

Robin Maugham: The Servant. London, Davis-Poynter, 1972

Characters: Richard Merton, Sally Grant, Tony Williams, Barrett, Vera, Mabel.
The action of the play takes place in the present day.

Act 1

Scene 1

Tony's living room in Chelsea, Spring.

7 p.m.

The walls are covered with a dark-coloured paper patterned with bunches of grapes and scratched of dirt. The room is furnished with fumed oak and square armchairs upholstered in a hideous modern material. The shape of the room is good, with two long windows and a well-shaped mantelpiece. A door stage Right leads on to a small landing at the head of the stairs. The stage is empty and the door ajar. There is a dull crack of light through it.

(RICHARD MERTON comes in wearing an overcoat and carrying a briefcase. He opens the shutters and a shaft of dull evening light comes in to the room. He drags a table stage Centre, stands on it and fits an electric bulb from his pocket to the centre light. He is a pleasant looking man of about thirty, with a lean, sensitive face.)

Sally: (off) Tony... Tony

Richard: Who is it?

(SALLY GRANT enters. She is a pretty, fresh-faced girl of twenty-five)

Sally: Hello. Have I come to the wrong house?

Richard: I don't know.

Sally: The door was on the latch so I walked in. Doesn't Tony live here?

Richard: Yes, that's right.

Sally: I know you 're Richard Merton.

Richard: I take it you 're a friend of Tony's?

Sally: I'm Sally Grant. Do you mean he hasn't even told you about me? Not even that I exist?

Richard: No, He hasn't. But that's typical.

Sally: You 're so right. Anyway, he rang me from the airport and gave me this address. I thought he 'd be here by now.

Richard: Well, I haven't seen him yet. He's on his way.

Sally: I do think it's mean of him not even telling you about me.

Richard: Would you like a drink? I'm afraid all we've got is vodka and tonic.

Sally: That 'll be fine.

Richard: Ah, glasses.

(He moves the sofa from where it is to get glasses from the cupboard underneath the book case and fixes the drinks.)

Richard: Sally Grant... Of course...

Sally: Ah!

Richard: Of course he did write.

Sally: Have you ever been out there? I rather liked it myself but I've never known anyone so desperate to get back to England as Tony was, poor lamb. Do you know he very nearly accepted your offer?

Richard: My offer?

Sally: To lend him some money. You see Tony told me all about you... You were at school together, then the Army... You see, I know the lot.

Richard: Well, Tony doesn't need a loan from me now...

Sally: (looking around) How did Tony find this house?

Richard: I got it through an agent.

Sally: You got it from him?

Richard: Yes. I've only taken it for six months with an option of renewal, so if he doesn't like it he can find somewhere else.

Sally: I think it was jolly nice of you to take all that trouble for him.

Richard: It 'll be quite a job keeping it clean but he asked me to find someone to look after him, so I've got a manservant lined up.

Sally: Manservant? Good Lord! Do they still exist?

Richard: Very much so.

Sally: Anyway, I'm sure he 'll love the house.

Richard: The rooms aren't bad but the furniture's ghastly. Look.

Sally: Incidentally, Tony said I was to make absolutely sure you came out with us this evening.

Richard: I 'd love to... But I 've got some work to do, I'm afraid.

Sally: At this time of night?

Richard: We 've just brought out a novel by a young convict which is selling rather well and I've got to get through the manuscript of his second by tomorrow morning.

Sally: What if I hadn't come? Don't tell me you'd have left Tony on his own his first night back in England?

Richard: You're very kind but you certainly don't want me in the way.

Sally: You've got it all wrong I promise you. Tony will be terribly disappointed if you don't come tonight. And so will I.

Richard: I don't believe you.

Sally: Please. You must believe me. Please come.

Richard: We can both welcome Tony home but then I must get back.

Sally: Listen, this is Tony's first night in London for over five years. He 'll get plastered, won't he?

Richard: Certainly. I hope.

Sally: You're deliberately misunderstanding... Look, Tony's determined to make a big thing of tonight. Everything will seem awfully glamorous.

Richard: You don't want him to say something he may later regret?

Sally: No... I want to give him time to know me as I am. So, let's all have supper together...

(There is a knock at the front door.)

That's him. Will you? Please?

Richard: All right, Sally.

Sally: Thank you, Richard.

Richard: It may be the manservant.

Tony: (off) Hello, Richard. Sally. Are you there?

Sally: Up here.

Tony: (off) Where?

Sally: (opening door.) Here.

(TONY rushes in. He is about thirty years old. He is tanned, well-built and muscular with an attractive face, which is now radiant with happiness. His curly hair is untidily brushed back over his forehead. He is tougher and less sensitive than RICHARD, and he has more vitality.)

Tony: Sally! My darling Sally. How are you? (He flings his arms round her and kisses her affectionately.) I'm sorry I was late but the customs gave me hell. (Handing her a bottle of scent.)

Sally: Bless you, Tony.

Tony: Richard, you old bastard. It's great to see you.

(They shake hands warmly.)

What about a drink? Thank heavens you've got some. It's so marvellous to be here and to see you both again.

Richard: (raising his glass) All the best, Tony.

Sally: Welcome home. (She is nervous and ill at ease.)

Tony: You 're looking terrific.

Richard: You 're looking thinner.

Tony: It's not surprising after what I've been through. Anyway, what about you? You look at least forty. What have you been doing with yourself?

Richard: Working.

Tony: He always did. Used to drive me mad.

Sally: How do you like the house?

Tony: (Looking around. To RICHARD.) It's charming outside. But you never told me it was a morgue.

Sally: There's gratitude for you! Richard's gone to all the trouble...

Tony: Well, honestly, it could hardly be gloomier, could it? Anyhow, who's going to look after me?

Richard: Don't worry. Everything's laid on. There's a man coming round to see you. He 'll be here any minute.

Tony: A man? What kind of man?

Richard: How do I know? I just told the agency you wanted the best servant they 'd got on their books.

Tony: You've been splendid.

Sally: Yes.

Tony: (Taking up the bottle.) Let's all have another drink.

Sally: I 'll get stinking if you 're not careful.

Tony: Good. (Filling SALLY'S glass and his own.)

Richard: (Happily) That's right. Let me go thirsty while you drink. Don't even tell me you 'd invited a girlfriend.

Tony (To SALLY.) Get him!

Sally: What are your plans, now you 're back?

Tony: There's an old friend of the family who's got rather a good job lined up for me in the City. At least I hope it's all lined up. I've got to go and see him about it on Wednesday.

Richard: Have you sold the farm?

Tony: Of course I have. I'm ravenously hungry. Where's a good place to eat round here?

Sally: Where shall we take him?

Tony: No, I'm going to take you, but you must tell me where. Is there anywhere good in the King's Road? I mean really good. For six years I've had badly cooked food and atrocious wine, when I could afford it, so for God's sake let's get out and get some good English food. A fillet steak or roast beef and Yorkshire pudding!

(There is a knock downstairs.)

Oh hell!

Richard: I expect that's the servant.

Tony: Richard, do interview him for me while I wash some of this grime off.

Richard: You've got to watch this man, Sally. I've known him since he was twelve and he's never done a thing for himself that he could get somebody else to do for him.

Tony: Do you mind?

Richard: It's you that wants a servant, not me.

(Another knock.)

I can't afford one.

Sally: Of course you must see him yourself.

Tony: Well, you must both stay and give me moral support. I never know what to say on these occasions.

Sally: Honestly, Tony! Hadn't you better let him in?

Richard: Shall I go?

Tony: How do I get rid of him if he's no good?

Sally: You say that you 'll think it over and let him know.

(RICHARD opens the door. BARRETT is already standing there. There is something feline about him. He is very quiet and smooth. His age might be anything between thirty and fifty.)

Richard: Oh!

Tony: Come in.

(BARRETT comes in, looks at all three of them, sizing them up, TONY last. Moves in slightly towards TONY.)

Barrett: Mr. Williams?

Tony: Good evening.

Barrett: Good evening, sir. I learned from the agency that you were requiring a manservant.

Tony: (Embarrassed) Yes. Have a cigarette?

Barrett: No, thank you, sir. Perhaps you 'd like to see my references. (He produces two letters.)

Tony: Thanks, I would.

Barrett: And this is a letter of introduction from the agency. (He hands him a third letter.)

Sally: (to RICHARD.) Would you like to show me round the rest of the house?

Richard: Yes, I 'd love to.

Tony: Don't be long.

Richard: We won't.

(As they go out, SALLY shakes her head at TONY as if to say, 'No. Not on your life.')

Barrett: It's a nice house, if I may say so, sir.

Tony: (Who is reading the letters.) It's not bad. The walls are a bit grim.

Barrett: That could easily be altered, sir.

Tony (Reading) Not all that easily.

Barrett: Just a touch of paint, sir, and a little thought.

Tony: Do sit down. Do you mean you could do this room yourself?

Barrett: I'm sure I could, sir - if I were provided with the correct materials.

Tony: Well, that's something to know.

Barrett: It is indeed, sir.

Tony: (Looking at him.) Your references are pretty good.

Barrett: I think so, sir.

Tony: Would you like to work here? Do sit down, please.

Barrett: Excuse me asking, sir, but are you a single gentleman?

Tony: Very single.

Barrett: You live here alone?

Tony: I've only this moment arrived. But I shall be living here alone.

Barrett: Then there would be no other servants I presume, sir?

Tony: None.

Barrett: You would want me to live in?

Tony: Yes.

Barrett: And I presume you would require me to run the establishment?

Tony: It's not all that much to run.

Barrett: Precisely, sir. I only wanted to ascertain your exact requirements. You would wish me to valet you, cook and clean the house.

Tony: Look, Barrett, I 'll tell you the form as I see it. I'm a bachelor. I 'll be here in London most of the week and go to the country most weekends. I 'll have people in

to drinks quite often and to meals now and then. If you find the work gets too much for you, you must come and tell me. I don't want any fuss. If you've forgotten to get in any food, all right, I'll go out to a restaurant. If all the lights fail, all right, I'll go and live in an Hotel. I really don't give a damn what happens so long as I'm not bothered about it. Understand?

Barrett: Exactly, sir. The catering, in fact, would be entirely in my hands?

Tony: Everything would be in your hands. Your references say you're an excellent cook. Fine. When I want lunch for three I shall say 'lunch for three' and expect a good lunch. What food you produce and where you buy it will be entirely your own concern.

Barrett: If you'll excuse me saying so, sir, there's the question of expense.

Tony: So long as you're reasonable, I shan't complain.

Barrett: I think you can leave that to me, sir.

Tony: You'll take the job?

Barrett: If you're satisfied that I can help you, sir.

Tony: I think we'll get on all right.

Barrett: The question of salary, sir.

Tony: I'd completely forgotten. What were you getting in your last place?

Barrett: You'll find that the letter from the agency gives a note of my previous earnings.

(TONY glances at the letter.)

Tony: What about the same as before? (Silence) Plus two guineas.

Barrett: That of course would be net, sir.

Tony: What do you mean by net?

Barrett: I would not be paying any income tax, sir.

Tony: Why not?

Barrett: Because I don't believe in it, sir.

Tony: All right. When can you start work? The sooner the better from my point of view.

Barrett: I could move my things in tomorrow morning, if that would suit you.

Tony: Fine. I've only just taken the house, so I don't suppose you'll find much in the way of household stuff. Buy what you need and don't fuss me about. That's the one rule I want you to remember. Don't fuss.

Barrett: I'll do my best to see you're comfortable, sir.

Tony: That's splendid. Well, I'll see you tomorrow morning then. Goodnight, Barrett.

Barrett: Goodnight, sir.

(BARRETT goes out. We hear footsteps down the stairs. A door slams. Then a door on the same level opening and shutting. TONY gulps down his drink. He is pouring himself out another as SALLY comes in.)

Sally: Did you take him on?

Tony: Yes. I thought I might as well give him a try.

Sally: Oh.

Tony: Oh what?

Sally: He just looked a bit strange to me, but I daresay he 'll work out all right.

Tony: (Lightly) I 'll get rid of him pretty quick if he doesn't.

(They stand in silence, looking at each other.)

Well?

Sally: Well?

Tony: You 're just the same.

Sally: Why shouldn't I be?

Tony: I don't know. Just too good to be true, I suppose.

Sally: And here I am.

Tony: And here you are. I thought I 'd just rot away there for the rest of my life.
Where's Richard?

Sally: He went out to a phone box to book a table.

Tony: Do you like him?

Sally: Yes. You know, he's exactly what I expected.

Tony: I was afraid you wouldn't be here when I got back. I thought you 'd have gone abroad again or got married or something.

Sally: No. But you must have known...

Tony: I never thought he 'd leave me any money.

Sally: Why? Didn't you get on with him?

Tony: I suppose I was never the kind of son he wanted. No, I never thought he 'd leave me a penny. Oh Sally, there's so much I've got to say to you.

Sally: Don't say it tonight.

Tony: Why not?

Sally: Just for tonight, let's not be serious. It's your first night back.

Tony: You 're not keeping anything from me, are you?

Sally: No. It's not that.

Tony: You wouldn't lie to me, would you, just because it's my first night home?

Sally: I promise.

Tony: Then may I kiss you? Not a bit seriously?

(They embrace.)

Richard: (As he comes in.) Did you take on that extraordinary character?

Tony: Yes.

Richard: I wonder where he sprang from.

Tony: Birmingham to judge by his references.

Richard: Well, I suppose you know best.

Tony: He's better than nothing.

Richard: I expect that's what his mother thought. Well, anyway - I give you a toast. To Number 7, Benson Street.

Tony: (raising his glass.) And to my new servant.

(They drink, as:

THE LIGHTS FADE.)

Scene 2

Tony's bedroom.

Early evening.

A fortnight later.

(BARRETT'S touch is already apparent in the bedroom. The light pastel-coloured curtains are obviously new, and so are the chair covers. TONY is lying in bed, reading a magazine. He hears a noise and looks up.)

Tony: Is that you, Barrett?

Barrett: (off) Yes, Mr. Tony.

Tony: Come here a minute, will you?

(BARRETT comes into the room. He is wearing a well-cut white coat and has a carrier bag in his hand and several parcels.)

Barrett: How are you feeling, sir?

Tony: Oh, not so bad, thank you, Barrett.

Barrett: May I suggest a fresh hot water bottle, sir?

Tony: Thank you. That's a good idea. (Pulling old bottle out of bed.)

Barrett: You 're looking a little better if I may say so, sir. Not entirely your old self as yet, but distinctly better than yesterday. No doubt the sudden change of climate was responsible for the illness.

Tony: I think I'm feeling better, Barrett. As a matter of fact, I may get up later on and go out this evening.

Barrett: I shouldn't do that, sir. The evening air is the most treacherous and it might set you back again.

Tony: Don't fuss, Barrett.

Barrett: I was going to make a fricassee of chicken followed by some Macedonian figs.

Tony: Oh... Um... What have you got there?

Barrett: A few small purchases for the house. Would you care to see?

Tony: Yes, let's have a look. (He clears a space on the bed.)

Barrett: This is a curtain fabric that I was able to pick up rather reasonably from an establishment I know in the King's Road. I thought it might look well in the drawing room, sir, if you agree.

Tony: Barrett, I've told you, I leave all that entirely to you. Just see to it. Find someone to get the stuff made up and buy anything else you think you need to make the place look a bit decent.

Barrett: I can do these myself, sir, seeing that we have a sewing machine. I've bought lining material and I 'll use the existing curtain rings. It's quite a simple job.

Tony: If you're sure you don't mind doing it.

Barrett: And this, sir, is a lampshade I took the liberty of buying for your bedside lamp. I think you 'll find that it looks rather well here. May I put it on?

Tony: Yes, do. Thank you, Barrett.

Barrett: (Unscrewing bulb.) Oh, I omitted to say, sir, that Miss Grant telephoned. She's on her way now to visit you.

Tony: Is she? Good. In that case you can make tea when she arrives. Did you buy anything to eat?

Barrett: I bought some muffins. They 're very difficult to get these days, sir. In fact, I believe there's only one shop in London that supplies them. Then I bought some rich tea biscuits and a plain sponge cake for Miss Grant. I thought she would prefer it.

Tony: Barrett, you 're marvellous. I love muffins. How did you know?

Barrett: Speaking for myself, sir, I know that it would be the simple pleasures like that which I should have missed the most if I 'd been in a country like Africa for any length of time.

Tony: Do you need any more money yet?

Barrett: No, thank you, sir. I may say, sir, that I am very careful with my shopping.

Tony: Just let me know when you want some more.

Barrett: Oh, I almost forgot, sir. Here's your Evening Standard.

Tony: Thank you, Barrett.

Barrett: If you 'd like to let me know which papers you 'd like delivered regularly, I 'll place an order with the newsagent in Royal Hospital Road. Is there anything else, sir, at the moment?

Tony: Pass me that pullover, will you?

Barrett: Certainly, sir. (He is helping TONY on with it as the knocker is heard.)

Tony: Thank you, Barrett.

Barrett: That will be Miss Grant. If that will be all, sir, I 'll her in and put a kettle on.

Tony: Just pass me that comb, will you?

Barrett: Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

Tony: Thank you, Barrett.

(BARRETT goes out. TONY combs his hair quickly. Re-enter BARRETT with SALLY.)

Barrett: Miss Grant, sir. (He goes out.)

Tony: Hello, darling.

Sally: How are you feeling?

Tony: Not so bad. How are you?

Sally: Oh, I'm all right. What can I do to help? Is there anything you need?

Tony: No, I don't think so, thanks.

Sally: Barrett's looking after you all right?

Tony: He's marvellous. I've never been so well looked after since... Oh, I don't know. Not for ages anyway. I've been very lucky. To think that I took the first man who applied for the job and he turned out so well. I'm glad you came, Sally.

Sally: I can't stay, actually. My boss sent me out to an architect's office in Sloane Street and I've got to be there at four, but I just thought I'd come in and say hello.

Tony: Hello.

(They kiss.)

I'm sorry I had to call off last night. We 'll make up for it when I'm fit again.

Sally: Did you get the flowers?

Tony: What flowers?

Sally: Oh, Tony, honestly!

Tony: You mean you sent me some flowers? I never got any.

Sally: Darling, really. It's bad enough having them stuck out there on the landing, but you don't have to pretend you never got them.

Tony: On the landing! I thought those were some flowers Barrett had bought. Are you sure they 're the same ones?

Sally: Well, they 're blue irises.

Tony: We 'd better find out. (He rings the bell. A short silence.) How's the job going?

Sally: Oh, it's all right. At least my boss seems to think so. Heard anything from Richard in New York?

Tony: Yes, I had a postcard.

(There is a knock at the door.)

Tony: Come in, Barrett.

Barrett: You rang, sir?

Tony: Yes, Barrett. Miss Grant tells me she sent some flowers. Some blue irises.

Barrett: That is so, sir.

Tony: You never told me.

Barrett: Pardon me, sir, but I thought I did.

Tony: You certainly didn't.

Barrett: Then I'm sorry, sir.

Tony: Well, where are they?

Barrett: They 're on the landing.

Sally: Why did you put them there?

Barrett: I thought that was a suitable place for them.

Sally: Let's see them, could we?

(BARRETT looks at TONY.)

Tony: Go and get them, Barrett.

(BARRETT walks from the room. TONY waits until the door closes before speaking.)

Tony: Sally, I think you 're being unreasonable, I really do.

Sally: (Incredulous) You what?

Tony: He's been so wonderful. Honestly. He's done absolutely everything. He's a man who can really take charge. I've left all the household things to him and I know I don 't have to worry about anything myself. It 'll all be done.

Sally: I hope you 're right, but he's only been here a fortnight.

Tony: You can tell a lot in two weeks.

Sally: You don't really believe he forgot, do you?

Tony: Of course he did. And he's apologised. What more do you want?

(BARRETT comes back with the flowers.)

Barrett: These are the irises, sir.

Tony: Thank you, Barrett.

Sally: Where would you like them? Over there? Or here?

Barrett: I'm afraid we can't allow flowers in our patient's room, can we, sir?

(To SALLY'S surprise, TONY says nothing.)

Sally: (trying to make her voice sound calm.) I don't think flowers can do any harm by day.

Barrett: I'm afraid that unless the doctor gives his permission, I think it would be best if they go back on the landing.

Sally: Put that vase down.

(BARRETT looks at TONY.)

Tony: Put it down, Barrett.

(BARRETT obeys and walks out.)

Sally: That's incredible.

Tony: I hope he's not too angry. If he goes it 'll be a hell of a drag. I 'd better have a word with him.

Sally: Darling, surely you can leave that until after I've gone? I can only stay five minutes anyway.

Tony: I meant after you've gone. It's no use talking to him while you 're here.

Sally: Well perhaps I 'd better be going now anyway.

Tony: Oh, Sally, no! I didn't mean it like that. I just meant that, well, he's a damn good servant and I don't want to lose him. He's sort of... I don't know. Please sit down again and talk to me. I haven't seen you properly for ages. It's almost three days. How's the job going?

Sally: You asked me that before.

Tony: Yes, but you haven't really told me what it's like. What you do all day. It's a pity you can't stay a bit. There's so much I want to talk to you about. I 'll tell you what - why don't you come back this evening and have a meal? Barrett will cook something delicious for us.

Sally: I can't this evening. My parents are having some people in to dinner.

Tony: Well, let's do it tomorrow then.

Sally: I 'd love to.

Tony: A champagne supper for two in the bedroom. It sounds like a hotel, doesn't it?

Sally: But you won't still be in bed tomorrow?

Tony: I don't know. I may get up. See how I feel when the time comes.

Sally: But isn't it tomorrow morning you've got the interview for that job?

Tony: Oh yes, I'm glad you mentioned that. I must ring them up and cry off.

Sally: Tony, you 're not that ill.

Tony: Oh, I don't know. There's not much point in going for a thing like that if you 're not absolutely on top of your form. I 'll see.

Sally: Anyway, what about the week-end?

Tony: Week-end?

Sally: Aren't we supposed to be going to see your relations?

Tony: Yes, I hadn't forgotten. Throwing you to the wolves.

Sally: Are they as bad as that?

Tony: Not really. They 'll love you.

(A knock.)

Come in, Barrett.

Barrett: The hot-water bottle, sir.

Tony: Thank you, Barrett.

Barrett: Tea will be ready in just a few minutes, sir.

Tony: Oh sorry, Barrett. I should have told you. Miss Grant won't be staying for tea. She has to go.

Barrett: Very good, sir. (Going)

Sally: Barrett.

Barrett: Yes, Miss Grant.

Sally: (Very hesitant.) Barrett, what do you think? (Almost challenging him.) Don't you think Mr. Tony

will be able to get up tomorrow morning?

Barrett: These things can't be hurried, Miss.

Sally: But Mr. Tony has a very important appointment in the city tomorrow. (to TONY.) I 'll tell you what, I 'll come and pick you up in my car and...

Barrett: (interrupting) I don't think that would be wise, Miss, going from one temperature into another.

Tony: Barrett's quite right, darling. I can easily fix another appointment with him next week.

Sally: Goodbye, Tony, I 'll see you tomorrow. (SALLY goes out abruptly. TONY, puzzled, looks at BARRETT.)

Barrett: Let me arrange your pillows a little more comfortably, sir.

(TONY leans forward and BARRETT starts plumping his pillows as the -

(LIGHTS FADE.)

Scene 3

Tony's living room.

10 p.m.

Four months later.

The room has been transformed. The walls have been painted a smooth white. The sofa and the chairs have been upholstered with a pleasant yellow chintz which blends with the tawny curtains. Tall vases of flowers, beautifully arranged, stand on the tables. (The flats can be reversed)

(Dim light outside but no other light. Enter BARRETT. Bright light in the doorway behind him. Puts tray down on table by armchair. Switches on standard lamp. Pours out coffee. Switches on bracket lights. He draws the curtains. He hears TONY outside and opens the door. TONY comes in and sits in armchair. He sips coffee while BARRETT pierces and lights a cigar for him.)

Barrett: I trust the coffee is to your liking, sir?

Tony: Splendid.

Barrett: I took the liberty of adding a touch of mustard and a pinch of salt. I've always been told it makes all the difference.

Tony: You were told right.

Barrett: You know, sir, I'm sometimes afraid to make any innovation in our routine. I don't want to put myself forward.

Tony: You 're doing fine, Barrett.

Barrett: I wouldn't like to step out of my place.

Tony: You don't have to worry.

Barrett: It would disturb me if I felt I was going beyond the mark .

Tony: Crap.

Barrett: A liqueur, sir? I can recommend the yellow Chartreuse.

Tony: I 'll have some brandy.

Barrett: Very well, sir.

(He goes to the cupboard and carefully withdraws a balloon and a bottle of brandy.)

Tony: You might put out the drink tray and some ice. Miss Grant and Mr. Merton are coming round.

Barrett: What about meals tomorrow, sir?

Tony: What is tomorrow?

Barrett: Wednesday, sir.

Tony: I 'll be out to lunch and there 'll be four to dinner. You might make another chocolate soufflé. It was delicious last night. The rest I leave to you.

Barrett: A fondue, perhaps?

Tony: Fine.

Barrett: And an avocado ice-cream as a final dish?

Tony: I leave it all to you.

Barrett: I think an avocado ice-cream might be a little more original than a soufflé - if I may suggest it, sir.

Tony: You can. Most surely.

Barrett: (obsequiously) May I speak to you for a moment, sir?

Tony: Certainly.

Barrett: I do my best, sir. I really have tried in this position - as perhaps you've noticed. But I'm afraid I must warn you, sir, that I may soon have to give notice.

Tony: What? Why, for heaven's sake?

Barrett: The work's too much for me.

Tony: Why didn't you say so?

Barrett: I didn't like to, sir.

Tony: I told you to let me know if you had any complaints.

Barrett: It was all right at first. And you were very considerate, if I may say so, sir, while I was getting the house ship-shape. But now that it's done, sir, and you've started entertaining, the work is more than one pair of hands can do.

Tony: We 'll get a daily woman in to help you.

Barrett: Perhaps you 'd prefer to find someone else.

Tony: Certainly not.

Barrett: Perhaps you 'd find someone whose work was more satisfactory.

Tony: Really, Barrett, you 're mad. Surely you realise how pleased I've been with all you've done.

Barrett: You've never said so, sir.

Tony: I thought you knew. You've changed the entire house. You look after me superbly. I've never been so comfortable in my life. All that week when I was in bed, you looked after me far better than any nurse could have done.

Barrett: Thank you, sir.

Tony: So, stop all this nonsense about leaving. Unless you 're not happy here or something?

Barrett: No, sir. If I had someone to help me with the work I 'd find the position completely satisfactory.

Tony: Good. We 'll find you a daily. We 'll fix it all up in the morning.

Barrett: If I may say so, that would not be entirely satisfactory .

Tony: Why not?

Barrett: You see, sir, I don't expect you realise how seldom I can get out in the evenings. I'm at work from eight in the morning sometimes until eleven or twelve at night when you have guests.

Tony: Barrett, I've been a fool. It simply never occurred to me. Besides, I did ask you to let me know if you had any complaints.

Barrett: I didn't like to disturb you, sir.

Tony: You 're an artist of comfort, Barrett. And I thought you rather enjoyed it.

Barrett: I like to make you comfortable.

Tony: So, what's the solution?

Barrett: I hope you don't mind my suggesting it, sir. But my sister's daughter has come to London from Birmingham. She's looking for a situation.

Tony: That's a splendid idea.

Barrett: She's a hard-working girl, and I think you would find her work satisfactory.

Tony: Would she live in?

Barrett: As you know, sir, there's a spare room in the basement. Since she's inexperienced, I don't suppose she would expect high wages if given her board and lodging.

Tony: You let me know what I ought to pay her and I 'll pay it .

Barrett: I 'd rather you saw her first, sir.

Tony: You know her. You think she's suitable. That's good enough for me. Get hold of her in the morning, will you?

Barrett: Yes, sir. I'm sure you won't be disappointed.

(He pours TONY more coffee.)

Tony: And Barrett.

Barrett: Sir?

Tony: Next time you 're worried about anything, just let me know.

Barrett: Thank you, sir.

Tony: I really can't be sufficiently grateful to you.

(There is a knock on the door. RICHARD enters.)

Tony: Hullo, stranger! How did you get in?

Barrett: Did I leave the front door open, sir?

Richard: (To TONY.) I've still got a latch-key, Tony. Would you like it back?

Tony: Of course not. You remember Barrett?

Richard: (To BARRETT.) Good evening.

Tony: How was New York?

Richard: Alcoholic.

Tony: Did you sell any books?

Richard: At the cost of cirrhosis, yes.

Tony: You look well enough.

(RICHARD looks round the room.)

Richard: What a transformation! It's charming.

Tony: You can thank Barrett.

Richard: (To BARRETT.) Did you do all this?

Barrett: Just a little touch of paint, sir, and a little thought.

Richard: I do congratulate you.

Barrett: Thank you, sir.

Tony: Sit down. What will you drink?

Richard: What have you got?

Tony: Everything. I believe Barrett's got in every liqueur under the sun.

Richard: A whisky and soda, please.

(BARRETT opens the cupboard and pours out a whisky and soda which he hands on a small tray to RICHARD.)

Richard: (To TONY.) You've put on weight.

Tony: Nonsense. I haven't put on weight, have I, Barrett?

Barrett: I haven't observed it, sir.

Tony: See?

Richard: Barrett's a biased witness.

Barrett: Is there anything further you require at present, sir?

Tony: Nothing, thanks.

(BARRETT goes out.)

Richard: Who did all the decorating?

Tony: Barrett. Every bit of it. I've given up trying to control him. He just does everything to the house he wants. Don't you think it's wonderful the difference he's made?

Richard: Does he find time to do any cooking?

Tony: But my dear man, he's a splendid cook. You must have dinner with me tomorrow night. He manages to produce the most wonderful food. I tell you he's the perfect servant.

Richard: Let's hope he works out all right.

Tony: He's really terrific. I've never been so comfortable before in my life.

(There is a knock at the front door.)

Tony: That's probably Sally.

Richard: How is she?

Tony: All right.

Richard: Why don't you marry her?

Tony: Why should Sally want to marry me?

Richard: You 're not bad to look at. You've got a moderate income.

Tony: Touch wood.

Richard: (Examining him carefully.) I believe you've changed, Tony.

(Voices off.)

Tony: Sally keeps telling me I've changed. What do you expect? Everyone changes, don't they? You've changed just as much as I have. (RICHARD is silent.) You've become a neurotic old publisher.

Barrett: (Announcing) Miss Grant.

Sally: (Entering) Really, Barrett, you don't have to announce me like royalty. Richard!

Richard: Sally!

Barrett: (Almost petulant.) I'm extremely sorry, Miss Grant, I'm sure. It did not seem to me that I was announcing you like royalty. (He goes out.)

Tony: Honestly, Sally, you might try not to cross Barrett every single time you come here. Excuse me a moment.

Sally: Tony!

Tony: I won't be long. (He goes out.)

(RICHARD looks curious.)

Sally: (Covering up for him.) Richard, it's good to see you! What was it like in New York?

Richard: Quite fun. Pretty hectic though. How are you?

Sally: I'm fine.

Richard: You don't sound it.

Sally: Richard, I'm so glad you 're back.

Richard: (Drily) Why particularly?

Sally: (Smiling) I need your help for one thing.

Richard: What's it all about? Let me give you a drink first. What would you like?

Sally: Brandy, please.

Richard: Anything in it?

Sally: No, thanks.

Richard: There you are. Now.

Sally: Well... I'm losing Tony.

Richard: You 're joking.

Sally: I wish I were.

Richard: Another woman?

Sally: No, another man. (RICHARD laughs. SALLY starts to cry. She tries to check herself and talks through her tears.) I know. I laughed too when I first thought about it, but it's true.

Richard: Oh Sally!

Sally: Well, you saw what just happened. The moment I arrive he goes running down to the basement to butter up that ghastly creature.

Richard: What, Barrett! Is that what you mean?

Sally: Who else?

Richard: But that's ridiculous, you don't even know he's gone to see Barrett.

Sally: Oh, I know.

Richard: Tell me what's been happening while I've been away.

Sally: Absolutely nothing. First of all, Tony was ill and Barrett pampered him so much he stayed in bed about three times as long as he needed to. He didn't even bother to go to the interview for that job. And now he's up, all he wants to do is stay indoors. I must say Barrett cooks awfully well, but I don't like it here. I can't explain it but I just don't. I can't get to feel at home here. I think it's because of Barrett. I can't bear him. I wish to God Tony would get rid of him.

Richard: But what's wrong with him?

Sally: He's bad for Tony. He's found out his weakness and he's playing on it.

Richard: What do you mean, Tony's weakness?

Sally: He's lazy and he likes to be comfortable.

Richard: (Cautiously) Don't we all?

Sally: Yes, but not that much. He's wrapping Tony up in comfort just like a child. I've even seen him take off Tony's shoes and put his slippers on for him. And Tony lets him.

Richard: I envy Tony. Barrett sounds the perfect servant.

Sally: He's getting more and more influence over Tony every day .

Richard: I'm sure you 're imagining things.

Sally: Richard, I'm not. Honestly, I'm scared.

Richard: Well, if Barrett is getting above himself, Tony had better get rid of him.

Sally: You just try persuading him.

Richard: I 'll try but Tony's got a mind of his own.

Sally: That's exactly what I'm beginning to doubt.

Richard: No, he's got a genius for making people do things for him and...

Sally: What?

Richard: Sally, are you in love with Tony?

Sally: Yes, very much.

Richard: (Ruefully) Ever since I can remember, girls have been falling for him .

Sally: Are you trying to tell me that... that Tony isn't serious about me?

Richard: I didn't say that.

Sally: No, but that's what you think, isn't it?

Richard: I only know that if I were Tony... (He tails off.)

Sally: What?

Richard: Nothing.

Sally: Oh, go on.

Richard: If I were Tony... I wouldn't let you get away from me.

Sally: Thank you, Richard. That's sweet of you.

Richard: Have you gone to bed with him?

Sally: No.

Richard: Why not? (SALLY shrugs.) You mean you haven't let him?

Sally: Perhaps. I don't like this flat. I told you.

Richard: Are you sure you 're not making a mistake?

Sally: I don't know. Possibly. Yes. Maybe. I believe -

(TONY comes back.)

Tony: What do you believe, Sally?

Sally: (Looking at him.) I believe... (Then changing her tone.) I believe I 'd like another brandy.

Tony: I wonder what you were really going to say.

Sally: (Lightly) Have you smoothed him down?

Tony: Yes, thank heavens. He's ridiculously touchy. I'm awfully sorry to walk out like that. But I don't want to lose him. Good servants are incredibly difficult to find these days. Another drink, Richard?

Richard: No thanks, I must go home.

Tony: Nonsense, my dear man. You've got to tell me all about New York.

Richard: I must, I'm afraid. It's getting on for eleven and I've got a stack of letters in my briefcase that all have to be sorted out before I go to the office tomorrow. Good night, Sally. Good night, Tony.

Tony: But when are we going to see you? Come to dinner tomorrow.

Richard: All right. Love to. I'll ring you in the morning.

Sally: Good night, Richard.

Tony: I'll see you out.

Richard: Don't bother, there's no need. Good night.

Tony: Good night.

(RICHARD goes. SALLY looks at her watch.)

Tony: Now, don't start thinking of going. I can't be abandoned this early in the evening and besides you're looking absolutely stunning. Come and sit down over here.

(They sit on the sofa.)

Sally: I like Richard.

Tony: We've had a lot of fun together. What's the matter? What are you thinking?

Sally: Nothing.

Tony: you're looking sort of fed-up. Are you?

Sally: No, of course not.

Tony: Won't you tell me?

Sally: I was thinking about us, actually. It seems so long since the last time we were alone together.

Tony: Well, I was ill all that time and then... Oh, I don't know... What with one thing and another. I'm sorry about the week-end.

Sally: Yes, I was looking forward to Cornwall.

Tony: We used to go there a lot when I was a kid. Poor old Aunt Agnes... It's a great big house and she never had less than six servants. Now she's keeping it on with one senile maid.

Sally: We ought to go soon if we're going or the good weather will be over.

Tony: Yes, well let's see. What's happening the week-end after next.

(BARRETT enters.)

Barrett: Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. I heard the front door so I thought Miss Grant had gone.

(About to withdraw.)

Tony: What is it, Barrett?

Barrett: It doesn't matter sir. It can wait till the morning. Is there anything you require, sir?

Tony: No, Barrett.

Barrett: Thank you, sir.

(About to withdraw.)

Tony: Barrett.

Barrett: Yes, sir?

Tony: You needn't clear away.

Barrett: Thank you, sir. Goodnight, Miss Grant. Goodnight, sir.

Sally/Tony: Goodnight, Barrett.

(Exit BARRETT. A silence.)

Tony: Have another drink, darling?

Sally: No, thanks.

Tony: I think I will.

Sally: All right, give me just a small one.

(Silence again.)

Tony: You know you shouldn't be in love with someone as hopeless as I am.

Sally: What do you mean, Tony?

Tony: I'm simply not good enough for you. Really, I'm not.

Sally: Darling, what are you trying to say?

Tony: Well, I haven't even bothered following up that job in the city.

Sally: There's time. You haven't been well. Why don't you give them a ring?

Tony: Sally, you 're a super girl, and you really deserve the best. Really, I mean that. And me, I...

Sally: Shall I tell you what I 'd like?

Tony: What would you like?

Sally: I haven't had my holiday yet this year. Can't we get away from this place and go off abroad somewhere together?

Tony: My darling Sally. (He takes her in his arms.)

Sally: Oh, Tony. (They cling together.)

Tony: I need you. I need you so much and I want you so much... Now.

Sally: Yes...

Tony: I thought...

Sally: It's all right.

Tony: I love you so much.

Sally: My darling.

Tony: Sally.

Sally: Um?

Tony: Will you stay here tonight?

Sally: Yes. (They kiss again. Then, suddenly, Sally hears something.)

Tony: What is it?

Sally: Someone on the stairs.

Tony: It's only Barrett. I 'll tell him we don't want anything.

Sally: No, don't. (She rises and moves away.)

Tony: Why not?

Sally: He'd know.

Tony: Nonsense. (He takes her in his arms again.)

(The door opens and BARRETT walks in. He stands motionless in the doorway. SALLY breaks away from TONY.)

Barrett: Did you ring, sir?

Tony: No.

Barrett: I made sure I heard the bell. Will you be requiring me any further this evening?

Tony: No, thank you, Barrett.

Sally: (Suddenly) Tony, I must be going.

Tony: but, Sally...

Sally: I've got a bit of a headache. Where's my bag?

(BARRETT produces it from the table by the sofa. SALLY goes. TONY follows her, glaring at BARRETT who looks round the room enquiringly. Then he walks slowly towards the sofa and begins plumping out the rumpled cushions as -

THE CURTAIN FALLS.)

Act 2

Scene 1

The kitchen in the basement of TONY'S house.

(This scene can be alternatively staged in the living room)

One month later.

1 a.m.

A door, stage right, leads into passage and thence to the back door. A door, back stage left, leads into a servants' room. The kitchen is also the servants' hall. It is a comfortable, cheerful room.

(A door slams then we hear TONY and RICHARD lurching drunkenly down the stairs. VERA enters from door left. She is very slender and looks younger than seventeen. She has a pale face and large brown eyes. Though she looks timid and demure, one feels there is something ardent and animal about her. She listens for a moment, rather like a frightened gazelle, then retreats again as the voices get nearer. TONY and RICHARD burst in, both wearing evening dress.)

Tony: Let's cook some bacon and eggs.

Richard: No more food for me. I couldn't.

Tony: Whisky?

Richard: Thanks. D' you know, I don't think I 'll go to the next old boys.

Tony: Why not?

Richard: Just look at the chaps we were with tonight. I mean, just look at them. Farley-Rogers for instance. Director of fifteen companies - or however many it is - and if ever there was a raving idiot, he is. No wonder British industry's in one hell of a mess.

Tony: Come to lunch tomorrow? Barrett makes the most superb crême brûlée.

Richard: To hell with Barrett.

Tony: What's wrong with Barrett?

Richard: What's right with him?

Tony: I could get rid of him tomorrow if I wanted to.

Richard: Why don't you?

Tony: He insulates me from a cold, drab world. He provides comfort and warmth and food.

Richard: There's more to life than that.

Tony: Such as?

Richard: Oh, I don't know. Sex.

Tony: (Laughing) No, he doesn't provide that. Though I daresay he 'd lay on a complete harem if I gave him half a chance. But I don't need sex all that much.

Richard: Hah, hah, hah!

Tony: I don't - I 'd far rather have a good meal and go to bed early.

Richard: Things of the mind then.

Tony: Let me tell you, Barrett could teach you a thing or two .

Richard: Such as?

Tony: Now you take the Times crossword.

Richard: Don't tell me Barrett reads the Times and does the crossword.

Tony: (Picking up the Times.) Twenty minutes it took us this morning. Only twenty minutes to get through the whole bloody crossword.

Richard: Do you mean that you and Barrett solemnly sit here together doing crossword puzzles?

Tony: What's wrong with that?

Richard: God almighty! Crosswords in the kitchen. What a party! And his niece too, I suppose?

Tony: Lay off Barrett.

Richard: No, I want to talk about Barrett.

Tony: Well I don't.

Richard: I've been meaning to say this to you for some time. Sally and I both think

Tony: (Interrupting): I might have guessed you 'd been having conferences with Sally. Well, save your breath. It's my business, he's my servant and this is my house. All right, you found it for me. Thank you very much, I'm very grateful. But I'm the one who's running it, okay?

Richard: But you 're not. Barrett's running it. And you.

Tony: He is not running me.

Richard: All right, where is he, then? Where is he? And where's his flaming niece? You know you were going to be in London this weekend, so you let them both go running off - not one of them, oh no, both of them go running off to Birmingham.

Tony: I happen to believe in being considerate to servants.

Richard: Don't give me that. Just because you want to get the bloody girl to bed.

Tony: My God, how little you know me.

Richard: You 're exactly the same as you always were.

Tony: And you 're not, I suppose.

Richard: Yes, I am. But I've grown up a bit, I hope.

Tony: Congratulations.

Richard: At one time, you know, I 'd have done anything for you .

Tony: And now?

Richard: Now I've grown up a bit.

(TONY looks at him in silence for a moment.)

Tony: Have you? Are you quite sure?

(VERA comes in left. She is wearing a short nightdress.)

Vera: Oh, what a fright you gave me! I'm sorry, sir. I thought it was burglars.

Tony: I thought you 'd gone to Birmingham.

Vera: I didn't feel that good, so we changed our plans.

Tony: Don't look so frightened. Come on. Let me give you a drink.

Vera: No thanks, really.

Tony: It won't hurt you.

Vera: No thanks. Thanks ever so. Good night sir. (She goes out.)

Richard: (Deliberately) I thought you carried that off rather well.

Tony: What do you mean?

Richard: A bit pointless though. If you wanted to get rid of me before she came back, why didn't you say so?

Tony: I told you once. I thought they 'd both gone to Birmingham.

(Richard gives a dirty laugh.)

Tony: You don't believe me?

Richard: What's she like? A bit of all right?

(TONY walks deliberately towards the door.)

Richard: Where are you off to?

(TONY walks out and slams the door. VERA appears in a dressing-gown, left.)

Vera: Oh, excuse me. I thought you 'd both gone.

Richard: (Drily) We haven't.

Vera: I was going to turn out the lights.

Richard: I 'll turn them out.

Vera: Has he gone to bed?

Richard: (After a moment's hesitation.) Yes.

Vera: Oh, please don't let me disturb you.

Richard: Your name is Vera, isn't it?

Vera: Yes.

Richard: Well, Vera, how do you like your work here?

Vera: I'm not complaining.

Richard: I'm sure Mr. Tony has no complaints.

Vera: I'm glad to hear it.

Richard: Does he often come down to the kitchen?

Vera: Only when Mr. Barrett's here. He likes crosswords, you know.

Richard: Do you ever see him alone?

Vera: Who? Mr. Tony? No! I don't suppose he's ever spoken to me when I was alone. He's ever so shy.

Richard: You 're shy, too, aren't you?

Vera: Sometimes.

Richard: How old are you, Vera?

Vera: Seventeen.

Richard: Is Barrett really your uncle?

Vera: 'Course he is. Whatever did you think?

Richard: Are you happy here?

Vera: It's all right.

Richard: Where have you been tonight?

Vera: To a dance.

Richard: I suppose you've lots of boyfriends running after you.

Vera: No. Can't say I have. Not any I care for, that is. Well, if you 'll excuse me, I 'll say goodnight.

Richard: Don't go.

Vera: You 're shy sometimes, the same as I am.

Richard: I suppose I am.

Vera: I think it's shy people that are the lonely ones.

Richard: But you 're not lonely, Vera.

Vera: 'Course I am.

Richard: But you 're young, you...

Vera: They say it's when you 're young you can feel most lonely of all. I know there are nights I lie in bed and try to get to sleep and I 'd give anything, anything you like, not to be alone. And do you know what I lie thinking? I'm thinking that all

over the world there are people who are lonely like I am. And some of them would want to be with me if they knew me. And I 'd give anything to find them.

Richard: But you've never found the right one?

Vera: (Deliberately) Sometimes.

Richard: You mean...

Vera: Sometimes I've found a man who felt just like I did. And it was all fine for a while. Do you know something? I think you feel like I do.

Richard: Yes. I think I do.

Vera: Don't be shy.

Richard: Vera...

Vera: What, love?

(As she speaks, TONY walks in.)

Richard: (recovering quickly.) Hullo! So, you 're back again. I thought you 'd retired in disorder.

Tony: Are you carrying it off nicely, Richard?

Vera: (To TONY.) When I heard the door slam I thought you 'd both left and forgot to turn out the lights.

Tony: (To RICHARD.) You thought I 'd gone to bed.

Vera: Yes, we did.

Tony: (To RICHARD.) Before you go, I 'd like to prove to you that I at least am not a liar. Would you like to read this?

(He hands him an envelope.)

Vera: If you 'll excuse me, I think I 'll say goodnight.

(She goes out, left.)

Tony: It's from my aunt in Cornwall. Please examine the date and the postmark. Now read the last paragraph. Go on, read it.

Richard: 'As your servants will be away for the week-end why not come down and spend three or four days with me? '

Tony: Does that satisfy you?

Richard: Yes. I was wrong. I apologise.

Tony: Now, perhaps you 'll tell me what you were gossiping about with Vera?

Richard: Tony... Oh, what's the use?

Tony: Why can't you and Sally mind your own business?

Richard: What the hell do you mean?

Tony: What were you asking Vera about?

Richard: (In disgust.) Oh, I give up. Goodnight.

Tony: (Still half puzzled.) Goodnight.

(The door slams as RICHARD goes out. TONY hesitates a moment, then taps on VERA'S door.)

Vera: (Off) Yes, Mr. Tony?

(She half opens the door, wearing just a nightdress.)

Tony: Will you tell Barrett that I won't be called in the morning.

Vera: (Opening the door and moving into the kitchen.) Mr. Barrett's not here, sir.

Tony: (Casually) Hasn't he come in yet?

Vera: But I thought you knew, sir. He's away in Birmingham.

Tony: You said you 'd changed your plans.

Vera: Yes. I didn't feel up to much so Mr. Barrett's gone off by himself.

Tony: He left you alone here?

Vera: Yes.

Tony: We 're alone here.

Vera: Yes.

Tony: When does Barrett come back?

Vera: Day after tomorrow.

Tony: You 're cold. You 're shivering. Do have a drink.

Vera: No thanks.

Tony: (Pouring a drink.) It won't hurt you.

Vera: Well, perhaps just a drop.

Tony: Your very good health.

Vera: And yours - sir.

Tony: You stayed up late.

Vera: I know. Please don't tell Mr. Barrett. He made me promise to go to bed early. But then my friend 'phoned up. And you know what it's like. I just can't resist a dance, I really can't.

Tony: Who was the lucky young man tonight?

Vera: Oh, him. He wasn't much to look at. Not really. He wasn't so young as you, come to that.

Tony: I would have thought you 'd have got a steady boy-friend by now.

Vera: Never. I don't seem to have any luck.

Tony: Perhaps they think you... Well perhaps they think you wouldn't give them a chance... Perhaps they 're afraid.

Vera: They 're ever so silly if they are afraid.

Tony: Why?

Vera: Because I want the same as they do.

Tony: Do you, Vera?

Vera: I'm flesh and blood, aren't I? I'm young, aren't I? Why shouldn't a girl need it as much as a man does.

Tony: Vera...

Vera: I want to be loved the same as anyone else does... You didn't think of me like that, did you?

Tony: No.

Vera: I thought about you. Do you mind me talking like this?

Tony: No.

Vera: Sure?

Tony: What do you think?

Vera: Sometimes when Mr. Barrett went out at night I 'd be alone down here and I 'd go to bed and lie there, and I 'd think of you alone upstairs. And I 'd wonder what it would be like - to be with you.

Tony: (Thickly) What about Barrett?

Vera: What about him?

Tony: He might find out.

Vera: Why should he?

Tony: If you were with me.

Vera: Why should he if we 're careful?

Tony: You swear you 'd never tell him?

Vera: 'Course I do.

Tony: Oh Vera, I want you so much.

Vera: I want you too. (She moves towards him.)

Tony: (Turning away from her with an effort.) Please go, Vera.

Vera: Why? (She is trembling with desire.) Come on... Tony. Don't be shy.

Tony: Please go.

Vera: Don't worry. It 'll be all right. You 're silly, aren't you? Mind...

Tony: Vera...

Vera: Careful... He might come back.

Tony: He's away.

Vera: My dress... Don't... (She runs to door.)

(TONY blocks her way.)

Tony: You said he was away.

Vera: I was lying.

Tony: You said he was away.

Vera: Don't... Not tonight... Not now...

Tony: He's away.

Vera: Please wait... Not like this.

Tony: Yes... I must...

Vera: I promise you... Tomorrow... Please, Tony.

Tony: No. (He forces her down onto the table.)

Vera: Let me go... Tony... Tony...

(CURTAIN)

Scene 2

Tony's bedroom.

Early evening.

Two months later.

(BARRETT is alone in the room. The door is open.)

Barrett: (Calling) Have you got the rest of the trousers?

Vera: (Off) Yes, I've got them.

Barrett: Hurry up then.

(VERA enters carrying several pairs of TONY'S trousers which BARRETT hangs up one by one in the wardrobe.)

Vera: Hasn't he got a lot of ties?

Barrett: Mind those trousers. It's no use me pressing them if you 're going to get them all crumpled straight away. Put them down on the bed and hand them to me one by one. No, not like that. Careful.

Vera: Sorry. I wish I had the money he must have spent on new clothes the last couple of months. How much do you think they 're worth, all that lot?

Barrett: The trouble with you is you 're not used to being in service. There's a button coming off these trousers. Take them down and sew it on, will you?

Vera: All right then. (Going)

Barrett: Not now.

Vera: Oh, I thought you meant... Well, we've finished up here, haven't we? I mean there's nothing else to do now, is there?

Barrett: Isn't there?

Vera: Well, is there?

Barrett: What about the bed?

Vera: Haven't I made it right?

Barrett: What time of day is it?

Vera: What do you mean?

Barrett: Morning or evening?

Vera: Oh! (She folds back the sheets and blankets and lays out the pyjamas neatly.) Okay?

Barrett: Yes, that's not bad at all. (He lies down on it.)

Vera: Well, come on then. Let's go back downstairs.

Barrett: Wait a minute.

Vera: What is it? What do you want to do? Why are you looking at me like that?

Barrett: Why aren't you wearing a clean apron?

Vera: It was clean this morning.

(BARRETT gets off bed.)

Barrett: But you've been working in it all day, haven't you? You know I like to see you in a clean apron. You were wearing a clean one last night and very pretty you looked in it too. Yes, you looked very pretty with the pretty little bow nestling in that lovely little hollow in your back.

(A door slams.)

Vera: That's him.

Barrett: He's back early, isn't he Vera? Isn't he?

Vera: Yes. Yes.

Barrett: He always seems in a hurry to get back here these days.

Vera: Les, why do I have to go with him?

Barrett: Stop it! (TONY comes in, carrying a suitcase.) Good evening, sir. We were just returning some clothes to your wardrobe after pressing them for you.

Tony: Good evening, Barrett. Good evening, Vera.

Barrett: Don't forget the trousers, Vera. There's a button, sir, which had become a trifle loose. It's better to have it sewn on securely than to run the risk of losing it.

Tony: Thank you, Barrett. Everything all right?

Barrett: Perfectly, sir. (He can see quite well that all TONY wants is to be alone with VERA.) We shan't need the plumber for the tap in your bathroom. It's a simple matter of a new washer which I can attend to myself.

Tony: Right.

Barrett: Will you be changing now, sir? Are there any clothes that you 'd like me to put out for you?

Tony: No, Barrett, I'm not changing.

Barrett: In that case, will there be anything further, sir?

Tony: No, thanks. You can go.

Barrett: Vera.

Tony: Vera, you can stay and unpack for me.

(He puts suitcase on the bed.)

Vera: Yes, sir.

Barrett: Thank you, sir. (Apparently about to go.) By the way, sir, I think I should remind you that this is my evening off.

Tony: Yes. That's all right.

Barrett: However, I've left a meal for you in the refrigerator which I trust you will find satisfactory.

Tony: Fine, Barrett. Thanks.

Barrett: There's some cold salmon mousse to start with, followed by some thin slices of cold roast beef, rare, as you like it, and a mixed green salad and a separate tomato salad.

Tony: Fine.

Barrett: I've prepared both a mayonnaise and a French dressing.

Tony: All right, Barrett.

Barrett: And for dessert you could have either fruit salad or another slice of the loganberry flan which I believe you liked at luncheon.

Tony: Yes, Barrett. All right.

Barrett: You won't have to get it yourself, of course, as my niece will be here to serve you, won't you, Vera?

Vera: Yes, Mr. Barrett.

Barrett: If there's nothing further, sir, I'll go now. I only have to change my jacket and then I'll be on my way, if you'll excuse me, sir. Don't forget the trousers, Vera, and remember to take the flowers out of the bedroom when you go. Goodnight, sir.

Tony: Goodnight, Barrett.

(BARRETT goes out of the room and his footsteps are heard going down the stairs.)

Tony: Vera!

Vera: No, wait... He hasn't gone yet.

Tony: So what? He isn't coming back up here.

Vera: No, wait.

Tony: What's the matter?

Vera: Nothing.

Tony: Oh, Vera, I've been longing for you all day.

Vera: Just wait till we hear the front door.

Tony: Vera, I can't wait.

Vera: You don't really care for me at all.

Tony: That's not true. You know what I feel.

Vera: Wait.

(The door slams. TONY takes her in his arms.)

Tony: Oh, my darling.

Vera: Mind, silly, you 'll tear my apron. (She moves away and begins to undress. She smiles at him.) There's no hurry, Tony. We've got all the evening.

(BLACK OUT)

Scene 3

Tony's bedroom.

Night time.

Three months later.

(The curtains are drawn and the bedside light is on. VERA, dressed only in her shortie nightdress, is lying in bed, flipping listlessly through a woman's magazine. Four or five others are scattered on the bed and on the floor. She's bored and waiting for someone - she keeps looking at the time. Finally, BARRETT comes in, in his outdoor clothes, carrying a small parcel.)

Vera: Well, you've been a long time. Where have you been?

Barrett: In the pub.

Vera: All this time? You said you were only going to be half an hour.

Barrett: Well, you know what it's like when you get drinking.

Vera: Sure it was just drinking? You are mean, Les. Honestly. How often is it we get a chance like this with him away? And then you go and waste half the evening boozing in the pub. If that is where you've been.

Barrett: Don't be daft. Now he's patched it up with Sally, they 'll always be going off together for the weekend - you wait and see.

Vera: I don't think he has patched it up with her.

Barrett: If staying the weekend with her parents isn't patching it up, I 'd like to know what is. Especially when they only live on the other side of London. (He sits on bed and opens the evening paper.)

Vera: Oh, Les, aren't you going to do anything but sit there doing nothing but read the bloody paper? (BARRETT throws the parcel at her.) Coo, Les! Is that for me?

Barrett: Well, who d'you think it's for?

Vera: I thought you 'd been in the pub all this time. Why didn't you tell me you 'd been getting things for me? Let's have a look at it then. Oh, Les! You've never given me such a big one. Coo, you are smashing! I 'll tell you what. I haven't finished the other one yet but I 'll open this one on Thursday evening and wear some then, shall I?

Barrett: We 're not waiting till Thursday. (He opens the bottle of scent and starts dabbing it all over her face.)

Vera: Aren't we? Come on then, put some behind my ears.

(BARRETT puts some scent behind her ears and she grabs it from him to dab scent on him. They wrestle with each other.)

Vera: Come on, Les.

Barrett: What do you want?

Vera: You know. Let's play the game.

Barrett: Where's your apron?

Vera: Downstairs.

Barrett: Go and get it.

(VERA moves to door and turns.)

Vera: Your shoelace is undone.

Barrett: No, it isn't.

Vera: Well, it isn't done up very nicely. Shall I do it up for you?

Barrett: Go on then.

(VERA stoops down, ties his lace, then clutches him round the ankles.)

Vera: Shall I tell you something?

Barrett: Yes, tell me.

Vera: Do you know what I don't like?

Barrett: What?

Vera: I don't like it when you do things for him. You know. Like when you put his shoes on.

Barrett: You 're silly, aren't you? You 're pretty but you 're silly.

Vera: You know what I mean. I mean I know it's your job but I still think there's some things you should only do for a man if you 're - well - if you 're in love with him.

Barrett: That's right. Like soaping his back for him. Well, I leave that to you. Now that's quite enough about Tony, isn't it? We don't want to talk about Tony, do we?

Vera: Oh, Les, no. No, we don't.

Barrett: That's better.

Vera: Les, are you really fond of me? Really and truly?

Barrett: You 're all right.

Vera: I don't understand you, Les, really I don't. Don't you feel jealous when you know I'm with him? I mean I wouldn't like it if you went with Miss Grant.

Barrett: We said we weren't going to talk about Tony any more.

Vera: You always say that. Why can't you talk to me? I mean honestly! I'm not daft. And it's only natural - a girl likes to know.

Barrett: But you do know.

Vera: I don't know. What is it you want from me? Why can't we just play with each other? Why do I have to go with Tony?

Barrett: Because Nanny wants you to.

Vera: Oh, don't start that all over again. You know I hate it. Why do you have to talk like that?

Barrett: Well, aren't I his Nanny? And isn't he getting as dependent on me as a child?

Vera: I hate you when you talk like that.

Barrett: No, you don't. I know you, Vera, and I know I've got every inch of you to do just what I like with. (He starts stroking her arm.) It's true, isn't it? Isn't it?

(VERA stares up at him. She begins trembling. He is stroking her arm rhythmically.)

Barrett: Isn't it?

Vera: (Hoarsely) Yes, Oh, Les. (She clasps his hand to her breast. He takes it away.)

Barrett: Oh, that's enough.

Vera: Les, darling. Darling. (BARRETT suddenly stiffens.) What's the matter?

Barrett: Shh! I thought I heard his car outside. (He's over by the window listening.)

Vera: Don't be silly. You know they 're not coming back till the morning.

Barrett: Put the light out.

Vera: What for?

Barrett: Put the light out!

(VERA obeys, first the bedside light, then the overhead light. BARRETT parts the curtains to look out.)

Barrett:(Urgently) Is the door bolted?

Vera: What door?

Barrett: The front door. Is it bolted?

Vera: No, I don't think I... No, I didn't bolt it. I thought you 'd be coming back in that way.

Barrett: You little idiot. Lock that door. Put the light on and get into the bathroom, quick.

Vera: (Putting light on.) Is it really him? Are you sure?

Barrett: Go on, quick, and take all your things with you. Take the scent. Go on, move.

(VERA scurries into the bathroom. BARRETT locks the bedroom door and pulls up as much as he can of the carpet against it.)

Barrett: Here, take this.

(He pushes VERA'S magazines after her into the bathroom, pulls the door shut, puts his jacket on and starts making up the bed very hastily.)

Tony: (off, coming up the stairs.) Barrett, Barrett, Barrett.

(BARRETT doesn't answer but goes on tidying rapidly. The door handle moves.)

Tony: (outside the door.) Who's there.

Barrett: It's me, sir.

Tony: Well, open the door.

Barrett: Directly, sir. Just one moment, if you please. I've got the carpet up and it's in the way of the door. I'm just relaying it.

Tony: (Off) Well, hurry up and open the door. What are you doing in there anyway at this time of the night?

Barrett: (Still tidying up.) I was just giving the room a good clean- out, sir, and it seemed to me the carpet wasn't lying quite straight, so I had it up and I...

Tony: (Off) Come on, open the door.

Barrett: Yes, sir. (He unlocks the door and TONY comes in.)

Tony: Now, what's all this about the carpet?

Barrett: (rolling it back into position.) There, sir, that's considerably better, don't you agree?

Tony: It's all right. It always was all right so far as I can remember. Barrett, the bed...

Barrett: The bed, sir? Oh, yes, sir, I'm sorry your pyjamas haven't been put out, but if you remember, you gave me to understand very definitely that you weren't coming back till the morning.

Tony: Barrett, get out of my way. (He examines the bed.) What's been happening here?

Barrett: Nothing, sir. Nothing at all. I'm extremely sorry, sir. I have to admit that I took the liberty. My own room is being... I've been doing a little decorating, sir, and I upset some whitewash. On the mattress, sir. The whole mattress is soaked in whitewash, sir, I'm afraid. So, as you were away, I... I took the liberty. I thought you wouldn't mind, sir. Of course, I should have made up a bed in one of the spare Rooms if only I 'd thought of it. I'm extremely sorry.

Tony: That's not like you, Barrett.

Barrett: No, sir. I 'll change the sheets for you at once, sir. If you 'd like to wait downstairs, I 'll have the bed made for you in no time.

Tony: Barrett, I must tell you I'm disappointed. It's just not the kind of behaviour I 'd have expected from you. And if anything like this ever happens again - I'm warning you now - I shan't be prepared to overlook it.

Sally: (Off) Tony.

Tony: Just coming, darling. Is that clear, Barrett?

Barrett: Yes, sir.

(TONY is about to go. Then he hesitates.)

Tony: What's the smell in here?

Barrett: It's eau de cologne, sir. I had rather a bad headache. I sometimes use it when I have a headache.

Tony: It's not eau de cologne. (He draws back towards the bed.) You've had a girl here.

Barrett: No, sir.

Tony: You have.

Barrett: I can promise you -

Tony: You have, Barrett.

Barrett: Yes, sir. I'm extremely sorry... I'm afraid that I was drinking in the public house, drinking rather heavily, I have to admit, and I became somewhat inebriated and there was this woman in the public bar...

Tony: I don't want details.

Barrett: No.

Tony: How dare you bring your scruffy little tarts into my bed.

Sally: (Off, but coming up the stairs.) Tony, Tony.

Tony: Wait a minute, darling. Just wait.

Sally: (Coming into the room.) What's happening?

Tony: Nothing. I shan't be long. Just hold on and I'll be with you in a second.

Sally: No, Tony, I heard. Now perhaps you realise I was right about him.

Tony: Darling, please leave this to me. Wait for me downstairs.

Sally: No, Tony.

Tony: All right. Barrett, you can leave the room.

Barrett: Yes, sir. (moving to the door.) Excuse me, sir.

Tony: What is it?

Barrett: I hardly like to leave the room the way it is. Might I suggest, sir, that you both go downstairs while I air the room and remake the bed and tidy up a little?

Tony: Leave the room.

Barrett: I only thought, sir -

Tony: Leave the room.

Barrett: Yes, sir.

(As BARRETT reluctantly starts to move there is a noise in the bathroom like a hanger dropping. TONY and SALLY look towards the bathroom door. TONY turns to see BARRETT'S face. He knows from BARRETT'S expression who is inside.)

Sally: Well, aren't you going to see who it is? (TONY remains rigid.) Right. (She goes into the bathroom and comes back.) Come out, Vera.

(VERA comes out in BARRETT'S mackintosh.)

Tony: You bastard!

Sally: Now do you see how vile he is? He's despicable and horrible. He makes me ill, really ill, just the sight of him. (TONY does nothing.) You realise he's committed incest?

Barrett: No, Miss. (to Tony.) I haven't committed a criminal offence. I have to admit that I lied to you, sir. I was afraid that if you knew our true relationship you would never have engaged her. You see, sir, Vera is not my niece. Vera is my fiancée.

Tony: You 're lying.

Barrett: You only have to ask her. It's all right, dear. You can tell them our little secret, now.

Vera: Les and I have been engaged for ages.

Tony: Get out, both of you.

Vera: You've been two-timing just as much as I have. I suppose you think it's all right for you to do it. Oh, I know your sort. I'm not good enough for you, am I? I'm good enough to have in here when there's no-one about, but I'm not good enough to take out, am I? Not good enough to introduce to all your posh friends. No, you have to have someone smart and rich and upper class. You 'd never have married me - not in a million years. Would you?

Sally: Tony, you - Tony... You... (she stops as she sees TONY'S face.)

(TONY turns to BARRETT and VERA.)

Tony: Get out.

(VERA leaves with BARRETT. SALLY looks for an instant at TONY'S face and leaves.)

Act 3

Scene One

-

Tony's living room.

One month later.

The room looks derelict. The ornaments on the mantelpiece have gone and a lot of empty bottles are in evidence. There is a general atmosphere of dirt and untidiness.

(SALLY, wearing full evening dress, is waiting rather impatiently, expecting TONY to walk in. She goes to the empty cigarette packet on the table and throws it into an overflowing waste-basket. She picks up a magazine, flips through the pile of gramophone records. Finally, the front door slams and TONY appears. He's wearing a creased and shapeless lounge suit. He looks ill, fatter, and it's obvious that he's consistently been drinking too much. The charm and vitality have gone.)

Tony: I know I've been a long time so don't tell me.

Sally: That's all right.

Tony: Wait till I tell you who I've just seen.

Sally: Who?

Tony: He was in the pub when I went in.

Sally: Who?

Tony: Who do you think?

Sally: Tommy Blake?

Tony: No.

Sally: Edward?

Tony: No.

Sally: Someone I know?

Tony: You know him.

Sally: I don't know. You don't mean...

Tony: Yes.

Sally: Not Barrett?

Tony: Yes.

Sally: I thought he 'd gone back to Birmingham.

Tony: He came back. (Going for the whisky.)

Sally: Oh, Tony, you don't really want another drink now, do you?

Tony: One of the most maddening habits you've got, my dear, is the habit of thinking you know what I want better I know myself. As it happens, you see, I am in a rather better position than you are to know what I want.

Sally: You've been drinking, haven't you? You've been drinking in the pub with Barrett.

Tony: Now don't start.

Sally: Sorry.

Tony: Anyway, what the hell do you think I've been doing in the pub? What do people normally do in pubs?

Sally: You said you were just going in for some cigarettes. Anyway... (Trying again.) Well, come on, give me a drink too.

Tony: Scotch?

Sally: Could I have a gin and tonic?

(TONY pours it for her and a large Scotch for himself.)

Tony: We still haven't got any bloody ice.

Sally: Well, why don't you get the fridge repaired?

Tony: I 'll ring them tomorrow.

Sally: But you were going to ring them yesterday and then you promised faithfully you 'd do it this morning. Honestly, Tony, it isn't as if you didn't have the time.

Tony: All right. I know.

Sally: Would you like me to ring them from the office in the morning?

Tony: No, I 'll do it.

(A silence.)

Sally: Did you get some cigarettes?

Tony: (He gives her one.) I can see it's going to be some evening.

Sally: You don't really want to take me, do you, Tony?

Tony: Of course I want to take you.

Sally: Then for God's sake let's try to enjoy ourselves.

Tony: All right, we 'll enjoy ourselves. I 'll tell you what. I 'll go up and change now, quickly, and then we 'll have time to drop in for a drink at that new place in Jermyn Street. Okay?

Sally: Lovely.

Tony: That's more like it.

Sally: I asked Richard to come in for a drink here before we go out. He's on his way now.

Tony: Richard? Oh, Christ. What did you want to do that for?

Sally: I thought you 'd be pleased.

Tony: He's insufferable these days.

Sally: Why do you say that?

Tony: Because I'm in no mood for another sermon about pulling myself together and getting a job and I've got to change and I've got to see Barrett for five minutes and then I want to take you to this bar that's just opened.

Sally: You've got to see Barrett? Did you say you've got to see Barrett?

Tony: I told you, it 'll only take five minutes.

Sally: But Tony -

Tony: Now for God's sake, don't start up about Barrett again.

Sally: (Rising) But why do you want to see -

Tony: And we 're not going to talk about Barrett. All right?

Sally: You know it's not all right.

Tony: For God's sake let's enjoy ourselves.

(SALLY sits down again. A silence.)

Oh, Christ!

(He puts on a jazz record and turns the volume up very high. He starts shaking to it.)

Come on.

(After a moment SALLY gets up and shakes with him. The knocker is heard.)

Sally: Wasn't that the front door?

Tony: Didn't hear anything. (It is heard again.)

Sally: It is, Tony. (she stops shaking but TONY continues.) Are you going or do you want me to go?

Tony: It's not locked. He 'll let himself in.

Sally: All right, I 'll go.

(As soon as Sally is out of the room, TONY pours himself a large scotch which he downs in one. She comes back with RICHARD.)

Tony: Richard, you old sod. (Switching the gramophone off.)

Richard: How are you, Tony?

Tony: Why haven't you been to see us for such a long time? What are you going to have to drink?

Richard: Tony, you 're looking ill.

Tony: What are you going to drink? We still haven't got any ice, so I can offer you a deliciously hot dry Martini, a tepid vodka and tonic or a lukewarm whisky off the rocks.

Richard: Thanks. I 'll have a whisky... Whoa, that's loads. You 're looking gorgeous.

Sally: Thanks.

Richard: I like the dress and your hair's different.

Sally: Thank you, Richard.

Richard: And the necklace is beautiful.

Sally: Do you like it? It's a family thing.

Tony: Go on.

Richard: Mmh?

Tony: What about her eyes, her teeth? What about her nose?

Sally: Tony!

Richard: What's the matter, Tony?

Tony: I'm sorry... Don't take any notice of me.

Richard: That's all right.

Sally: Why don't we all sit down?

Tony: Yes, let's sit down. Have a cigarette.

Sally: (As he offers cigarettes to Richard.) Thanks. (TONY offers them to her first.)

Richard: Thanks. (A silence.) How did you like the new Visconti?

Tony: What?

Sally: The film we saw on Wednesday.

Tony: It was all right.

Richard: did you like it, Sally?

Sally: Quite. I don't know whether I understood all of it. Tony thought it was too morbid.

Tony: I did not think it was too morbid.

Sally: But darling, that's what you said.

Richard: You didn't see that discussion about it on television last night?

Sally: No, we went out last night. We went to a party.

Richard: Did you have fun?

Sally: Well... It was quite fun.

Tony: Tony got drunk so Sally did not have fun.

Richard: By the way, I asked my charwoman if she could come round here in the mornings.

Tony: Thanks, but I don't think I 'll need her. I've just about got everything taped again.

Sally: You don't mean...

Tony: Yes, I do. I haven't absolutely decided yet. Depends what he has to say for himself when he comes round. I think it's going to be all right, though.

Richard: Who?

Sally: Tony just met Barrett in the pub.

Tony: He's still got to convince me but it's quite possible I 'll take him back.

Sally: Tony, you don't really want -

Tony: For once and for all, will you stop making out that you know what I want better than I do myself.

Richard: If you seriously want to take Barrett back, then you 're mad. Can't you see what you 're doing to Sally? Anyway, what do you need a full-time servant for? Everybody else manages with just a char, so why shouldn't you?

(TONY says nothing, but pours himself a drink.)

Sally: Tony, please don't get drunk before we've even gone out.

Tony: For god's sake! Honestly. You 're both as bad as each other. Really, you 're like a couple of old hens. Who asked you to come fussing over me? Who asked you to interfere with every blessed thing I do? I didn't. Can't I even pour myself a drink or engage a servant without getting told I'm out of my mind?

Sally: Tony, you 're ill, darling. Try to understand that you 're ill.

Tony: So that's the line now, is it? I'm ill. First he says so, now you do. I'm not ill. I 'll tell you exactly what's wrong with me. For one thing I'm sick to death of people telling me what I should and shouldn't do, and for another I'm fed up to the teeth with living alone in this enormous house without proper staff. You may not mind living in squalor but I do. I hate tepid baths and tepid drinks and dirty rooms and dirty linen. I like good food on clean plates. I like to see flowers well-arranged and if there's one thing I want to spend money on, now that I've got it, it's service. You don't know what it's like to be out in the wilds for six years. Six years on a god-forsaken farm where my nearest neighbour was twenty miles away, with nothing to do in the evenings but sit on a rickety wooden chair staring at a paraffin lamp and thinking about the lights in Piccadilly Circus and the cars slushing through the streets to the restaurants and cinemas and night-clubs. And knowing I was broke and hadn't got a hope in hell of getting back. Do you wonder that I took a drink now and then? Do you blame me for taking anything I could lay my hands on to make me forget? Well I can tell you this. I've put up with enough discomfort to last me a lifetime.

Richard: Fair enough. But Barrett isn't the only servant in England who could make you comfortable.

Tony: Of course he isn't, but I still haven't told you what happened in the pub. You see, the fact is that they 'd been saving up money to get married for some time, but Vera's father was ill-treating her and Barrett had to find a way of getting her away from home. That's why he had to lie to me. Anyway, it's all over between them now. She's run off with another man.

Richard: Do you really believe that?

Tony: Why should he lie to me?

Sally: Oh Tony!

Richard: I suppose it doesn't occur to you that if he's succeeded in taking you in once, he can probably do it again. (The knocker sounds.)

Tony: Perhaps you 'd like to stay and help me cross-question him.

Richard: No thanks.

Sally: Tony, please don't let him in. Let Richard go to the door and say you've changed your mind, you don't want to see him.

Tony: Honestly! Anyone would think he was the devil incarnate. Why make such an issue out of poor old Barrett? Is he so important? He's a servant, that's all, but he is a good one and you've seen for yourself what it's been like here without him.

Sally: You can't possibly take him on again.

Tony: Sally, honestly, you 're making a lot of fuss about nothing.

Sally: if you let him into this house, I'm going.

Tony: I suppose you don't realise how utterly ridiculous you're being.

Sally: Are you going to see him or not?

Tony: You understand that what you 're trying to do is take over the right to decide who I have and don't have in my house. Perhaps you 'd like me to consult you about how many eggs I should have for breakfast and what kind of toothpaste to buy.

Sally: You know what I mean.

(Knocker is heard.)

Tony: Richard, can't you make her understand how silly this is?

Richard: I think Sally's absolutely right.

Tony: I'm going to let him in. (Moving towards the door.)

Sally: Richard, are you by any chance free for dinner this evening?

Richard: Well, yes. Would you like -

Sally: I 'd like you to take me out.

Richard: I 'd love to.

Tony: Perhaps you 'd be good enough to let Barrett in on your way out.

Richard: Good night Tony.

Sally: Goodbye, Tony. God bless you.

(TONY doesn't answer. They go out. He fixes himself another drink, and sinks into armchair, left. A knock on the door.)

Tony: Come in, Barrett. (BARRETT appears in a well-pressed lounge suit.) I'm glad you've come.

Barrett: (Cautious and rather calculating.) Thank you, sir.

Tony: Have a drink.

Barrett: Thank you, sir.

Tony: Help yourself.

Barrett: Thank you, sir.

Tony: Take your coat off. It was lucky meeting you like that in the pub.

Barrett: I was very glad of the opportunity to speak to you, sir. I'd been several times on the very point of coming round, but I was afraid you'd have refused to see me, sir.

Tony: I don't know what I'd have done. Pour me another whisky, will you?

Barrett: Certainly, sir. (Pouring) I'm afraid that in different ways we were both taken in by Vera.

Tony: I was taken in by both of you. You shouldn't have lied to me.

Barrett: I can't tell you, sir, how bitterly I have reproached myself. But at the time, the risk that you would refuse to allow us to be here together was too great. And I was so completely under her influence there was nothing I wouldn't have done for her. And when she came out with that idea of telling you that she was my niece...

Tony: Was it her...

Barrett: Yes, sir. Not that I'm trying to pass off the blame onto her. After all, she's only a young girl and it was my fault for listening to her.

Tony: It only you hadn't been so deceitful.

Barrett: I can assure you, sir, it became increasingly painful for me. But once we'd begun, there was no turning back. And then when I found that you and she - well, there was nothing I could do but accept the situation. But it was painful for me, sir.

Tony: And for me too. I don't mind telling you, Barrett, it's taken me a long time to get over it.

Barrett: Yes, sir. I can understand that.

Tony: In fact, I'm not sure that I altogether have. If only you hadn't lied to me.

Barrett: (Scoring smoothly.) Circumstances sometimes overcome our better feelings, sir. I'm sure it gave you no pleasure when you were with Vera behind my back.

Tony: Have you got a job at the moment?

Barrett: Yes, sir. I'm in service with a lady in Lowndes Square.

Tony: Is it all right?

Barrett: No, sir. Not that I'm not treated with consideration but it's purely routine work and, as you know, sir, I like being left to arrange things on my own initiative.

Tony: Another drink?

Barrett: No, thank you, sir. May I get you another, sir?

Tony: Thanks. (BARRETT pours a stiff whisky.) When did Vera leave you?

Barrett: It was just after you dismissed us, sir.

Tony: You mean that had something to do with it?

Barrett: I'm convinced it did, sir.

Tony: Why?

Barrett: I'm not quite sure how I should put it, sir. But after we 'd left, there was nothing I could give her that was as good as what she 'd got used to here. I mean from her point of view, this was the ideal situation, with both of us... sir.

Tony: Sit down, Barrett. Now, listen... Barrett, if I were to ask you to come back here, what would you feel about it?

Barrett: I 'd like to very much indeed, sir.

Tony: And when would you be able to start?

Barrett: Would Friday week be too late? I only need to give a week's notice in this position but I wouldn't like to let Mrs. Armitage down by giving less.

Tony: You let me down, didn't you? You promised me you 'd look after me. You said you could make this house work. And so you did, for a time. Then you just left.

Barrett: I did not leave you, sir. It was you who discharged me when you found out about my relationship with Vera. For my part I had no idea of your relationship with her until that evening.

Tony: You mean that if you had known, you 'd have wanted to leave?

Barrett: You must remember, sir, that she was my fiancée.

Tony: If only you 'd told me that.

Barrett: As I said, sir, I wasn't sure how you 'd have reacted to that. Or if only I 'd discovered sooner that you were attracted to her.

Tony: What difference would that have made? It would just have made you want to leave sooner, that's all.

Barrett: Not necessarily, sir.

Tony: What do you mean? Come on, Barrett. Out with it.

Barrett: Well, if I may say so, sir, it had never occurred to me that a girl like Vera might be of interest to a gentleman like yourself.

Tony: You just don't know me at all if you think that.

Barrett: No, sir?

Tony: What do you think it was like in East Africa, for God's sake?

Barrett: Yes, of course, sir. It was very difficult, I have no doubt.

Tony: Difficult? It couldn't have been easier. You could buy a girl there for the price of four cows. And she was yours for keeps to do what you liked with and no questions asked. None of this night-club nonsense. The trouble with England is the pubs close too early and the girls go to bed too late. At least most of them do. Vera was all right. Vera's just the type I like. You don't find many girls like that.

Barrett: That, sir, depends on where you look.

Tony: What do you mean?

Barrett: Perhaps I'm speaking out of turn.

Tony: What were you going to say?

Barrett: Nothing, sir... It's just that, had you said certain things to me before, which you 're saying now, I think I might have been able to be of some assistance in sparing you a certain amount of inconvenience. Not that the past needs to concern us unduly - that's all over and done with. No, it's not the past that matters.

Tony: Well, go on. What were you going to say?

Barrett: To be quite honest with you, sir...

Tony: Yes?

Barrett: I can't help feeling upset when I think that you may still bear me a grudge for what's past.

Tony: Of course I don't. The past's all forgiven and forgotten.

Barrett: Thank you, sir. That's a great relief.

Tony: Barrett, what were you going to say?

Barrett: It was just something you said yourself, sir, that put it into my mind. I can't remember your exact words but I believe you said something to the effect of Vera's being a certain type of young girl you 're not altogether indifferent to.

Tony: Yes. Yes.

Barrett: There's another young person I know who is not altogether unlike Vera in type. May I pour you another drink, sir?

Tony: Yes, do, and have some yourself.

Barrett: She's only a year older than Vera and she's somewhat more reliable...

Tony: What's she like?

Barrett: She's very agreeable, sir. As I say, sir, she's not unlike Vera. Perhaps a little more attractive. It's difficult to say. Certainly not less attractive. But just to

recapitulate, sir. Did I understand you to say that you 'd wish me to give my notice in to my present employer?

Tony: Yes. Give it to her immediately.

Barrett: And it will be convenient if I move my things back in here on Saturday week?

Tony: Yes, if that's the soonest you can do it.

Barrett: Thank you very much, sir. (He picks up his overcoat.)

Tony: And Barrett, I can be sure that you will...

Barrett: You can be sure that I shall do everything, sir, everything to make you comfortable. Your very good health, sir.

(CURTAIN)

Scene 2

The kitchen.

Two weeks later.

About mid-day.

(MABEL is sitting on the kitchen table, munching her way Through a large box of chocolates. She is a slim little cockney girl with a pert face and a husky voice. A bright superficial insolence comes from a basic insecurity . Three or four saucepans are cooking on the gas stove. TONY comes in wearing pyjamas.)

Tony: Hullo.

Mabel: Hullo.

Tony: What time is it?

Mabel: Nearly five to twelve.

Tony: How long have you been up?

Mabel: Hours. You were still asleep so I thought I 'd come down and listen to some music.

Tony: Don't spoil your lunch.

Mabel: I won't.

Tony: What's he cooking?

Mabel: He didn't say. Looks like some sort of roast. He put a lot of those herbs in.

Tony: It smells terrific. What herbs did he put in?

Mabel: It's no use asking me that sort of thing. Why do you care so much about food? What difference does it make?

Tony: (Picking out a chocolate.) You don't seem altogether indifferent to it yourself. (He pops it into her mouth.)

Mabel: I don't care the way you do. If people buy me chocolates or meals in restaurants, I eat them. If they don't I go out and buy tins. But so long as I don't go short, I'm not worried.

Tony: Have you ever gone short?

Mabel: 'Course I have. There's been lots of times when Dad was out of a job and there wasn't enough food in the house.

Tony: But not since you've been living on your own?

Mabel: Sometimes.

(BARRETT comes in with his waistcoat and apron on and his shirt-sleeves rolled up.)

Tony: Morning, Barrett. (BARRETT checks the saucepans.) Any letters, Barrett?

Barrett: Only one, sir. From America.

Tony: Richard again. Another letter about him and Sally.

Barrett: It's on your desk. Shall I bring it down to you?

Tony: No, don't bother.

Barrett: Mabel, could you come and help me make the beds?

Tony: No, don't bother about the beds. Leave them for now and Mabel and I can do them a bit later on while you 're getting lunch ready.

Barrett: No, I don't want you doing housework. I 'll do them. I can manage. (Exit)

Mabel: I might just as well give him a hand. It won't take a minute.

Tony: No, hold on. There's something I want to ask you.

Mabel: Well?

Tony: What's your flat like?

Mabel: Flat? How much do you think I earn? It's only a room.

Tony: And your parents. Do you see much of them?

Mabel: Not much. Why?

Tony: Do they know that you aren't still working in the restaurant?

Mabel: What's all this leading up to?

Tony: I was wondering whether you 'd... Whether you really want to get another job.

Mabel: Well, I haven't got much choice, have I? I've got to live.

Tony: I thought perhaps you might like to live here.

Mabel: Live here?

Tony: Well, would you?

Mabel: I 'd love to, but I mean... How could I?

Tony: You stayed here last night. What's to stop you staying every night?

Mabel: Have you talked it over with him.

Tony: It's nothing to do with him. It's my house.

Mabel: Sure, but if I move in here, I've got to live with both of you, haven't I?

Tony: Not at all.

Mabel: I don't mean that. I mean he's living here, and I've got to get on with him, haven't I?

Tony: All that matters is that you get on with me.

Mabel: I seem to do that all right, don't I?

(TONY kisses her, making her bend back over the kitchen table.)

Mabel: Careful. You nearly had my hair in the butter. Anyway, how do you know you wouldn't get tired of me?

Tony: I wouldn't get tired of you.

Mabel: What about money? I've got to earn some, you know. I mean even if I live here, I'll still have expenses.

Tony: I'd make you an allowance.

Mabel: Would you do that? You really want me, don't you?

Tony: Yes, I really want you. (A kiss.) And what's more I want you now.

Mabel: Not while he's making the beds. He might want it too.

Tony: Don't you like him anymore?

Mabel: (Evasive) He was all right before I met you.

Tony: But he's not as nice as I am?

Mabel: He's in a very funny mood this morning.

Tony: Perhaps he had a bad night.

Mabel: Yes, perhaps he did.

Tony: Go on, I bet he got more sleep than we did.

Mabel: I think you ought to talk to him about me moving in.

Tony: For God's sake, he's only a servant.

Mabel: What do you think I am? I'm only a waitress.

Tony: That's different.

Mabel: So long as he doesn't take it out on me when you're not there. That's all I care about. When he gets nasty he gets real nasty. I can tell you. And I don't like all this apron lark.

Tony: It's just a game. There's no harm in it.

Mabel: I don't know. Somehow it scares me. You like him, don't you? You really like him.

Tony: Yes, I do.

Mabel: And he's got a thing about you, too.

Tony: He's what?

Mabel: He's always on about you. He always was, even when he was working for that Mrs. Whatsit. That was the time I first met him.

Tony: What did he say?

Mabel: Oh, I don't know. It's no use asking me. It was just talk. You know.

Tony: But what sort of talk?

Mabel: You know. What you were like and that. You know what it's like when you 're talking about somebody That somebody else doesn't know. Always on about you. And he's just the same now.

Tony: But what does he say?

Mabel: I don't know. You know what I am. I forget. Well, one thing was how well you wear a suit of clothes.

Tony: How I what?

Mabel: I don't know what he means, really, but something about the reason he enjoys valeting you so much is because there aren't many young men who know how to wear a suit of clothes the way you do. Sounds silly to me. I mean there's only one way of wearing clothes, you just wear them, but that's what he said.

(Enter BARRETT.)

Tony: Hullo, Barrett. Did you manage all right with the beds all by yourself?

Barrett: It's not difficult, sir, making a bed. (He goes to the cooking pots.)

Tony: I could do with a drink. (After waiting in vain for Barrett to react.) Got any Scotch in here, Barrett?

Barrett: No, sir.

Tony: Barrett, tell me, are you finding it rather too much for you, running the place singlehanded.

Barrett: I can manage.

Tony: Because, for one thing, there's no reason at all why we shouldn't have lunch down here, is there? It 'll be much easier for you, won't it? It 'll save you an awful lot of carrying, up and down those stairs, and it really isn't worth it just for the three of us. Yes, let's always eat down here in future, unless we've got guests or something. All right?

Barrett: If you prefer it, sir.

Tony: And if you 'd like a daily to help you with the work, you can have one.

Barrett: No, thanks.

Tony: Well, think about it and if you want one, just say the word. Because there 'll be three of us now to cook for, and so on. I've asked Mabel to stay.

Barrett: Did I understand you to say, sir, that you 'd asked Mabel to stay?

Tony: Yes, she's going to stay with us permanently. (BARRETT says nothing.) Well, I think I 'll go upstairs and get a drink. Would you like something, Mabel?

Mabel: Yes, I 'd like a whisky, please.

Tony: Anything in it?

Mabel: Bitter lemon.

Tony: Bitter lemon with whisky?

Mabel: Yes, that's the way I like it. Whisky sour, I call it. I know it isn't really a whisky sour, but that's what I call it.

Tony: What about you, Barrett? Shall I get you a drink?

Barrett: (At the stove.) No, thanks.

(TONY goes out.)

Mabel: Well? (Barrett starts sharpening a knife.) It's all right, isn't it? Because I don't have to stay if you don't want me to. I mean I haven't said yes. I mean you 're the one. I mean I wouldn't be here at all if it wasn't for you, would I? Les, what is it? What's the matter?

Barrett: If he wants to eat down here, you 'd better lay the table.

Mabel: Yes, of course I will. (She makes no move to go, but stands facing him.)

Barrett: What are you waiting for then?

Mabel: Les, why did you bring me here?

Barrett: Get the table laid.

Mabel: Do you want me to say yes I 'll stay or do you want me to say thank you very much but it's no go?

Barrett: Eh? (He turns.) I want you to stay.

Mabel: All right then, I will. At least I will if...

Barrett: If?

Mabel: If you 'll be a bit nice to me. I mean talk to me a bit. Don't just stand there and say ' Get the table laid ' as if I'm a slave. I don't mind working. I 'll do anything for you, if only you 'll treat me like a human being.

Barrett: Come here, Mabel.

Mabel: Oh, love. (An embrace.) That's better. That's good. That feels marvellous.

Barrett: You 're all right.

Mabel: I don't understand you, Les. I really don't. I mean I don't see what you get out of it. There you are, slaving your guts out all day in the house cooking away, making the beds, cleaning the floors and even finding girls for him into the bargain, and what do you get out of it, except a wage packet at the end of the week? I bet he doesn't even pay you as much as you could earn, a man like you.

Barrett: Shut up. He's coming.

Mabel: (Trying to put her arms round him again.) So what? Let him see us. Why shouldn't he? If he wants me to stay, he might as well find out.

Barrett: (Pushing her away.) No, not yet. Get back to the table.

(MABEL is moving away as TONY comes back with the drinks .)

Tony: Here we are. Scotch and bitter lemon for you. Sure you won't have anything, Barrett? I've brought the bottle?

Barrett: No, thanks.

Tony: How's the lunch coming along? Something smells jolly good. What is it?

Barrett: Lamb.

Tony: Is something the matter, Barrett?

Barrett: No.

Mabel: Where's the stuff to lay the table with?

Barrett: In the drawer.

Tony: Come on, Barrett, what is it?

Mabel: I 'd leave him alone if I was you.

Barrett: You shut up and lay the table.

Tony: Barrett, I 'd rather you didn't...

Barrett: No, put a tablecloth on first. Just because we 're eating in the kitchen it doesn't mean we aren't going to do things properly. If you don't mind.

Tony: Barrett, please don't speak to Mabel like that. She's here as my guest.

Barrett: As your guest, did you say?

Mabel: Which drawer are the soup spoons in?

Tony: (Quietly) You heard what I said.

Barrett: Well, let me tell you something -

Tony: No, I think I 'll tell you something first. I'm perfectly well aware that this situation isn't easy.

Barrett: Huh!

Mabel: Les!

Barrett: What?

Mabel: The soup spoons. Which drawer are they in?

Tony: But I want Mabel to stay and she wants to stay and there's no reason at all why it shouldn't work out if only we look the facts in the face.

Mabel: Tony, don't.

Tony: Otherwise the whole thing's going to get out of hand.

Mabel: Tony.

Tony: No, it's no use not talking about it. The three of us have got to face up to the situation.

Barrett: Face up to the situation?

Tony: Barrett, you 'd better go to your room.

Barrett: Now you just listen to me -

Tony: No, you've said more than enough already and you 'll only regret it later. Now come on, pull yourself together. What's the matter with you? Have you been drinking?

Barrett: No, I have not been drinking, and no, I will not regret anything I've said or anything that I'm going to say now .

Tony: All right. Let's have it. If there's something you want to get off your chest, come over here and sit down and tell me about it.

Barrett: Oh, get off. You don't have to play the young officer down here. ' Any complaints? ' ' Anything to get off your chest? ' Look, I'm a servant. I know that, so I don't need to be reminded of it every time you condescend to say ' Let's be equals just for five minutes '. ' Let's do crosswords together '. ' Let's have lunch in the kitchen '. All right, I'm a servant and I do my job. I take orders from you and I call you sir and I cook your food and wait on you and put out clean socks for you in the morning and pick up your dirty ones from where you threw them under the bed when you got into it with my girl that I've been fool enough or generous enough or whatever it is to bring along here to the house. All right. Never mind. I 'll do all that just so long as I need to go on being a servant. But if you want to condescend to me, my lad, you 'll do it somewhere else and not down here in my kitchen. I'm the boss down here and it's me that gives the orders if there's any orders to be given. And if you want to come and have lunch down here, you just remember that. I didn't ask you to. I'm quite willing to carry it up the stairs. That's my job. But if you come down here, you 're coming into my room, so don't you tell me to go to my room, because that's exactly where I am.

Tony: Barrett, I... (lost for words, he crosses to BARRETT and lightly touches his arm.)

Barrett: Now if you don't like that, all you've got to do is tell me to go, and I will. And as for her, she can do exactly what she likes. She can come with me or she can stay with you, and if I were you, I wouldn't be too sure which she 'll do.

Tony: Nobody's asking you to go, Barrett. Where did I put my drink? (He finds it and gulps it down.) All right, Barrett. Give me a call when lunch is ready, would you, please?

(Exit with glass.)

Mabel: Oh, les, you showed him.

Barrett: You shut up and get that table laid.

(CURTAIN)

Scene 3

The kitchen.

Winter.

Three months later.

10.0 p.m.

The kitchen has changed since the last scene. It is now obviously used as a living room as well as a kitchen. A television set has been installed and the drink is now kept down here. Tony and Barrett are sitting in armchairs on either side of the stove. Barrett is doing a crossword in the newspaper folded on his lap. Tony looks fat, bloated and sodden. Wearing a pyjama jacket, shabby flannel trousers and slippers, with a scarf tied around his neck, he is dirty and unshaven. He nurses an empty glass.)

Barrett: (Reading a clue.) 'Goes short of sweets - seven letters '.

Tony: What was that?

Barrett: I said, 'Goes short of sweets - seven letters '. Last letter's 'S ' and the first is ' L '.

Tony: (Making effort to concentrate.) The last letter's ' L ' ?

Barrett: No, the first letter's ' L ' and the last is ' S '.

Tony: Lollops.

Barrett: Lollops? Oh, I see, yes, lollops. That's right. Good. (writing it in.) Now. ' The country seems the place for putting in a round of golf. Nine letters '.

Tony: No idea.

Barrett: The first letter's ' G '. Oh, I've got it. Greenland. Green-land. Get it? Now then, ' What price a damaged apple-cart? '.

Tony: Oh, for God's sake. Haven't we done enough for tonight?

Barrett: Come on, we 're only just getting into our stride.

Tony: Where on earth can she have got to?

Barrett: She 'll be back.

Tony: Pour me another drink, will you?

Barrett: I thought you said you were cutting down.

Tony: Just one more. A small one.

Barrett: You 'll only be sorry in the morning.

Tony: Please.

Barrett: All right.

Tony: Thanks.

Barrett: What do you want for lunch tomorrow?

Tony: Anything you like. I leave it to you. She should be here now. I bet she's picked up some man.

Barrett: No she hasn't. Relax.

(TONY gets up, crosses to the window and looks up at the street railings, which are only just visible in the thick fog.)

Tony: Why did we have to let her go out tonight of all nights in this fog? What time is it?

Barrett: (Without moving.) It was ten o'clock when you asked me five minutes ago, so I suppose it's five past now. (TONY pours another drink.) One more, you said.

Tony: Oh, don't fuss me. I need it.

Barrett: (To himself.) What price a damaged apple-cart?

Tony: Was that the front door?

Barrett: You're like a cat on hot bricks and you don't need to be. She's not going up to your room tonight, you know.

Tony: What do you mean? You said -

Barrett: No I didn't. The drink's affecting your memory. She's staying down here tonight.

Tony: I thought you said -

Barrett: Who found Mabel in the first place? Who picked her up and brought her here? You don't think it's you she's after, do you? She's seen you drunk, remember.

Tony: You don't think you stand a chance, do you?

Barrett: You can wait if you like - and see. But I'll tell you what, Tony... Tonight I won't be selfish.

(TONY pours another drink. Suddenly he shudders.)

Barrett: Now then, what price a damaged apple-cart? Seven letters.

Tony: Listen.

Barrett: Yes, I think there is someone up there.

Tony: Go up and see who it is.

Barrett: There's someone coming down the stairs.

Tony: I thought the front door was locked.

Barrett: It was. Mabel must have left it open.

Richard: (Off) Is anyone in?

Tony: It's Richard... Hullo, there. Yes. Come down.

Richard: (Entering) Hullo. You 're down here, are you?

Tony: (Nervously) Richard, where have you sprung from? Yes, we sit down here because it's warmer and so much more Comfortable. What will you drink, my dear man? Whisky? (He pours out large dollops with a shaking hand and splashes in soda.)

Barrett: Look out or you 'll waste it.

Tony: Plenty more where that came from. (Laughs nervously but RICHARD doesn't join in.) Did you have a good time in the States?

Richard: it was all right. I didn't like it quite so much the second time. Why didn't you answer my letters?

Tony: I'm a hopeless letter writer. When did you get back?

Richard: The beginning of last week.

Tony: Why didn't you come and see us?

Richard: I kept trying to ring you, but I could never get any answer.

Barrett: (Suddenly) How did you know we 'd be here tonight?

Richard: I asked in the pub.

Tony: Yes, we do go in there from time to time.

Richard: Tony, can I see you alone? Why don't we go upstairs?

Tony: What for?

Richard: There's something I want to tell you.

Tony: You can talk quite freely in front of Barrett.

Richard: Let me see you alone.

(BARRETT sits.)

Tony: Where's Sally?

Richard: She got a job in Zurich.

Tony: Zurich? But I thought you were practically engaged.

Richard: So did I.

Tony: I heard she was going to follow you out to the States.

Richard: She was. First of all, she was going to come out with me. And then she said she 'd write and maybe come out later...and then, when she finally did write, the letter was all about you.

Tony: Was it? I suppose it was what I was expecting really. I haven't seen her since that evening you left together.

Richard: I know.

Tony: But I mean she never even tried to contact me again after that.

Richard: Would it have been any use if she had?

(Footsteps overhead.)

Barrett: She's back.

Tony: You might as well know there's a girl living here.

Richard: I know.

Tony: She's a girl-friend of Barrett's and she also helps him with the work.

Richard: And she's also a girl-friend of yours.

Tony: All right. So what?

(Enter MABEL.)

Mabel: Sorry I've been so long. I thought I was never going to get back here. Oh, we've got company, I see. (A silence.) Aren't you going to introduce me, Tony?

Tony: Richard Merton. Mabel Carvey.

Mabel: Pleased to meet you, I'm sure. (She shakes Richard's hand.)

Tony: Had enough, Richard? Have you seen all you came to see?

Barrett: You look cold, dear.

Mabel: I'm shrammed. It's awful, out. Goes right through you.

Tony: Are you all right?

Mabel: Sure, I'm okay. I wouldn't say no to a nice hot cup of tea.

Tony: Put the kettle on, Barrett.

Barrett: Put the kettle on, Mabel.

Mabel: (She is at the radiator, warming herself.) All right, I will in just a tick.

Tony: It's all right. I'll do it. (He puts the kettle on.)

Richard: I've got to speak to you, Tony.

Mabel: Oh, if you two want to talk business or something, I can go upstairs. I mean, don't mind me.

Barrett: That's right, Mabel. We'll both go. You can see they want to be left alone together. Only we don't need to go upstairs. We'll go into the servants' bedroom in there.

Mabel: Servants' bedroom? Is that what it is? You never said.

Barrett: Yes, that's what it is. That's where Vera used to sleep. At first. Come on.

Mabel: It'll be awfully cold in there. There's no fire.

Barrett: We'll put the electric blanket on.

Mabel: Electric blanket? What are you talking about?

Tony: No, stay here.

(BARRETT takes MABEL into the room.)

Tony: (To RICHARD.) There's nothing at all to say. I know exactly what you think of me, so there's no need to say it. I've heard it all before.

Richard: I don't think you have any idea at all what I think of you. But that isn't really why I came here. First of all, I want to apologise.

Tony: My dear man! What for?

Richard: You had just one chance of breaking out of this... And I took that away from you... Sally... I don't want her for myself. I thought I did but I ought to have known that there wasn't the slightest hope that she and I could ever have settled down together. Well I did know, somewhere, that I shouldn't be doing it, But I went ahead and all I did was kill any last chance she might come back to you. I don't know whether things would be any different for you now if she had come back. But they might.

Tony: No. I didn't want her. You don't need to worry about that.

Richard: Oh yes I do. Tony, you must let me help you.

Tony: You can't.

Richard: I can if only you 'll let me. I'm back in England for good. I've been offered a partnership in the firm. Which means quite a lot more money. I'm thinking of leaving Oakley Street and moving into a flat I've seen. But it's too big for me on my own. Will you share it with me?

Tony: I should forget that if I were you.

Richard: But I can't. Don't you see? Come away with me.

Barrett: (Off) Tony! Aren't you going to come in and join us?

(TONY gets up and moves over to the closed door.)

Richard: It's not a bad flat. It looks out over the park. It's unfurnished, but if we used your furniture and mine, we 'd have enough, between us.

Tony: Richard, let's meet some other time, but you must go now. Thank you for coming though. It was nice of you.

Richard: Tony, if ever there's anything...

Tony: I know... Thanks.

Richard: When shall I see you?

Tony: Give me a ring.

Richard: But you don't answer.

Tony: I 'll ring you. (Trying to show him to the door.)

(TONY moves involuntarily towards the closed door.)

Richard: (Stopping) Tony, how do you think this is going to...

Tony: I've no idea.

Richard: Don't you care?

Tony: I don't think about it.

Mabel: (Off) No, Les...

Tony: Goodbye, Richard. And thanks.

Richard: I can't leave you like this.

Tony: You must.

Richard: Tony... It's a long time ago... But you must still remember...

Tony: Not a thing... Forget it. And forget me. (He turns.)

Barrett: Tony.

Richard: Goodbye Tony.

Tony: Goodbye, Richard. I'm glad about the partnership.

(RICHARD walks slowly to the basement door and goes out. TONY helps himself to a drink. He shudders, then moves towards the bedroom door.)

(CURTAIN)