

Side 1
MOLLIE
GILES

MOLLIE. *(moving down to the sofa and sitting)* Oh! I do so want everything to go well at first. First impressions are so important.

GILES. *(moving down to right of the sofa)* Is everything ready? Nobody's arrived yet, I suppose?

MOLLIE. No, thank goodness. I think everything's in order. Mrs. Barlow's hooked it early. Afraid of the weather, I suppose.

GILES. What a nuisance these daily women are. That leaves everything on your shoulders.

MOLLIE. *And yours!* This is a partnership.

GILES. *(crossing to the fire)* So long as you don't ask me to cook.

MOLLIE. *(rising)* No, no, that's my department. Anyway, we've got lots of tins in case we are snowed up. *(Crossing to GILES)* Oh, Giles, do you think it's going to be all right?

GILES. Got cold feet, have you? Are you sorry now we didn't sell the place when your aunt left it to you, instead of having this mad idea of running it as a guest house?

MOLLIE. No, I'm not. I love it. And talking of a guest house. Just look at *that!* *(She indicates the sign board in an accusing manner.)*

GILES. *(complacently)* Pretty good, what? *(He crosses to left of the sign board.)*

MOLLIE. It's a disaster! Don't you see? You've left out the "S." Monkwell instead of Monkswell.

GILES. Good Lord, so I did. However did I come to do that? But it doesn't really matter, does it? Monkwell is just as good a name.

MOLLIE. You're in disgrace. *(She crosses to the desk.)* Go and stoke up the central heating.

GILES. Across that icy yard! Ugh! Shall I bank it up for the night now?

MOLLIE. No, you don't do that until ten or eleven o'clock at night.

GILES. How appalling!

MOLLIE. Hurry up. Someone may arrive at any minute now.

GILES. You've got all the rooms worked out?

MOLLIE. Yes. *(She sits at the desk and picks up a paper from it.)* Mrs. Boyle, Front Fourposter Room. Major Metcalf, Blue Room. Miss Casewell, East Room. Mr. Wren, Oak Room.

GILES. *(crossing to right of the sofa table)* I wonder what all these people will be like. Oughtn't we to have got rent in advance?

MOLLIE. Oh no, I don't think so.

GILES. We're rather mugs at this game.

MOLLIE. They bring luggage. If they don't pay we hang on to their luggage. It's quite simple.

GILES. I can't help thinking we ought to have taken a correspondence course in hotel keeping. We're sure to get had in some way. Their luggage might be just bricks wrapped up in newspaper and where should we be then?

MOLLIE. They all wrote from very good addresses.

GILES. That's what servants with forged references do. Some of these people may be criminals hiding from the police. *(He moves up to the sign board and picks it up.)*

MOLLIE. I don't care what they are so long as they pay us seven guineas every week.

GILES. You're such a wonderful woman of business, Mollie.

(GILES exits through the arch up right, carrying the sign board. MOLLIE switches on the radio.)

Side 2

MRS. BOYLE

MAJOR METCALF

(Scene – The same. The following afternoon.)

(When the curtain rises it is not snowing, but snow can be seen banked high against the window. MAJOR METCALF is seated on the sofa reading a book, and MRS. BOYLE is sitting in the large armchair right in front of the fire, writing on a pad on her knee.)

MRS. BOYLE. I consider it *most* dishonest not to have told me they were only just starting this place.

MAJOR METCALF. Well, everything's got to have a beginning, you know. Excellent breakfast this morning. Good coffee. Scrambled eggs, home-made marmalade. And all nicely served, too. Little woman does it all herself.

MRS. BOYLE. Amateurs – there should be a proper staff.

MAJOR METCALF. Excellent lunch, too.

MRS. BOYLE. Cornbeef.

MAJOR METCALF. But very well disguised cornbeef. Red wine in it. Mrs. Ralston promised to make a pie for us tonight.

MRS. BOYLE. *(rising and crossing to the radiator)* These radiators are not really hot. I shall speak about it.

MAJOR METCALF. Very comfortable beds, too. At least mine was. Hope yours was, too.

MRS. BOYLE. It was quite adequate. *(She returns to the large armchair right and sits.)* I don't quite see why the best bedroom should have been given to that *very* peculiar young man.

MAJOR METCALF. Got here ahead of us. First come, first served.

MRS. BOYLE. From the advertisement I got *quite* a different impression of what this place would be like. A comfortable writing-room, and a much larger place altogether – with bridge and other amenities.

MAJOR METCALF. Regular old tabbies' delight.

MRS. BOYLE. I beg your pardon.

MAJOR METCALF. Er – I mean, yes, I quite see what you mean.

(CHRISTOPHER enters left from the stairs unnoticed.)

MRS. BOYLE. No, indeed, *I* shan't stay here long.

Side 3

CHRISTOPHER

MISS CASEWELL

CHRISTOPHER. Oh!

MISS CASEWELL. Hullo.

CHRISTOPHER. (*gesturing back to the library*) Wherever I go that woman seems to hunt me down – and then she glares at me – positively glares.

MISS CASEWELL. (*indicating the radio*) Turn it down a bit.

(**CHRISTOPHER** turns the radio down until it is playing quite softly.)

CHRISTOPHER. Is that all right?

MISS CASEWELL. Oh yes, it's served its purpose.

CHRISTOPHER. What purpose?

MISS CASEWELL. Tactics, boy.

(**CHRISTOPHER** looks puzzled. **MISS CASEWELL** indicates the library.)

CHRISTOPHER. Oh, you mean *her*.

MISS CASEWELL. She'd pinched the best chair. I've got it now.

CHRISTOPHER. You drove her out. I'm glad. I'm very glad. I don't like her a bit. (*crossing quickly to MISS CASEWELL*) Let's think of things we can do to annoy her, shall we? I wish she'd go away from here.

MISS CASEWELL. In this? Not a hope.

CHRISTOPHER. But when the snow melts.

MISS CASEWELL. Oh, when the snow melts lots of things may have happened.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes – yes – that’s true. *(He goes to the window.)*
Snow’s rather lovely, isn’t it? So peaceful – and pure...
It makes one forget things.

MISS CASEWELL. It doesn’t make me forget.

CHRISTOPHER. How fierce you sound.

MISS CASEWELL. I was thinking.

CHRISTOPHER. What sort of thinking? *(He sits on the window seat.)*

MISS CASEWELL. Ice on a bedroom jug, chilblains, raw and bleeding – one thin ragged blanket – a child shivering with cold and fear.

CHRISTOPHER. My dear, it sounds too, too grim – what is it? A novel?

MISS CASEWELL. You didn’t know I was a writer, did you?

CHRISTOPHER. Are you? *(He rises and moves down to her.)*

MISS CASEWELL. Sorry to disappoint you. Actually I’m not.
(She puts the magazine up in front of her face.)

Side 4

TROTTER

PARAVICINI

TROTTER. (*rising and crossing to left of PARAVICINI*) What did you say to the lady to upset her, sir?

PARAVICINI. Me, Sergeant? Oh, just a little innocent fun. I've always been fond of a little joke.

TROTTER. There's nice fun – and there's fun that's not so nice.

PARAVICINI. (*moving down centre*) Now I do wonder what you mean by that, Sergeant?

TROTTER. I've been doing a little wondering about you, sir.

PARAVICINI. Indeed?

TROTTER. I've been wondering about that car of yours, and how it happened to overturn in a snowdrift (*He pauses and draws the right curtain.*) so conveniently.

PARAVICINI. Inconveniently, you mean, don't you, Sergeant?

TROTTER. (*moving down to right of PARAVICINI*) That rather depends on the way you're looking at it. Just where were you bound for, by the way, when you had this – accident?

PARAVICINI. Oh – I was on my way to see a friend.

TROTTER. In this neighbourhood?

PARAVICINI. Not so very far from here.

- TROTTER.** And what was the name and address of this friend?
- PARAVICINI.** Now really, Sergeant Trotter, does that matter now? I mean, it has nothing to do with this predicament, has it? *(He sits at the left end of the sofa.)*
- TROTTER.** We always like the fullest information. What did you say this friend's name was?
- PARAVICINI.** I didn't say. *(He takes a cigar from a case in his pocket.)*
- TROTTER.** No, you didn't say. And it seems you're not going to say. *(He sits on the right arm of the sofa.)* Now that's very interesting.
- PARAVICINI.** But there might be – so many reasons. An *amour* – discretion. These jealous husbands. *(He pierces the cigar.)*
- TROTTER.** Rather old to be running round with the ladies at your time of life, aren't you?
- PARAVICINI.** My dear Sergeant, I am not, perhaps, quite so old as I look.
- TROTTER.** That's just what I've been thinking, sir.
- PARAVICINI.** What? *(He lights the cigar.)*
- TROTTER.** That you may not be as old as you – try to look. There's a lot of people trying to look younger than they are. If somebody goes about trying to look older – well, it does make one ask oneself why.
- PARAVICINI.** Having asked questions of so many people – you ask questions of yourself as well? Isn't that overdoing things?
- TROTTER.** I might get an answer from myself – I don't get many from you.