: Is that what I did?

BRINDSLEY: You said you never wanted to see me again.

CLEA: I never saw you at all – how could you be walked out on? You should *live* in the dark, Brindsley. It’s your natural element.

BRINDSLEY: Whatever that means.

CLEA: It means you don’t really want to be seen. Why is that,

Brindsley? Do you think if someone really saw you, they would never love you?

BRINDSLEY: Oh, go away.

CLEA: I want to know.

BRINDSLEY: Yes, you always want to know. Pick-pick-pick away! Why is *that*, Clea? Have you ever thought why you need to do it? Well?

CLEA: Perhaps because I care about you.

BRINDSLEY: Perhaps there’s nothing to care about. Just a fake artist.

CLEA: Stop pitying yourself. It’s always your *vice*. I told you when I met you: you could either be a good artist, or a chic fake. You didn’t like it, because I refused just to give you applause.

BRINDSLEY: God knows, you certainly did that!

CLEA: Is that what *she* gives you? Twenty hours of ego-massage every day?

BRINDSLEY: At least our life together isn’t the replica of the Holy Inquisition you made of ours. I didn’t have an affair with you: it was just four years of nooky with Torquemada!

CLEA: And don’t say you didn’t enjoy it!

BRINDSLEY: Enjoy it? I hated every second of it.

CLEA: Yes, I remember.

BRINDSLEY: Every second!

CLEA: I recall.

BRINDSLEY: When you left for Finland, it was the happiest day of my life.

CLEA: Mine, too!

BRINDSLEY: I sighed with relief.

CLEA: So did I.

BRINDSLEY: I went out dancing that very night.

CLEA: So did I. It was out with the lyre and the timbrcl.

BRINDSLEY: Good. Then that’s all right.

CLEA: Fine.

BRINDSLEY: Super!

CLEA: Dupet!

BRINDSLEY: It's lovely to see you looking so happy.
CLEA: You too. Radiant with self-fulfilment.

[*A pause.*]

BRINDSLEY: If you felt like this, why did you come back?

CLEA: If you felt like this, why did you tell Mrs Punnet I was still at the top of the heap?

BRINDSLEY: I never said that!

CLEA: You did.

BRINDSLEY: Never!

CLEA: You *did!*

BRINDSLEY: Of course I didn't. You invented that ten minutes ago, when you were *playing* Mrs Punnet.

CLEA: I - Oh! So I did! . . .

[*They both giggle. She falls happily against his shoulder.*]

BRINDSLEY: You know something - I'm not sure she's not right.

[*During this exchange the COLONEL and his DAUGHTER have been standing frozen with astonished anger. Now the outraged father takes over. He is very angry.*]

COLONEL: No doubt this is very funny to you two.

CLEA: It is, quite, actually.

COLONEL: I'm not so easily amused, however, madam.

BRINDSLEY: Now look, Colonel -

COLONEL: Hold your tongue, sir, I'm talking. Do you know what would have happened to a young man in my day who dared to treat a girl the way you have treated my Dumppling?

BRINDSLEY: Well, I assume, Colonel -

COLONEL: Hold your tongue, I'm talking!

CAROL: Oh, leave it, Daddy. Let's just go home.

COLONEL: In a moment, Dumppling. Kindly leave this to me.

BRINDSLEY: Look, Carol, I can explain -

CAROL: Explain what?

BRINDSLEY: It's impossible here.

COLONEL: You understand, sir.

BRINDSLEY: Carol, you don't understand.

CAROL: What the hell's there to understand? All the time you were going with me, she was in the background - that's all there is to it - What were you doing? Weighing us up? . . . Here! [*She pulls off her engagement ring.*]

BRINDSLEY: What?

CAROL: Your ring. Take the bloody thing back!

[*She throws it. It hits the COLONEL in the eye.*]

COLONEL: My eye! My damned eye!

[*CLEA starts to laugh again.*]

[*In mounting fury, clutched his eye.*] Oh very droll, madam! Very droll indeed! Laugh your fill! Miller! I asked you a question. Do you know what would have happened to a young lout like you in my day?

BRINDSLEY: Happened, sir?

COLONEL [*quietly*]: You'd have been thrashed, sir.

BRINDSLEY [*nervous*]: Thrashed -

[*The man of war begins to go after him, feeling his way in the dark - like some furious robot.*]

COLONEL: You'd have felt the mark of a father's horsewhip across your seducer's shoulders. You'd have gone down on your cad's bended knees, and begged my daughter's pardon for the insults you've offered her tonight.

BRINDSLEY [*retreating before the COLONEL's groping advance*]: Would I, sir?

COLONEL: You'd have raised your guttersnipe voice in a piteous scream for mercy and forgiveness!

[*A terrible scream is indeed heard from the hall. They freeze, listening as it comes nearer and nearer, then the door is flung open and HAROLD plunges into the room. He is wild-eyed with rage: a lit and bent taper shakes in his furious hand.*]

HAROLD: Ooooooh! You villain!

BRINDSLEY: Harold -

HAROLD: You skunky, conniving little villain!

BRINDSLEY: What's the matter?

HAROLD [*raging*]: Have you seen the state of my room? My room? My lovely room, the most elegant and cared for in this entire district? — one chair turned absolutely upside down, one chair on top of another like a Portobello junk-shop! And that's not all, is it Brindsley? Oh no, that's not the worst by a long chalk, is it Brindsley?

BRINDSLEY: Long chalk?

HAROLD: Don't play the innocent with me. I thought I had a friend living all these years. I didn't know I was living opposite a Light-fingered Lenny!

BRINDSLEY: Harold! —

HAROLD [*hysterical*]: This is my reward, isn't it? — After years of looking after you, sweeping and tidying up this place, because you're too much of a slut to do it for yourself — to have my best pieces stolen from me to impress your new girl friend and her daddy. Or did she help you?

BRINDSLEY: Harold, it was an emergency.

HAROLD: Don't talk to me: I don't want to know! I know what you think of me now . . . 'Don't tell Harold about the engagement. He's not to be trusted. He's not a friend. He's just someone to steal things from!'

BRINDSLEY: You know that's not true.

HAROLD [*shrieking — in one hysterical breath*]: I know I was the last one to know — that's what I know! I have to find it out in a room full of strangers. Me, who's listened to more of your miseries in the small hours of the morning than anyone else would put up with! All your boring talk about women, hour after hour, as if no one's got troubles but you! —

CLEA: She's getting hysterical, dear. Ignore her.

HAROLD: It's you who's going to be ignored, Clea. [*To BRINDSLEY*] As for you, all I can say about your engagement is this: you deserve each other, you and that little nit.

[*CAROL gives a shriek.*]

BRINDSLEY: Carol!

HAROLD: Oh, so you're there, are you? — Skulking in the shadows! **BRINDSLEY**: Leave her alone!

HAROLD: I'm not going to touch her. I just want my things and I'll be off. Did you hear me, Brindsley? You give me my things now, or I'll call the police.

BRINDSLEY: Don't be ridiculous.

HAROLD [*grimly*]: Item: One lyre-back Regency chair, in lacquered mahogany with ormolu inlay and appliqué work on the cushions. **BRINDSLEY**: In front of you.

[*Harold thrusts the taper at it to see it.*]

HAROLD: Ta. Item: One half-back sofa — likewise Regency — supported by claw legs and upholstered in a rich silk of bottle green to match the aforesaid chair.

BRINDSLEY: In the studio.

HAROLD: Unbelievable! Item: One Coalport vase, dated 1809, decorated on the rim with a pleasing design of daisies and ppeonies.

BRINDSLEY: On the floor.

HAROLD: Ta.

[*BRINDSLEY hands it to him.*]

Ooooh! You've even taken the flowers! I'll come back for the chair and sofa in a minute. [*Drawing himself up with all the offended dignity of which a HAROLD GORRINGE is capable.*] This is the end of our relationship, Brindsley. We won't be speaking again, I don't think.

[*He twitches his raincoat off the table. Inside it, of course, is the Buddha, which falls on the floor and smashes beyond repair. There is a terrible silence. Trying to keep his voice under control.*]

Do you know what that statue was worth? Do you? More money than you'll ever see in your whole life, even if you sell every piece of that nasty, russy rubbish. [*With the quietness of the mad*] I think I'm going to have to smash you, Brindsley.

BRINDSLEY [*nervously*]: Now steady on, Harold . . . don't be rash . . .

HAROLD: Yes, I'm very much afraid I'll have to smash you . . . Smash for smash — that's fair do's. [*He pulls one of the long metal*

prongs out of the sculpture.] Smash for smash. Smash for smash!
 [Insanely he advances on BRINDSLEY holding the prong like a sword, the taper burning in his other hand.]
 BRINDSLEY [retreating]: Stop it, Harold; You've gone mad.
 COLONEL: Well done, sir. I think it's time for the reckoning. [The COLONEL grabs the other prong and also advances.]
 BRINDSLEY [retreating from them both]: Now just a minute, Colonel. Be reasonable! ... Let's not revert to savages! ... Harold, I appeal to you - you've always had civilized instincts! Don't join the Army! ...
 CAROL [grinly advancing also]: Get him, Daddy! Get him! Get him!
 BRINDSLEY [horrified at her]: Carol!
 CAROL [malevolently]: Get him! Get him! Get him! Get ...
 BRINDSLEY: Clea!
 [CLEA leaps up and blows out the taper. Lights up.]
 COLONEL: Dammit!
 [CLEA grabs BRINDSLEY'S hand and pulls him out of danger.]
 [To CLEA] Careful, my little Dumpling. Keep out of the way.
 HAROLD [to CAROL]: Hush up, Colonel. We'll be able to hear them breathing.
 COLONEL: Clever idea! Smart tactics, sir!
 [Silence. They listen. BRINDSLEY climbs carefully onto the table and silently calls CLEA up after him. HAROLD and the COLONEL, prodding and slashing the darkness with their swords, grimly hunt their quarry. Twenty seconds. Suddenly, with a bang SCHUPPANZIGH opens the trap from below. Both men advance on it warily. The electrician disappears again below. They have almost reached it, on tiptoe, when there is another crash - this time from the hall. Someone has again tripped over the milk bottles. HAROLD and the COLONEL immediately swing round and start stalking upstage, still on tiptoe. Enter GEORG BAMBERGER. He is quite evidently a millionaire. Dressed in the Gilbertian manner, he wears a beard, an eyeglass, a frock-coat, a top hat and an orchid. He carries a large deaf aid. Bewildered, he advances into the room. Stealthily, the two armed men

stalk him upstage as he silently gropes his way downstage and passes between them.]
 BAMBERGER [speaking in a middle-aged German voice, as near to the voice of SCHUPPANZIGH as possible]: Hallo, please! Mr Miller?
 [HAROLD and the COLONEL spin round in a third direction.]
 HAROLD: Oh, it's the electrician!
 BAMBERGER: Hallo, please?
 COLONEL: What the devil are you doing up here?
 [SCHUPPANZIGH appears at the trap.]
 Have you incended the fuse?
 HAROLD: Or are you going to keep us in the dark all night?
 SCHUPPANZIGH: Don't worry. The fuse is mended.
 [He comes out of the trap. BAMBERGER goes round the stage, right.]
 HAROLD: Thank God for that.
 BAMBERGER [still groping around]: Hallo, please? Mr Miller - vere are you? Vy zis darkness? Is a joke, yes?
 SCHUPPANZIGH [incensed]: Ah, no! That is not very funny, good people - just because I am a foreigner, to imitate my voice. You English can be the rudest people on earth!
 BAMBERGER [imperiously]: Mr Miller! I have come here to give attention to your sculptures!
 SCHUPPANZIGH: Gott in Himmel!
 BAMBERGER: Gott in Himmel!
 BRINDSLEY: God, it's him! Bamberger!
 CLEA: He's come!
 HAROLD: Bamberger!
 COLONEL: Bamberger!
 [They freeze. The millionaire sets off, left, towards the open trap.]
 BRINDSLEY: Don't worry. Mr Bamberger. We've had a fuse, but it's incended now.
 BAMBERGER [irritably] Mr Miller!
 CLEA: You'll have to speak up. He's deaf.
 BRINDSLEY [shouting]: Don't worry, Mr Bamberger! We've had a fuse, but it's all right now! ...

BLACK COMEDY

[*Standing on the table, he clasps CLEA happily. BAMBERGER misses the trap by inches.*]

Oh, Clea, that's true. Everything's all right now! Just in the nick of time!

[*But as he says this BAMBERGER turns and falls into the open trap-door. SCHUPPANZIGH stuns it to with his foot.*]

SCHUPPANZIGH: So! Here's now an end to your troubles! Like Jehovah in the Sacred Testament, I give you the most miraculous gift of the Creation! Light!

CLEA: Light!

BRINDSLEY: Oh, thank God. *Thank God!*

[*SCHUPPANZIGH goes to the switch,*]

HAROLD [*grimly*]: I wouldn't thank Him too soon, Brindsley, if I were you!

COLONEL: Nor would I, Brindsley, if I were you!

CAROL: Nor would I, Brinnie Winnie, if I were you!

SCHUPPANZIGH [*grandly*]: Then thank *me!* For I shall play God for this second! [*Clapping his hands*] Attend all of you. God said: 'Let there be light!' And there was, good people, suddenly! - astoundingly! - instantaneously - inconceivably - inexhaustibly - indistinguishably and eternally - LIGHT!

[*SCHUPPANZIGH, with a great flourish, flicks the light switch. Instant darkness. The turntable of the gramophone starts up again, and with an exultant crash the Sousa March falls on the audience - and blazes away in the black.*]

END



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