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Legacy

by Austin Hawkins

Dramatised from the papers of
Frederick Joseph Manning of Octon Cottage
Torquay, England
(1879 - 1950)

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Legacy

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A saga of loyal service, unexpected good fortune, betrayal and disappointment set against the background of a fast-changing social scene and the looming threat of World War II.

CHARACTERS

5W / 4M + 2 Offstage Voices

MAISIE COOPER: *About 17, a parlourmaid; innocent, a bit happy go lucky.*

MARY DRAPER: *Mid 40's, a housekeeper, widow; inclined to be direct and rather bitter but does has a softer side to her nature.*

JOSEPH MANNING: *56, (in 1935), a gardener/chauffeur; reliable dependable type, down to earth.*

LADY BANBURY: *About 55; dominant haughty manner as befits the class structure in the 1930's.*

MR. CODNER: *Late 50's to mid-60's, local solicitor; rather staid and very formal manner.*

MR. DIAMOND: *Mid 20's to mid-50's, Auctioneer's clerk. Cheerful type.*

LEONARD ST. JOHN COURTNEY: *A local "Annuity Consultant" 40 - 50 years old; very dapper, suave manner. but perhaps a bit shifty.*

FANNY MANNING: *About 47, Joseph's wife; timid manner, but knows her own mind.*

OLIVE MANNING: *Olive and Joseph's daughter, late 20's/early 30's; cheerful, plain "girl next door" type.*

OFFSTAGE VOICES: *(1) Voice of Radio newsreader; (2) Voice of Senior Civil Servant.*

SETTING

ACT 1: *Withdrawing room of Octon, a villa in Torre Torquay late 1935, the home of the recently deceased Mr. Noble Acutt.*

ACTS 2 AND 3: *Sitting room of a small rented, working man's house, the home of Joseph Manning and his Family.*

The play straddles the era leading up to World War II and the threat of war is becoming very real. The social order is changing as an ongoing result of the first World War and the recovery of the economy following the deep recession of the late 1920's. There are still many domestic servants, but the practice of employing live-in servants, housekeepers, maids, chauffeurs etcetera is in decline. Electricity and domestic machines are being developed. The play reflects the challenges which the characters are facing as they deal with social changes entwined with the true story of their personal fortunes and follies, and contemplating the enormity of another World War.

AUTHOR'S NOTES AT END OF SCRIPT

LEGACY

By Austin Hawkins

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING: *An upper middleclass villa, (Octon St. Michael's Road in Torquay), January 1936. The withdrawing room furnished in an earlier style for the times, a bit "genteel shabby".*

Stage L an entrance door from the hall, Centre R a plain panel door covered in green baize. Stage R French doors to the garden. There is a large radiogram, or wind up gramophone of the period, a bureau, a three-piece suit or a couple of sofas and a coffee table. A telephone of early vintage, A call bell for servants, and with a clock. On a side table there are silver frames with black and white photos of an old gent with a younger woman.

AT RISE: *Daytime; the room is unoccupied and is gloomy because the curtains over the French doors are closed. Daylight flooding through the gap.*

Enter from the hall door, 17-year-old housemaid MAISIE wearing a rather worn and shabby overcoat. She walks over to the window, opens the curtains half way to let in more daylight. She is carrying a 78rpm record. She takes the record from its paper sleeve and puts it on the player, whips off her coat to reveal her black and white maid's uniform, goes to the green baize door peeks behind it and returns to start the record playing.

SFX: Recording of "CHEEK TO CHEEK", (Original version from the 1935 film), starts to play.

MAISIE sways about in a dance adopting the posture of a ballroom dancer lead by an imaginary partner and sings along with the record.

Unseen by MAISIE the hall door opens and MRS. DRAPER in hat and coat, clutching her handbag, stands in the doorway, her frame perhaps casting a slightly sinister shadow across the room. MRS. DRAPER, 45 – 50, is a tidily dressed working class woman of the era. She waits for a beat or two unseen by MAISIE.

MRS. DRAPER

(Loudly)

And just what do you think you're up to?

MAISIE startled, stops, rushes to the radiogram and stops the music. MRS. DRAPER advances into the room.

Getting above yourself aren't you?

MAISIE

(Contrite)

I'm sorry Mary, I just so wanted to try....

MRS. DRAPER

I'm still not sure you grasp what being in service is all about Maisie, I'd have thought better of you that I would, and this house still in mourning.

(She fixes MAISIE with a stern look)

You've done well in the few months you've been here but you need to learn a bit of decorum.

(MAISIE looks nonplussed)

Don't know, do you?

MAISIE

(Uncertainly)

Manners?

MRS. DRAPER

Yes that, and deference... In service you defer to your betters.

MAISIE

Yes, but we're all people.

MRS. DRAPER

Maybe so, but you owe your daily bread to 'the quality' as people used call 'em. They have money, and what's more a position in society. You have neither.

MAISIE carefully puts the record back in its sleeve.

MAISIE, Continued

It's from "TOP HAT". You should see it Mary, he's so dishy! White tie, carnation and all – and Ginger Rogers has this lovely dress made of white feathers and Madge, tells her" as long as you're a spinster you're fair game for any male". It's just so...romantic.

She catches sight of MRS. DRAPER's icy look and trails off.

MRS. DRAPER

Fair game for any male! Not just spinsters dear, believe me!

She softens a little now and is removing her coat and hat.

MRS. DRAPER, Continued

Look Maisie, this is not a time to have your head in the pictures. What you don't realise girl, it's a very sad and worrying time for those of long service, losing their employer. And I have warned you, I've said it before, likelihoods are all of us, will be looking for work soon, think on that!

MAISIE

It'll all come right in the end..."What will be will be." my Mum says.

MRS. DRAPER

Now where's that vacuum machine?

(MAISIE makes to leave)

Wait, you can take my things.

MAISIE takes MRS. DRAPER'S Coat etc. turns to go and almost bumps into MANNING as he enters. MANNING carries a trug with a bunch of cut flowers resting in it. He is about 45, weathered; avuncular in manner; a pipe smoker. He is in the formal uniform of a chauffeur.

MAISIE

Oops, Sorry Mr. 'Em'

MANNING gives her a faint smile. MAISIE exits carrying her record and with her arms piled up with the coats, hat, etc. MANNING moves nearer to MRS. DRAPER who spots the flowers.

MANNING

Still flowering in the big glass house. If there's a vase handy we can have 'em in here for our visitor.

MRS. DRAPER

He'll be here on business. There's no call for ceremony.

MANNING

Maybe not, but I'm sure Mr. Acutt would have approved, very proud of our chrysanthus he was.

MRS. DRAPER

That's as maybe but we don't have those considerations any more.

(Puffing up cushions)

Anyway, I don't see what he wants with us; surely not going to read the Will, not to the likes of us, and not with young Mr. Acutt still in South Africa. I mean it's.....

MANNING

He hasn't said he's coming for that, and anyhow that's family business for his nephew and nieces.

MRS. DRAPER

Be that as it may, what we all need to know is, what'll happen to us here at Octon.

MANNING

(Now a bit exasperated)

We might learn more this morning. Mr. Codner said on the telephone that he has information for the staff.

MRS. DRAPER

Information! more likely checking up on us, or about to give us our marching orders, that's your information.

MANNING shakes his head at this. MRS. DRAPER looks at his attire.

MRS. DRAPER, *Continued*

Why're you wearing that? You'll not be driving anyone?

MANNING

Can hardly wear my gardener's stuff. Have to show a bit of respect, he's a professional man.

MRS. DRAPER

I don't know. I caught MAISIE good and proper. In here playing his gramophone and cavorting about without so much as a bye your leave, and now you're.....

MANNING interrupts her.

MANNING

Don't be too hard on the girl, she's young and doesn't under—

MRS. DRAPER

.....and now you're toadying up to this solicitor.

(Looks to photo of the old gent with his daughter Florence)

He'll have seen you'll be alright, always were 'is favorite.

MAISIE enters carrying a 1930's vacuum cleaner unseen by them. She overhears the following and decides to withdraw leaving the machine.

MANNING

Favorite! It's true he talked to me a lot on account of the garden— countryman like 'im, liked 'orticulture, and investing. He helped me with one or two small stakes, but if he'd had any interest in cooking or knitting like, he'd have more'n likely talked to you than me.

MRS. DRAPER

Don't be daft Joe.

(A beat or two)

MANNING

Anyway, I don't care for that kind of talk, a real gent Mr. Acutt was, treated us fair and square, you can't say otherwise.

During this, MANNING puts down the trug, walks over to the window and draws back the curtains flooding the room with light.

MANNING, *Continued*

No point in this, he won't hardly be able to see.

MRS. DRAPER

Now who's being disrespectful; people know this house is in mourning, Joe.

She moves to the window and re-draws the curtains half way leaving some daylight.

SFX: A door bell is heard.

MRS. DRAPER

Oh my, *(looking at clock again)*, he's very early, wouldn't you just know it—or was it ten o'clock?

(She nears the green baize door)

Maisy! Where's she gone now, Maisie! get this vacuum back in the cupboard.

MRS. DRAPER exits. MAISIE appears only to grab the vac and exit with it.

MANNING grabs the trug complete with flowers, opens the French doors and places it outside. He closes the door, turns back carefully, straightens his tie and tenses up in a waiting stance. The front door is heard to open (OS). MRS. DRAPER returns followed by LADY BANBURY. She is in her fifties, with an aristocratic sense of her own importance.

MRS. DRAPER

(Begins offstage)

I'm sorry m'Lady, we're not expecting visitors except Mr. Acutt's lawyer is calling here at half past ten, please come into the withdrawing room.

LADY BANBURY sweeps into the room.

MRS. DRAPER

(Entering)

When the bell rang we thought that...

She is cut short by LADY BANBURY.

LADY BANBURY

Good Morning Manning.

MANNING

Good Morning your Ladyship.

MANNING executes a faint bow in her direction. She seats herself and rearranges the cushions. She sits very upright exudes authority and looks around intently. MANNING and MRS. DRAPER remain standing.

LADY BANBURY

I shall not detain you then. We returned only last evening quite exhausted! Usually the banana boats provide a perfectly satisfactory passage, but this year the return journey was ghastly, absolutely ghastly! The chef sought solace in the bottle. At dinner the Captain drove us to distraction with his socialist dogma, and what's more the weather was foul. I can feel the sea's motion even now. But no sooner was I back in St. Michaels when Thompson shocked me with the news about dear Mr. Acutt. Now do tell me, what happened?

THE SERVANTS remain standing.

MRS. DRAPER/MANNING

He started to complain about/On Saturday morning...

LADY BANBURY

One at a time will do.

MANNING and MRS. DRAPER look at each other. LADY BANBURY turns to MANNING.

MANNING

He'd been feeling unwell for a few days, 'ad this pain in his back and around his chest and such. Very pale, he was. 'e went to bed early. Next day he was worse, so Mary – er – Mrs. Draper, called Doctor Dobson an 'e was here in a jiffy he was.

MRS. DRAPER

The doctor said that there was little he could do.

LADY BANBURY

His diagnosis?

MRS. DRAPER

He said something bout – er – it could rupture.

LADY BANBURY

A rupture! That doesn't normally kill anyone!

MANNING

'Twas his aor....an annu-something

LADY BANBURY

An aneurism, the doctor would have feared it might rupture... Oh don't look so surprised, I did my stint nursing in the Great War, learned quite a lot from the doctors (*As a half whispered aside*) rather more than was seemly on occasion. (*Back to full voice*) And then?

MANNING

The Doctor sent in nurse Bryant to make him comfortable but he went downhill quickly, going unconscious...then he passed on within minutes.

LADY BANBURY

He did not "pass on" or any other such euphemism—he died, plain and simple. Best accept it.

MRS. DRAPER starts to break down but regains her composure.

LADY BANBURY, *Continued*

Now, now, dear, don't take on. Had to happen at some point.

MRS. DRAPER

(Recovering; slight defiance in her voice)

M'lady we have both served Mr. Acutt for many years.

LADY BANBURY

I never felt that he was quite the same after Miss Florence died; a bitter blow losing one's only child. He was very put out when she settled in South Africa.

(A Beat)

And there's no one here from the Acutt family?

MANNING

No, M'lady, 'cept we're in contact with Mr. Kenelm Acutt in South Africa, nearest relative he is, but he's not returning to England for the moment and.....

LADY BANBURY

(Surprised; in haughty voice)

Not returning! Really!

MANNING

The traveling take's weeks. Durban's quite a journey.

LADY BANBURY

I am well aware of the distance from South Africa, Manning.

MANNING

O'course your ladyship

LADY BANBURY

Who then is dealing with his affairs?

MANNING

Mr. Codner at Hooper and Wollen is officiating and is due to call shortly.

He consults the clock or his pocket watch.

LADY BANBURY

I see, well at least there's a steady hand on the tiller. Dear Noble, so very, very charming and – er – urbane. A true gentleman, and of a class that I fear is in decline in Torquay.

MRS. DRAPER

Yes, M'lady and—

LADY BANBURY

(Ignoring her)

So unfortunate my being abroad and missing the burial, but I will be writing the family with my condolences. Are all the household still engaged?

MANNING

Yes, M'lady, at least until we know what's happening.

LADY BANBURY

And what is the establishment?

MRS. DRAPER

There's Emily the cook and...

LADY BANBURY

He wouldn't have let her go; I recall the most divine Cot Elettes d'agneau La Milanaise stule.

MRS. DRAPER

(Turning to MANNING pointedly informing him sotto voice)

Lamb cutlets.

MANNING

Oh.

MRS. DRAPER

And we still have Cecelia the kitchen domestic, Elsie and Annie the two housemaid domestics, and there's Maisie our parlourmaid, only been here five months.

LADY BANBURY

Is she any good?

MRS. DRAPER

(Defensively)

Maisie's a very nice girl; she's learning well.

MANNING

And there's my under-gardener, Basil.

LADY BANBURY

Well somehow you'll have to keep them all busy. The Devil makes work for idle hands don't you know!

She gets up and MANNING and MRS. DRAPER react by standing back deferentially for her to depart.

LADY BANBURY, *Continued*

With Mr. Codner calling, I'll go, but do keep me informed. You must feel that you can call upon me for advice should you need it. Dear Noble would have wanted that I feel sure.

MANNING

Thank you M'lady, we do appreciate that.

Unseen by them, MRS. DRAPER rolls her eyes. She bobs a curtsy as Lady BANBURY sweeps out followed by the TWO SERVANTS.

MAISIE enters via the green baize door carrying a duster and puffs up the cushions where LADY BANBURY has been sitting. MRS. DRAPER returns.

MAISIE

I thought there was a gentleman calling?

MRS. DRAPER

I hope you weren't listening at the door?

MAISIE

(Indignant)

No I wasn't! I heard a lady's voice in the hall, that's all.

MRS. DRAPER

We were unexpectedly honoured with a visit from Lady Muck herself.

MAISIE

Lady Who?

MRS. DRAPER

Surely You know of Lady Banbury from up the road? 'St. Michael's? You've met my friend Mrs. Thompson?

MAISIE

Yes.

MRS. DRAPER

She's housekeeper to Lady Banbury.

MAISIE

Oh!

MRS. DRAPER

Well Lady Banbury's just back from wintering at her friend's estate in Jamaica and was just itching to know everything. If you lose your job here she'll be after you. But she does not keep staff long.

MAISIE

Why?

MRS. DRAPER

You'll get to know. Elsie'll have forgotten to light the wash boiler as sure as eggs. Come on.

She departs followed by MAISIE.

BLACKOUT.

Scene 2

AT RISE: *The same room unchanged a little later, no one about. The chrysanthus are now in a vase.*

SFX: The door bell rings.

MRS. DRAPER, *Off*

(Calling)

Maisie! Answer the front and show the gentleman into the withdrawing room.

MAISIE, *Off*

Okey dokey.

MANNING hastens into the room flattens his hair with his hand and again takes up a waiting stance.

MAISIE enters followed by a formally dressed man with a wing collar and carrying a Gladstone bag. He is wearing a winter overcoat and gloves.

MAISIE

(Affecting a posh voice)

Mr. Codner. Mr. Codner this *IS* Mr. Manning.

MR. CODNER looks at her a bit askance; his voice is clipped and businesslike.

MR. CODNER

I do know who he is thank you! Good morning Manning.

MANNING

Good morning Sir.

MR. CODNER

Funeral went off smoothly enough, bitterly cold in the churchyard though. Everything in order here?

MANNING

As well as we can make it Sir, all things considered. Just had a visit from Lady Banbury.

MR. CODNER

She's back then. *(Under his breath)* That'll keep us on our toes.

MANNING

It did seem a bit odd at the grave side, not having young Mr. Acutt there.

MR. CODNER

Quite so, can't be helped, Durban's quite a journey you realise.

MANNING

I said as much to her Ladyship...didn't go down too well though.

MR. CODNER

(Half under his breath)

It wouldn't.

MANNING

I don't want you to think we're being rather forward like, seeing you in here, I mean, 'stead of the back parlour like, but, as I said to Mary – Mrs. Draper – this'll be more familiar to you.

MR. CODNER

Quite so, this will do fine.

MANNING

Coffee Sir?

MR. CODNER

No no, I shall not be long.

During this he removes his coat and holds it out in MAISIE'S direction to take it, without looking at her.

MR. CODNER, *Continued*

I take it that Mrs. Draper is here? I need her to join us, but I will not require the others, including ehum...?

MANNING

Maisie

MR. CODNER

Yes, you can run along now Maisie.

MANNING is a bit miffed at this, looks AT MR. CODNER and then turns to MAISIE who is making for the door.

MANNING

'ang on Maisie, ask Mrs. Draper to join us if you please.

She heads for the door with his coat over her arm.

MAISIE

(Smugly)

She's in the kitchen Mr. Em. – making coffee.

MANNING looks at MR. CODNER.

MR. CODNER

Oh very well, but I do not have long.

MANNING

Yes I'm sorry Sir, we are all out of sorts, I mean, as people are saying, eighty-six was a very good innings, but even so, it was so unexpected like.

MR. CODNER

Indeed, you all have my commiserations; a God-fearing man and much respected I might say.

MANNING

Please do sit.....

MR. CODNER, not waiting to be asked is already seating himself, opens his bag and puts on his reading glasses, MANNING stands by looking a bit awkward. There is a beat or two until MRS. DRAPER arrives with tray of coffee. MR. CODNER looks up to see her but does not stand.

MR. CODNER

Good morning Mrs. Draper. No sugar if you please.

MRS. DRAPER

I remember Sir.

MR. CODNER

Heard anything further from young Kenelm Acutt?

MANNING

No Sir, not since his letter acknowledging the cable I sent when Mr. Acutt passed on.

MR. CODNER

(MRS. DRAPER hands him the coffee)

Bit dark in here isn't it?

MRS. DRAPER

Of course! We are in mourning.

She does move, though, to open the curtains a bit more.

MRS. DRAPER passes MANNING a coffee; they stand a little way away from each other and clearly not comfortable. MR. CODNER takes a sip of coffee and clears his throat.

MR. CODNER

Oh do sit, you're not in service at this moment.

(They both sit on the edge of their chairs)

You must have realised that your late employer was a man of, how shall I put it, comfortable, indeed considerable means.

(MANNING and MRS. DRAPER take a glance at each other)

And you know of course that he is, was, a client of Hooper and Wollen. Now that the funeral formalities are concluded it's my duty to deal with his estate, that's to say, his Will and any bequests therein.

MANNING

Yes Sir.

MR. CODNER

The situation here is rather out of the ordinary.

MANNING

Sir?

MR. CODNER

I have exchanged telegraph messages with young Mr. Acutt, in fact he's most obliging, approved the funeral arrangements with the other relatives, and they have agreed with him that, in the circumstances I can now speak directly and in confidence with peripheral legatees.

MR. CODNER looks at them both; they look at each other quizzically, MANNING shrugs his shoulders. MR. CODNER sees this.

MR. CODNER, *Continued*

Yourselves! The bulk of the estate is of no concern today but some individual bequests are.

(MANNING nods his assent)

I cannot anticipate whether the family might decide to retain Octon and your services; entirely a matter for them of course. In the meantime, young Mr. Acutt is aware that you will be concerned about your situation and hence my visit here today.

(MANNING and MRS. DRAPER again exchange glances)

Now that the funeral has come and gone, I can address our immediate concerns and say that the house must be kept up for the moment and your wages will be met as before. You must keep everything in good order; the house, garden, cars.

MANNING

You can rely on us Mr. Codner.

MR. CODNER

I'm sure. One way or another it will not be long before we get some indication of their intentions.

MRS. DRAPER

And then we could be out of a job?

MR. CODNER

(He gives her a rather straight look over his glasses)

I have already said, it's too soon to say, and no purpose will be served by speculating. However, I am empowered to reveal some of the detail of Mr. Acutt's Will in so far as it concerns you.

He unfolds the parchment and looks over his glasses. THE OTHERS look at each other and back to him. There is clearly tension in the air.

MR. CODNER, *Continued*

Aside from family matters you might like to know that Mr. Acutt has made some generous bequests for the Children's Hospital, and the Parish Church.

MANNING

Typical of the old gent, he was very—

MR. CODNER

(Interrupting)

Turning to the household here,

(Delivers this quickly, switching to a rather formal voice)

I now read an extract from the last will and testament of Mr. Robert Noble Acutt of Octon Torquay. 'I give and bequeath the following pecuniary legacies to my servants who shall be in my employ at the time of my death.' There are bequests to the under gardener and the indoor servants. You can advise them they will receive ten pounds for each completed year of service.

MANNING

We can tell them that?

MR. CODNER

That's what I just said. Now, turning to yourselves

(He pauses for effect)

'To my attendant Mary Draper in appreciation of her kindness and attentive service to me over many years, the sum of one thousand pounds.'

MRS. DRAPER

(Hand goes to mouth in genuine surprise)

Oh, my!!

MR. CODNER

(Ignores her and continues in his dry formal voice)

In due course, when the estate is being wound up, I will draw a bankers cheque for this sum and require you to sign a receipt.

MRS. DRAPER

Thank you, sir.

MR. CODNER

I need hardly add that this is a tidy sum and certainly enough to furnish you with a small property should it transpire that you will no longer be living in Octon. Hooper and Wollen would be pleased to deal with any legalities you may encounter.

MRS. DRAPER

(Flustered)

Oh, thank you, well no, I don't know, I mean, I'll need time to think. I don't have a bank account, you know, do you think...

MR. CODNER

(Talking over her)

There remains only one other matter.... Manning.

MANNING

Yes Mr. Codner

MR. CODNER

I don't suppose you imagine that Mr. Acutt will have overlooked your loyal service to him, tending these fine gardens over the years and driving him as well.

MANNING

I don't presume anything Sir, although the old gentleman held very firm opinions, he was always very fair with me.

MR. CODNER opens his mouth to speak.

MANNING, *Continued*

(Without hesitation)

At the funeral I was thinking back to when I started here March 1906, twenty-seven I was. He asked about everything I'd done, but wouldn't say if I'd got the position, then a note come to my home

(Looks upwards as if reading it)

"Sir, I will engage you on the terms mentioned to you. You will commence work on Wednesday."

(Looking at MR. CODNER)

Man of few words our Mr. Acutt.

MR. CODNER

Quite so, now....

MANNING

(Still)

But we got along well considering our different stations in life.

MR. CODNER

Yes, yes, let's get on.

(Resumes reading from papers)

"Joseph Manning has been in my employ since 1906 as under gardener, head gardener and as my chauffeur. If still in my employ he will have given long and loyal service and made the gardens of Octon the envy of Torquay. To Joseph Manning the sum of two thousand pounds.

MANNING rises to his feet in shock and hastily sits down again, MRS. DRAPER also reacts. MR. CODNER remains cool and detached.

MR. CODNER, *Continued*

As I said to Mrs. Draper, in due course I will furnish you with a cheque and require a legacy receipt. I need hardly add Mann...er, Mr. Manning, that you will need to take a great deal of care with this legacy. This is a considerable sum for a person of your...to have bequeathed to you. He clearly had a very high opinion of you.

MANNING

Thank you, sir.

MR. CODNER

Now then, if my office can be of any assistance, you must feel that you can call upon us....as, er, valued clients. You'll need to make an appointment of course.

He returns his papers to the Gladstone, takes a final sip of coffee and prepares to leave. MRS. DRAPER rings the servant's bell.

MANNING

It's very good of you to have called with this, what's to say, welcome news, Mr. Codner.

MAISIE appears and has anticipated that MR. CODNER'S Coat and hat will be needed and is carrying them.

MR. CODNER

(Turns back with an after-thought)

Oh, one other thing, I have instructed valuers to check the inventory of furniture and affects. Expect to hear from them on my authority but do not admit anyone else to the house unless they have legitimate business here.

(Heading for the door; turns)

Well, good day to you Mrs. Draper, I'll be in touch when I learn anything new, but you should be aware that these matters can take months to come to fruition. Don't do anything

MR. CODNER, *Continued*

hasty, and be discreet, this is not for everyone's ears. If you have any concerns telephone my office – 4317.

MRS. DRAPER

Goodbye, and thank you sir.

MR. CODNER exits followed by MANNING and MAISIE with the hat and coat. MRS. DRAPER walks to the window and back clasping her hands. After a few beats MANNING returns.

MRS. DRAPER

Well, that was unexpected.

MANNING

Was it? Like I said, he was a fair man.

MRS. DRAPER

Right then, perhaps we should take a moment or two to...to, er, remember that.

She activates the call bell. A beat or two follows and MAISIE reappears.

MAISIE

(In slightly over-formal voice, bordering sarcasm)

Yes, Mrs. Draper, you called?

MRS. DRAPER is now rather less crusty in her manner.

MRS. DRAPER

Right, then, Maisie you can brew a fresh pot of coffee.

(MAISIE turns to go)

No, no, wait. On second thought, the silver tray and sherry glasses.

MAISIE

Really! for...?

MRS. DRAPER

For two.

MAISIE

Right now?

MRS. DRAPER

Ah...yes now, in here, we'll take it in here Mr. Manning and I.

MAISIE makes a surprised facial gesture, picks up the coffee tray and turns to exit. BLACKOUT.

Scene 3

AT RISE: *The same room; daytime, three weeks later. MAISIE enters via the green baize door, carrying a feather/bamboo duster, she dusts a couple of things then stopping DS, holding out the duster as an imaginary partner, she breaks into a waltz. Behind her MANNING enters from the green baize door, bare feet, dressed in his gardener's togs, and carrying a wrap of newspaper containing two turnips tied with string.*

MANNING

Penny for your thoughts, Maisie.

MAISIE

Oh!... Hello Mr. Em, you made me jump!

MANNING

Tripping it with some 'ansome American film star, was you?

MAISIE

Some hopes.

MANNING

How's your Mum? Got a new situation yet?

MAISIE

Not really, bit of casual last week, silver service down the Grand Hotel.

MANNING

'spec something 'll turn up. Here, I've a couple of turnips for 'er; there's more'n we can use.

MAISIE

Thanks Mr. Em.

MANNING

I'll put 'em beside the tradesman's door for when you go. Don't tell the others though, eh?

MANNING turns to go.

MAISIE

Mr. Em?

MANNING

(Turning back)

Yeah?

MAISIE

You're a very kind man, you know how it is for Mum bein' a war widow and two of us to feed and clothe. I don't know what we'd do without the veggies you give us.

MANNING

Don't take on! It's all got to be eaten up.

There is a beat or two then MANNING turns to go.

MAISIE

Can I ask you somethin'?

MANNING moves over closer to her.

MAISIE, *Continued*

You know I go dancin' Saturdays.

She looks away from him a bit bashful.

MANNING

'alf Torquay knows it, I shouldn't wonder.

MAISIE

(Coyly)

Well.....a month ago this young man asked me for a waltz, very good, real strong lead...

MANNING

Yes?

MAISIE

James, very well spoken. Well, he asked me again the next week, and we sat together.

MANNING

Well?

MAISIE

He walked me to the bus stop...and as we was waiting he kissed me...you know... properly...

MANNING

You like 'im eh?

MAISIE

(Nods)

He said "I'd like you to be my girl."

MANNING

Well you're a good-looking maid o' course. Mind you 'ave to keep a weather eye on where that might end up Maisie—don't you start somethin' you shouldn't be aimin' to finish like.

MAISIE

You don't need to say about that, the lectures I get from Mum, always on about keepin' your hand on your 'appeny. "There'll be no helpin' you if you go too far."

MANNING

What did you say to 'im?

MAISIE

I didn't say no, and then the bus come up.

MANNING

Seeing him again then, eh?

MAISIE

Dunno, thing is I 'aven't been for two weeks, he must be thinking I'm avoiding him, but I'm not. 'Spose he's takin' up with someone else.

MANNING

Why've you stayed away then?

MAISIE

(After a beat or two; quietly)

You know how things are, money's real tight and Mum got behind with the rent so I've been giving her nearly all me wages.

MANNING

Oh...You goin' this week?

MAISIE

No.

MANNING

Same reason?

MAISIE nods. There is a pause, then he gets out his wallet and extracts a ten-shilling bank note and waves it at her.

MAISIE

Ten shillin'? I can't take that, it's half a week's wage! I'm not askin' you for money. What'd Mum say?

MANNING

Here take it, get down the Spa Ballroom; flash him your best smile.

MAISIE hesitates or shakes her head, still uncertain; he waves the note at her again.

MANNING, *Continued*

If your dad was still here, he would want you to go... Think of it as...as me passing it on for him like, eh?

He pushes the ten-shilling note into her hand. She is still uncertain but they turn as they hear MRS. DRAPER approaching. She hastily hides the money in her sleeve just as MRS. DRAPER enters via the green baize door carrying linen dust sheets.

MAISIE

(In a stage whisper)

I'll pay it back, I will.

MRS. DRAPER

(Looks from one to the other sensing something significant)

Oh, there you are Maisie! You finished the dusting, I'll not put covers on 'till it's clean.

(Puts down the dust sheets and starts to unfold one)

Come on then!

MAISIE takes one end of the dust sheet and mouths the words "thank you" to MANNING who winks back to her. She helps MRS. DRAPER spread a cover over one of the chairs.

MRS. DRAPER, *Continued*

(Sharp as ever)

Share it then. What're you two so concerned about?

MAISIE

I was just saying about this lady in Woolworth's snack bar yesterday. She was going on about that Mr. Hitler and we could be in another war with Germany 'cause of him.

MANNING

Herr Hitler. Don't you fret yourself about that sort of thing, Maisie.

MAISIE

But she said if there's another war they'll be flying over here and drop bombs and fire sticks on us.

MANNING

Incendiaries you mean.

MAISIE

That's the ones, they set fire to your house. And they might use gas like in the last war, even here in Torquay.

MANNING

Get on with her! There's nothing in Torquay to interest 'em? True he was out of order marching into the Rhineland tearing' up treaties, but it won't come to war, we sorted out Germany last time; he'll come to 'is senses.

MAISIE

It'll be alright then?

MANNING

Tis over there in Europe, we're alright about them.

MRS. DRAPER

All right about them! Easy for you to say that, but are they alright about us?

MANNING

I can't see it coming to war. Their Ambassador, Von Ribbontrop was guest of our Mayor 'ere just a few weeks back, A friendly visit 'twas, and reviewing their warship.

MRS. DRAPER

Huh, that's as may be. My cousin was serving table at the dinner for him. Big speech about Germany being a true friend of the British people, toasting Torquay Council. Then he struts out to his big bullet-proof car shouting "Heil Hitler." I tell you they're an ugly lot those Nazis. Mark my words there's no stopping them,

*During this, MAISIE and MRS. DRAPER
are doing bits of business with dust covers.*

MRS. DRAPER, *Continued*

And another thing, it's being said that the only reason he came here was to go around Devon spyin' on what our Navy has.

MANNING

(Speaking directly to MAISIE)

Don't heed her Maisie. They're just standing up for themselves, regaining their national pride, what with their money becoming worthless and all. We should be a bit more generous towards 'em.

MRS. DRAPER

Generous towards them! They're not being generous to the Sudatans or the Czechs.....

MANNING

We had four years of war with 'em, Us and the Americans, God bless 'em. Twas the war to end all wars, that's what they promised us. We all went along with it no matter what. They can't ask us to do all that again. Whole generation of young men, thousands of 'em no longer on this earth.

MRS. DRAPER

Too true. Millions out there now, limbs missing, blinded, trying to live on twenty-seven and six pence a week, all those bodies lost in mud and.....

She makes for the door quickly taking out her handkerchief.

MAISIE

(Looking after her and back to MANNING)

What's happened?

MANNING

You wouldn't know Maisie, her husband Bill, killed in France, 1918 only a few days 'afore the armistice. They was real close of course. It takes her bad sometimes even now.

MAISIE

Oh I'm sorry, I didn't know. She can marry again though eh?

MANNING

Not that easy Maisie, widow of her age, same's your Mum I 'spose. Shortage of eligible men you see, so many lost come the end and then the Spanish flue takin millions an' all.

MRS. DRAPER returns, tucking away her handkerchief, regaining her composure.

MRS. DRAPER

Come on now Maisie, we need to get on.

MANNING turns to go. SFX: Telephone rings. MANNING turns back to answer it MRS. DRAPER and MAISIE continue sorting out the furniture covers.

MANNING

"Octon, Mr. Manning answering you"

MAISIE

(Speaking to MRS. DRAPER, trying to be upbeat)

The Regal's showing "China Seas" from Monday. Can't wait to see it, Clark Gable, he was that gambler in "Call of the Wild", he's so dishy.

MRS. DRAPER shakes her head and smiles.

MANNING

(Into the telephone)

Yes sir...

MAISIE

There's been queues outside the Electric Picture House every night to see the King's Funeral.

MANNING

(Continuing on the telephone)

You've had a letter from them then?

MRS. DRAPER

I was in Union Street when the massed bands went down playing funeral marches; grown men tears streamin' down their cheeks. It started me off I don't mind saying.

MANNING

Oh, I see. We'll get letters from your office then.

MANNING puts down the telephone and slowly turns DS looking distracted. MAISIE notices first.

MAISIE

You alright Mr. Em?

MRS. DRAPER looks up from what she is doing and straightens up.

MANNING

Can you leave us a moment Maisie?

MAISIE looks from one to the other and exits

MRS. DRAPER

Bad news Joe?

(MANNING nods)

They're not keeping Octon!

(MANNING nods assent)

I knew it, I've said all along. Start looking for work, or it's the Mayor's poor relief.

MANNING

Not you, not with all your experience, and your legacy you won't be queuein' at his soup kitchen.

MRS. DRAPER

We'll have to tell the others. Seven of us looking for work!

MANNING

How'll they take it, specially Maisie, what with her Mother's situation.

MRS. DRAPER

I have warned her but she's so happy go lucky.

MANNING

Elsie and Annie are in the kitchen, you going to tell 'em now?

MRS. DRAPER

After I've done this.

He exits. MRS. DRAPER unfolds another dust sheet then stops, clearly contemplating the news.

SFX: Doorbell.

MRS. DRAPER, *Continued*

(Looks at clock, says to herself)

Now who can that be?

She exits to answer the door. Voices are heard from the hallway, ad lib. MRS. DRAPER returns carrying a visiting card followed by LEONARD ST. JOHN COURTNEY. He is tall, slim, quite dapper and carrying a silver-tipped cane. In one hand is a large manila envelope.

MRS. DRAPER, *Continued*

(Guarded)

He might be here, but we're not expecting callers. The house is closed up and we are not to receive visitors.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

Be at ease madam, I am known to Mr. Manning, as who might say, an acquaintance. He has been to my rooms at Queens Chambers.

(Points at the visiting card)

He'll spare me a moment, you can be sure of it.

MRS. DRAPER

Very well, I'll see.

She exits carrying the card.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY walks about examining the room, taking in a framed picture, etc. He preens himself a little. MANNING enters a little flustered.

MANNING

Oh, good day sir,

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

And a very good day to you Sir.

MANNING

I wasn't expecting to hear from you so soon?

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

I am the bringer of good tidings (*Waves the envelope*) your oil bonds.

BLACKOUT.

Scene 4

AT RISE: *The same drawing room a month or so later. Daytime with sunlight coming through the French Doors. The dust sheets have gone. Ornaments have been assembled on a table with labels and numbers and some of the furniture also has labels. The auctioneer's clerk, MR. DIAMOND, with brown working man's house coat on, is wielding a clip board. He has an attaché case at his side, and is just drinking up a cup of tea and checking numbers attached to things.*

MR. DIAMOND

Thank you, Mrs. Draper. A grand cuppa.
(*Places cup on tray*)

I'm all done in the house; now there's the hothouses and the garden pieces left to do. All them tools and ornamental pieces'll take time.

MRS. DRAPER

Just as well do it while Mr. Manning's not around, (*Conspiratorially,*) he's lived and breathed for that garden.

During this MANNING's shadow has silhouetted in the daylight in the French doors, He enters, carefully wiping his feet, he is carrying a couple of sheets of paper and has heard the last line.

MRS. DRAPER, *Continued*

Oh Joe. I didn't see you there!

MANNING

Don't you fret on my account, it's got to happen, (*Moves to MR. DIAMOND*); here's a list of me hand tools, it's all on there, you just need to tick 'em off.

MR. DIAMOND

Oh thanks Joe, that'll save time.

MAISIE enters from the green baize door with hat and coat on, and carrying a cheap cardboard suitcase, and perhaps a cardboard box tied up with string. She is

clearly upset. MR. DIAMOND looks from one to the other and realises that his presence is possibly awkward.

MR. DIAMOND, *Continued*

I'll be off out and check this list. There's a lot here.

He picks up his attaché case and leaves via the French doors, closing them behind him.

MAISIE puts down her case, sniffs and gets out her handkerchief, clearly not knowing what to say.

MANNING

(Trying to sound upbeat)

All set then?

MAISIE nods assent and sniffs again.

MRS. DRAPER

C'mon dear, we all have to make changes, life's never perfect, not for anyone. You'll learn to face up to bad things without letting it get you down. I'm sure Mrs. Jerram's a nice lady, and Parkhill's a beautiful house. You'll settle in quick as quick.

MAISIE looks at her but does not appear convinced.

MRS. DRAPER, *Continued*

One and sixpence a week more and the Spa Ballroom just down the road.

MANNING

That's true.

He smiles at MAISIE, who still looks glum.

MANNING, *Continued*

And to think, they're even having their motor car pick you up! That's a first believe me!

MAISIE

(Fighting back tears)

I know...but I liked it here.

(She goes nearer to MRS. DRAPER)

I know I've vexed you at times Mary but...

MAISIE gets tearful; MRS. DRAPER comforts her for a moment.

MRS. DRAPER

Don't take on dear. I knew from the start it would come to this. Couldn't see the family moving here nor young Kenelm leavin' his business in South Africa to live here, not if he remembers Torquay's climate. That'll have made up his mind for 'im!

MANNING

Can't be helped Maisie, make do and mend eh?

(MAISIE looks over to him and forces a smile)

That's the way, could be worse you know.

MRS. DRAPER

I'll say it could, you've a job, clothes on your back and a warm house to live in.

MANNING

Aye, there's plenty would envy us Maisie.

MRS. DRAPER,

My cousin Ron up in Cumbria, out in all weathers, e' gets twenty-two shilling a week, a tied farm cottage, with an earthen floor, no gas, oil lamps for lighting, clothes made from farm sacks, and dares't say a wrong word to the farmer, I tell you there's—

SFX: A car horn interrupts her.

MAISIE

(Looks in panic at both of them)

I'll have to go then.

MAISIE goes up to MANNING and he smiles at her. They shake hands and impulsively she gives him a hasty peck on the cheek. She picks up her case makes for the door still upset. MRS. DRAPER gives a knowing look at MANNING and follows her out. MANNING turns away looks a bit lost for a moment or two. We hear MRS. DRAPER offstage.

MRS. DRAPER, *Off*

Bye then dear, let us know how you're doing. You can telephone you know. 2784 remember

(SFX: Car moving off)

Bye....BYE!

MANNING has moved to the window and gives a desultory wave.

SFX: Front door closing. MRS. DRAPER re-appears and despite her crusty manner now shows her vulnerability.

MANNING

Don't take on, Mary.

He goes up to her and makes to put an arm around her but she moves away a little, the body language is confused.

MANNING, *Continued*

I mean, he was eighty-six, it couldn't go on forever.

MRS. DRAPER

I know, but you put that at the back of your mind. If only Miss Florence was alive, perhaps she would have...

MANNING

He's seen us a'right you know, we have the legacies, you wasn't expecting that.

MRS. DRAPER

I know, but I still need a job of work.

MANNING

You'll soon be re-engaged. Housekeeper of your experience.

MRS. DRAPER

Don't count on that, it's all different now, just look at the 'Domestic Servants' adverts.

She picks up a copy of the local newspaper a broadsheet the front page of which is classified ads.

MRS. DRAPER, *Continued*

(Reading)

"In-between Maid, Daily General, Kitchen domestic – daily. Corridor maid." Only one for a cook and none for house keepers. Friday there was only five, all for dailies.

MANNING

(Sighs agreement)

They don't want tied gardeners no more neither, they're trying to manage with hourly jobbers... You could try adding your name to the servants' register.

MRS. DRAPER

Maisie's alright, for the moment. Good position if you ask me. She'll have her work cut out though, they don't have four maids like here... Oh Joe, I'm sorry, I clean forgot! a letter came for you—South African post mark, young Acutt for sure.

She exits via the hall door and MANNING moves over to stare out of the French doors at the garden. MRS. DRAPER returns with an envelope. She walks over to stand just to MANNING'S side and joins his reverie.

MRS. DRAPER, *Continued*

All the years you've spent out there Joe, no one could have done it better.

MANNING

(After a beat or two)

No use bein' maudlin Mary.

MRS. DRAPER

... Here...

She pushes the envelope at him. MANNING turns down stage and still in a bit of a trance, opens the envelope. MRS. DRAPER turns to watch him.

MANNING

It's me reference.

(Reads; half to himself)

To whom it may concern: – This is to certify that Joseph Frederick James Manning has been in my Uncle's employ as Head Gardener and in later years as Chauffeur too, which is sufficient testimony as to the excellence of his services. My late uncle in his Will expressed his appreciation in a tangible form and I have much pleasure in recommending him to anyone who requires his services, which owing to my late Uncle's death and the consequent sale of the property, have regretfully to be terminated. Kenelm H. Acutt

MRS. DRAPER

Well, like I said, he's seen you alright, if this had happened two year's back things might have turned out a bit different. With a bit of money behind you – would have felt that we could – well – things might have taken a different turn for us, is all I'm saying.

MANNING

Please Mary, 'tis all in the past that is. I thought we both agreed about... that we shouldn't speak about it no more, that nothing could come of it, all the upset and...

MRS. DRAPER

We did, but you led me on Joe, you know you did!

MANNING

Nothing really happened.

MRS. DRAPER

Depends what you mean by nothing.

MANNING

You know what I'm saying, we didn't.....we didn't go too far.

MRS. DRAPER

No, not in that way, but you know it, you know it, and don't you deny it! You know how that left me and with us both working on under the same roof...

She shakes her head and purses her lip clearly remembering a painful time. There is an awkward silence for a beat or two.

MRS. DRAPER, *Continued*

But you'll be alright, with that reference. As you said there'll be plenty as wants a jobbing Gardner, how many have got your knowledge and can drive motor cars as well?

MANNING

Nah, that's all very well jobbing, a bit here, bit there, it's never your own, and you know what some of 'em are like, all fancy manners and don't pay you up on time. Basil's been owed money from his jobbin' work for months now.

MRS. DRAPER

Huh. Torquay's not the town it used to be. More than its share of – what do they call 'em? – parvenus.

Another beat or two follows.

MANNING

Thing is this, Mary; I left school a fourteen-year-old. I've bent me back ever since, week in week out, but now, now, the way I see it is this, the legacy's me chance, I'm goin' to make me move.

MRS. DRAPER

Move, move where?

MANNING

Move up in the world!

MRS. DRAPER

Oh?...How do you expect to do that then?

MANNING

Improve me situation. Be'in in service like us, its "yes sir, no madam," Remember 'ow you're placed. Upstairs people, to them we're invisible 'alf the time. We're like that clock—we carry on tickin' away. Every Friday afternoon wages gets handed out to wind us up and we're off again for another week.

MRS. DRAPER

(Shocked)

I'd never ever have thought to hear you, you of all people, talking like this Joe!

MANNING

I'm not ungrateful, I know it were lucky being here with the old gent, but even then what chance have you got to change anything.

MRS. DRAPER

People with our station in life don't expect to change things, you know that as well as I do.

MANNING

"People in our station in life"...just so...You know it, Mary, folks in service, they never tell us much, that's the thing, you see, they don't want anything to change. We don't know

MANNING, *Continued*

much, no inside knowledge, and even if we 'ad, what good would it be with no capital to get you started, but now, now with Mr. Acutt's money I can build on my good fortune and thanks to me new connection, I've the chance to move up.

MRS. DRAPER

Connection, what connections have you – Oh, you mean him with the fancy name, down at the harbour, Mr. Saint what's it?

MANNING

(Pronouncing the name very correctly)

Mr. Saint John Courtney, Aye.

(Defensively)

I already have a small investment, oil bonds.

(Taps the side of his nose)

He's done well for me there, got me started, nothing too big, just testing the water kind of thing.

MRS. DRAPER

Couldn't you leave it to Hooper and Wollen? Mr. Codner offered. They'd know how to invest your money surely?

MANNING

They'll do the legal stuff alright, but I'm just a man who's been in service to them. They'd put me money on deposit at 3 percent. No, I've got a real chance now...

(Takes a card from his breast pocket and looks at it; beat)

He's a real gent and well connected, even with Government people.

MRS. DRAPER

Government people! what, up in London?

MANNING

No, abroad,

MRS. DRAPER

Abroad! Where?

MANNING

Burma.

MRS. DRAPER

Burma, BURMA! Well, all I can say is, I do hope you know what you're about.

MANNING

I'm saying no more right now.

MRS. DRAPER purses her lips in an obviously skeptical way which MANNING does not notice.

MANNING, *Continued*

And you Mary, had any more thoughts?

MRS. Draper

Like the solicitor said, I don't have to depend on a living in post now, but it'd be a big thing for me, buying my own little place. There'd be Council rates, gas and electric if it's been wired, and who would I have to do repairs? Things would still be tight if I don't work on.

MANNING

You'll get something.

MRS. DRAPER

(Beat)

I do hope so.

(Slumps in a chair, looking weary)

Even if I could get a place it's not that easy starting all over again.

MANNING

You'll manage Mary, I'm sure of it.

MRS. DRAPER

Don't you be so sure. It takes time with someone new, you have to learn all their little ways. They're expectin' you to know what they want next before they know it for themselves...I don't know.

MANNING

What about something else then—a draper's shop like? I don't know anyone as knows more about fabrics and stuff than you do.

MRS. DRAPER

Huh! Can you see me behind a shop counter cackling to other women all day? Here I've had to keep one person satisfied, not a whole army of conceited women. They don't just want to buy something, they want to see you bow and scrape for 'em as well.

MANNING

Not all of 'em.

MRS. DRAPER

Thing is, I've trained up and supervised four women here. Once he got used to me the old gent left me to it. But taking orders from some jumped-up shop manager. I've heard 'em speak to the staff and it's not the same way they speak to the customers believe you me! A word out of place and it's a week's notice and no reference.

MANNING

Bound to be different o' course.

MRS. DRAPER

Maisie and the other young'uns won't be in service all their days. How many houses like this'll be still going in ten or twenty years from now? Two-acre of garden and seven

MRS. DRAPER, *Continued*

servants. Never surprise me if they don't pull down the glass houses and build bungalows on the land.

MANNING

Can't see that happenin', there's plenty of land for bungalows.

MRS. DRAPER

And who needs someone who knows how to clean a carpet with dried tea leaves? Any fool can push an electric machine about, and a darn sight quicker too!

A beat of two and MANNING moves to look out at the garden again. He then turns back towards her.

MANNING

(Half to himself; wistfully)

Progress Mary! Whatever it brings you can't odds it, but us working folks, we'll cope with it, like we always have. Still, count your blessings I say, the old gent weren't so bad, it's been good here...it's been very good to us, has Octon.

They are both pixilated looking at each other as LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.

End Act I

Intermission

Act II Scene 1

SETTING: *A few months later. We are now in the sitting room of a small terrace house rented by the Mannings. A small window overlooks the garden and street. It is late afternoon. The room is filled with simple furniture in the style of a working man's home in the 1930's. On one wall is a mirror. There are two easy chairs and a side table with a drawer. On top of the table are a revolving globe, a writing blotter and a table radio of the period.*

AT RISE: *Enter MANNING in outer coat and gloves carrying two white envelopes and some manila envelopes. He looks through the post,*

pulls out one envelope and drops the rest on the side table. MANNING hastily removes his coat and gloves and tears open the envelope he has selected. He is reading the contents when his wife FANNY is heard arriving. She enters with two full shopping bags.

MANNING

(Cheerfully)

'here come and look at this Fan.

FANNY

You could have helped me in with the bags Joe.

MANNING

(Animated)

Oh, sorry dear, but look here! It's important. I'll be the first one in my family to own their own place... ever!

FANNY

It's from the solicitor?

MANNING

Aye, he's exchanged contracts, too late for any back-slidin' now. Means the building plot'll be mine. We can get planning the bungalow proper like, and then, then you'll never again live in a home what's owned by somebody else and that's a fact.

FANNY

I suppose it'll be ok. It's a lot to take on though, I just hope it works out alright with the money

MANNING

(A bit irritated)

Course it will! More people are buying their own places now, I know what I'm about Fan.

FANNY

So, when will the builders get going?

MANNING

Once Mr. Codner says to pay the balance, then we have what he calls "completion". I then owns the land and they'll soon be able to start digging the foundations.

FANNY

Well I can't wait to be out of here. Octon cottage was better than this.

She leaves the room briefly with the bags.

MANNING

Then I'll be a man of property, a freehold owner. My name on the deeds!

The door is heard and their daughter OLIVE enters. OLIVE is early twenties, bright and cheerful disposition, average girl next door; tidy but not a really noticeable appearance.

FANNY

(Returns to the room)

Hello Ol, your Dad's got a bit of news.

OLIVE

Good news?

MANNING

I'll say!

FANNY

(Picks up her knitting)

He's had a letter from the solicitor—the plot of land, it's going ahead, Ol. Your dad'll be the owner soon.

MANNING

Thanks to Mr. Acutt

OLIVE

And you Mum, you'll both own it?

FANNY

Oh no. Property is more a man's business Ol.

OLIVE

If Sam and I were to get married I'd want us to own a house together

MANNING

Well you'd be a mite unusual with that then.

FANNY

(Turns to MANNING)

What's the other post then?

MANNING picks up the other letters and selects one.

MANNING

Jack's handwriting for sure

FANNY

Time we had news from London, open it up then.

MANNING

All in good time the land's more important to us, Fan.

He takes a last look at the solicitor's letter, puts it down to open the second letter and commences to read silently.

OLIVE

Down at the Pavilion there's "Out of the Blue' next week, it's the radio production. Sam's getting us tickets for it.

MANNING

(Scrutinising the letter)

My, my!

FANNY

What?

MANNING

flu's still about something dreadful up there, dropping like flies he says. Let's hope it's not 1919 all over again.

MANNING reads on.

FANNY

What else then?

MANNING

(A beat or two longer)

They're not very impressed with Teddy abdicating, Jack says " I'm a working man but I would not like either of my sons marrying a woman with a husband still living. Jack reckons he shouldn't have taken the throne at all, he says 'ere "You would not like your Olive marrying a husband with two wives still living, even if they've divorced".

SFX: DOOR BELL.

MANNING, *Continued*

Not expectin' anyone are we?

OLIVE

I'll Go.

OLIVE exits and we hear muffled voices in the hall off.

FANNY

The King should tell that Simpson women to get on the next ship back to America. He should find hi'self a nice English lady, there's no shortage of 'em.

OLIVE returns looking at a visiting card in her hand.

OLIVE

It's a man for you Dad, Mr...Saint... John Courtney, annuity consultant.

MANNING rises to his feet a bit flustered just as ST. JOHN COURTNEY appears in the doorway.

MANNING

Oh, good afternoon. I'm sorry we were not expecting company. This is my wife Fanny, and Ol, Olive, you've seen.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

Delighted to make your acquaintance Mrs. Manning, and I am most sorry if this is an inopportune moment to be calling. Your charming daughter said you were in, but please, if it's in the least bit inconvenient I can....

MANNING

No, no.

(Turning to the FANNY and OLIVE)

Mr. Courtney's called on business, dear.

(To ST. JOHN COURTNEY)

Please, *(Points to vacant chair)*. Can we offer you a drink Sir?

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

Most kind, nothing strong though. I'm a temperate man you know. A weak tea, milk and no sugar will suffice thank you.

MANNING looks towards FANNY who catches on.

FANNY

Come on Olive, we'll get some tea for this gentleman. Brooke Bond alright for you mister?

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

I'm sure it will be splendid.

They leave with FANNY taking a backward scrutiny of ST. JOHN COURTNEY as she closes the door.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY, *Continued*

Well now, I do hope things are settling down. Quite a change for you I'll wager, leaving the big house.

MANNING

Yes, but we're settled here alright, temporary like.

(A little pompously)

Fact is I've just signed the contract for me own bit of land.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

Have you now, a wise move, a man of property now!

MANNING

Aye, and I'm in talks with builders, we're having our own bungalow put up out Marldon way – a big change that'll be an' all.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

How splendid for you. Now, did you get my note?

MANNING

Oh yes.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

Well, as it said, I did feel that you might need a little more time to grasp the unique benefits of my proposal. Now have you given it more thought?

MANNING

Aye, It's a big consideration though. Most of me legacy is spoken for, what with the bungalow going ahead, and... (*Trails off*)

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

You do agree though that my advice over the oil bonds was completely correct, was it not?

MANNING

Oh yes, I'm not saying anything agin that, turned in a quick profit and no mistake.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

Indeed it did. But don't think of it as your only opportunity. Take my recommendation not to cash the oil bonds, let me re-invest them for you and top that up with more funds because—

MANNING

Yes, but the thing is I don't feel that I really know about this Burma thing you wrote about. Oil is oil and what with more and more motor cars, lorries, charabancs on the roads. You can go all day now and only see a couple of horses and, I tell you what, I miss nipping out with a bucket to get a bit of horse dung for the borders.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

(*Showing distaste*)

Yes. I'm sure you do.

MANNING

I just don't know enough about this new thing of yours.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

Ah hah! You have no idea how pleased I am to hear you say that. It shows that you have the right instincts for investing. It's a shrewd man who insists on understanding the fundamentals of his investment, as who might say, what's backing it in the real world.

MANNING

That's about the size of it.

ST. JOHN COURNEY

Excellent. I see you have a globe.

*During the following ST. JOHN
COURNEY gets up and moves to the globe.*

MANNING

Olive 'ad it for school. Bit out of date I shouldn't wonder.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

Have a look here

*ST. JOHN COURTNEY turns the globe and
MANNING joins him.*

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

You may recall I mentioned to you that I have important connections in Burma?

MANNING

Aye.

ST JOHN COURTNEY

What do you know about Burma?

MANNING

Not much, I can point to it. *(Does so)*

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

Quite so. Now take a closer look at this area...here, a province of Burma, Arakan, western coastal province, also known as Rakhine, here the Araken Yoma mountain range, and here a vast area of bamboo forest. If there's one thing you associate with Rakhine its bamboo.

MANNING

Ah Well, I knows a thing or two about bamboo. We 'ad 'em as ornamentals up at Octon. Proper name arundinaria. There's three varieties A.viridistriata, and A.fastuosa, and—

ST JOHN COURTNEY

Of great botanical interest no doubt, but this is different in terms of scale. This is the business! The bamboo business! Thousands of acres of it harvested for pulp, for paper. And demand is ever increasing, all over the world more books are being printed. Education is expanding everywhere, more text books, exercise books, magazines, newspapers. This is 1937, Mr. Manning. It's progress, there's no stopping it.

MANNING

Bit like oil then?

ST JOHN COURTNEY

Yes indeed, much like oil, it's the future!

MANNING

You looking for investors like, so tell me this then, are you investing your own money in this?

ST JOHN COURTNEY

Indeed I am, I back my own judgment.

MANNING

But you're in a bigger way of business, you can afford a loss maybe, but for the small man....

ST JOHN COURTNEY

Ahh, but take heed, I am not merely investing, I am the holder of a valuable concession as a consequence of my Burma connection.

MANNING

But is it safe?

ST JOHN COURTNEY

Is it safe! It is practically backed by the Government.

MANNING

The Government!

ST JOHN COURTNEY

The Government of Burma!

MANNING

Oh I see.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

I suppose one does have to say there might be an element of risk in any new venture. But consider this—you have already benefited from taking my advice and this opportunity is even more exciting, and it's an opportunity I will not be able to repeat you know. Res in Cardine est, Mr. Manning.

MANNING

Come again?

During the following OLIVE appears with the tea tray

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

That is to say 'we are at a critical juncture'. Do forgive me for quoting a little Latin, but it's all too easy to overlook that not everyone is familiar with the classics.

(To OLIVE whom he is clearly eyeing up and down)

Ah, how kind, and, if I may make so bold, what a pretty blouse.

OLIVE gives him an uncertain smile looks a little bashful and exits pausing to take a quizzical look back at ST. JOHN COURTNEY. She does not close the door fully.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY, *Continued*

A most engaging young woman. A credit to Mrs. Manning and yourself to be sure.

MANNING

Our Olive?

ST JOHN COURTNEY

She turns the heads of many a young blade I'll wager.

MANNING

Won't do 'em much good 'cuz she's courting. Way things are shaping up I reckon she'll be betrothed afore long. Expensive business a wedding, if it comes on top of building the bungalow an' all.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

Certainly. So then, let's see if we can ease that prospect by offering you a sharp profit in this new venture.

(Positions himself right in front of MANNING)

What do you have to say about that then?

MANNING

(Clearly still hesitating)

Well...

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

Look; I do hope you'll take this opportunity, Mr. Manning, it will not come again you know, ohhh no.

MANNING

Oh, I do take that on board. It's good o' you, giving me this chance...but, well...

ST JOHN COURTNEY

Well if you're serious you'll have to act soon – sero venientibus ossa – the late comers will only get the bones. You are in at the beginning, a new venture, Mr. Manning, a great opportunity, act now!

MANNING

Carpe diem.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

(Not familiar with the phrase)

Carpe d... Indeed?

MANNING

The late Mr. Acutt used to say that, "Carpe Diem, Manning," And Basil, my under gardener, and meself, we'd get stuck in with a full day in the glass-houses afore we lost the light.

ST JOHN COURTNEY

A wise man, your late employer.

MANNING

He certainly was a real man o' the world. Mr. Acutt, been everywhere, Australia, all over. His family's big in South Africa you know.

ST JOHN COURTNEY

All the more reason to follow his maxim and er – "get stuck in."

A few beats; MANNING turns and paces a bit as he considers. ST. JOHN COURTNEY watches him intently.

MANNING

It's a big thing for me this, I understand all you say Mr. Courtney, but the thing is...

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

Oh please, do call me Leonard.

MANNING

Thing is Leonard, I have to be prudent with me legacy, you understand me...there won't be another for certain. I'm only a small man when it comes to these finance things. You say there'll be a fast profit and all, but... I don't know...

ST JOHN COURTNEY

(Irritated)

You don't know what exactly?

MANNING

Maybe I should sleep on it?

Out of sight of MANNING, ST. JOHN COURTNEY rolls his eyes, obviously irritated. But he recovers and attempts to disguise his irritation.

ST JOHN COURTNEY

Fine, fine! I don't want to hurry you, it's wise not to be hasty... Look, let's say this then. I'll call on you on Friday by which time I will have the final pricing.

MANNING

That sounds fair

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

I'll be off out of your way now and you can mull it over for Friday eh?

MANNING

(Moves to the door; calls)

Fanny dear, Mr. Saint Courtney is just leaving.

FANNY appears wiping her hands on her apron.

FANNY

'scuse me, a bit of baking.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY

With very tasty results no doubt. I'm so pleased to have met you Mrs. Manning, and do say goodbye to young Olive. A fortunate young man he must surely be! *(Winks knowingly)*

FANNY

Olive?

MANNING

I'll see you out Mr. Saint – Leonard.

*They exit and are heard saying goodbyes off.
OLIVE returns from the kitchen.*

OLIVE

(Entering)

I'm glad he's gone.

FANNY

Why's that?

OLIVE

A bit too easy with his words.

FANNY

He was very polite though.

OLIVE

I don't like him.

MANNING

(Returning from the hall; irritated)

Don't be hasty with your opinion, you don't judge a book by its cover.

OLIVE

What's he here for?

MANNING

(More irritated)

Told you, a bit of business.

FANNY

What sort of business?

MANNING

You women, you want to nose about in everything but you don't know what's what. He's not some seedy merchant down a back alley. A gentleman and shrewd too, and what's more, well connected, and mark you this, you won't be regretting that I've met 'im!

FANNY.

Well, I hope he's all he makes out to be, that's all I can say.

MANNING exits the room clearly in a huff.

OLIVE

You're right Mum, Dad needs to be bit wary of that one.

FANNY

What do you know about it Ol?

OLIVE

They were talking about investing money, and then he came out with some fancy Latin phrases, but he's not that clever with Latin.

FANNY

Olive! You were listening in. Better not let your father know that. What about his Latin?

OLIVE

Dad came out with a bit of Latin, too, but for all the fancy talk he didn't seem to know it.

FANNY

Your Dad wouldn't know any Latin?

OLIVE

He knew what "Carpe Diem" means.

FANNY

Did he now, and what does it mean.

OLIVE

"Seize the day!"

BLACKOUT.

ACT II
Scene 2

AT RISE: *The same sitting room a few days later. The radio is playing quietly. MANNING is seated, his pipe in his mouth. he is holding up and studying the plans of a bungalow.*

Enter OLIVE. She stands behind the seated MANNING and places her hand on his shoulder.

OLIVE

You'll wear your eyes out staring at the plans. Still not happy with it?

MANNING

Bit concerned 'bout the larder, could do with bein' smaller 'cause the door openin' into the kitchen's so near the back door, make it a bit tight...Seeing Sam tonight. Ol?

OLIVE

Yep, I'll go and change then I'll make you a drink.

She exits. SFX: Doorbell. MANNING mutters to himself, turns the radio off and exits off to the hall.

MAISIE, *Off*

Hello Mr. Em.

MANNING

(Surprised; entering with MAISIE)

Maisie! come on in, come in the sitting room, what brings you over here then?

MAISIE is still in her shabby coat and although she has made herself tidy, she is clearly not prosperous.

MAISIE

I saw Mary Draper in town, she told me you'd moved here, you like it?

MANNING

Not much. T'is smaller than Octon Cottage but it's only temporary you understand. I've bought a building plot up to Marldon. This here's the plans for a new bungalow.

MAISIE

Oh my. Everything'll be new then?

MANNING

Pretty well, our own place, never thought that would happen. But tell me, how life's treating you up at Parkhill.

MAISIE

Not there now. Mums idea, they were working me so hard. She found me a job down at the Grand, corridor maid.

MANNING

Mary said that'd happen, you leavin' bein' in service

MAISIE

Anyhow I've been wanting to meet up 'cause you must be thinking bad of me.

MANNING

'Bad of you' I wouldn't think that. Why so?

MAISIE opens her handbag take out her purse, removes a ten-shilling note and pushes it towards him.

MAISIE

Been too long I know, but I've come to pay me debt - So much happin' to be honest it went out of my mind and I haven't paid you back.

(MANNING looks puzzled)

Ten-shilling for my dancing down the Spa, remember?

MANNING

(Does not move to take it; clearly a bit nonplussed)

'twas way back. I'd forgotten it too, Maisie, You're an honest girl, after this time I reckon you'd as well keep it.

MAISIE

No, it's not my money Mr. Em, you were very kind to me. Mum's real strict about money. "We don't have much, Maisie, but we do have our self-respect."

Hesitating, they look at each other; he is making up his mind. Finally, he takes the money from her.

MANNING

Alright Maisie. Times is seldom easy but the depression made everything bad, vexed us all. Your Mum's right. Decent God-fearing folk with a bit of integrity, without 'em things'd fall apart – maybe they will someday.

MAISIE

My brother Michael, he's just found work—builders yard, things'll be easier for Mum now.

MANNING

Michael, he's the older one?

MAISIE

Yeah, and the housekeeper says I can do turn-down maid some evenings, you know, doin' the beds when they're at dinner.

MANNING

Make a long day's work of it Maisie.

MAISIE

I know, but I've started a night school course at the Vivian Institute, there's that to pay for.

MANNING

Course for what?

MAISIE

Pitman shorthand and touch typing, like the receptionists in the hotel. Have to learn to talk better though, like the guests is expecting you to.

Enter OLIVE looking smarter and carrying an envelope.

MANNING

Here Ol, here's Maisie from Octon, come visitin'.

OLIVE

Of Course, how're you then?

MAISIE

Not too bad thanks. You're looking nice, off out?

OLIVE

Sam's pickin' me up and we're off to the Odeon, they're showing Errol Flynn in *Charge of the Light Brigade*. Oh Dad, this letter was on the mat. It's type written.

(Hand's him the letter then turns to MAISIE)

Still go Ballroom dancing?

The two young women continue to chat ad lib as the LIGHTING GOES TO HALF with a PIN LIGHT ON MANNING. MANNING silently reads the contents of the letter as the audience hears the sound of ST. JOHN COURTNEY'S VOICE.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY'S VOICE

Dear Mr. Manning,

I did not call on you Friday, as I think it is better for you to give the matter of the Aracan Company further consideration.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY'S VOICE, *Continued*

I would however ask that you should re-invest the money from the Oil Bonds in units of the Aracan Company. By doing so you have the right to purchase more units later on should you care to do so.

At any rate every unit of £ 100 will give you – by June or July next year – £ 150 cash and £ 250 in shares. Can you ask for more?

You have benefited from taking my advice in one case. Do this now and you will gain still more.

All you have to do is to let me have your cheque and a letter stating you will surrender the oil bonds when you get the Unit Certificate.

I do hope you will do this, as I would feel otherwise that you did not trust me.

All considered, as you have seen for yourself, this is a sound business practically backed by the Govt. of Burma, my contact there, Dr. Thein Moung is tipped to be a cabinet minister before long.

LIGHTS RESTORED. MANNING picks up a letter pad and starts to write. The sound of the OLIVE and MAISIE talking returns to normal.

OLIVE

(Still chatting with MAISIE)

I'll have to see what Sam wants to do about that.

MAISIE

Oh, it's gettin' late got to be back at the Grand this evening and there's shopping to do.

MANNING hastily folds the letter into his pocket, opens a drawer and takes out a cheque book which he puts it in his pocket.

MANNING

I've got a call to make. I'll walk downtown with you, Maisie.

They prepare to leave. BLACKOUT.

Act II
Scene 3

AT RISE: *FANNY is seated on the sofa knitting. We hear the outer door close off and MANNING enters removing his coat. He greets her and puts his coat over a chair.*

FANNY

Not there Joe! I hope you're going to be a bit tidier when we're in the bungalow.

MANNING takes his coat out to the hall and then returns.

MANNING

Any post come?

FANNY

(Gestures to the side table)

On the top there.

MANNING picks up the envelope looks at the post mark and opens it. As he starts to read, LIGHTS FADE, leaving MANNING in SPECIALTY LIGHTING.

As MANNING reads, we hear ST. JOHN COURTNEY'S VOICE. FANNY continues knitting in the half-light unaware of the words MANNING hears in his head.

ST JOHN COURTNEY'S VOICE

Dear Mr. Manning,

Further to my letter of December last, attaching the certificates for the one hundred pound units in the Arakan Bamboo Pulp Company. I am glad to be able to inform you that we are now a fully registered Company, capitalised at present at £ 100,000. We have a very strong Board of Directors, and steps are being taken to either form a subsidiary Company with a capital of £350,000, or increase the present capital of £100,000 to the required figure.

In any case it will only be a short time now before all the shares issued by me are taken up. Will you be good enough to write to me at the Regent Palace Hotel, Piccadilly Circus, London, stating exactly what you have to get both in cash and shares.

Yours sincerely,

L. St. John Courtney.

LIGHTS RESTORE.

FANNY

London post mark I see.

MANNING

It is.

...Well?
FANNY

Well what?
MANNING

Well, what's it say?
FANNY

Oh, good news I reckon.
MANNING

From that Saint what's 'is name?
FANNY

It is, and there'll be more good news afore long.
MANNING

Hum.... I don't know what all the mystery's then. In all these years, Joe, I don't remember you keeping secrets.
FANNY

Well even if I had been, you wouldn't know, would you? It'd still be a secret.
MANNING

What I mean is, is everything fine and dandy, Joe?
FANNY

There's nothing to hide but 'tis complicated, this kind of investment. I don't see that you women will quite get the measure of it.
MANNING

You saying I'm too stupid?
FANNY

I'm not saying that, but you need to have studied this kind of thing and I don't want you frettin' over it. You don't 'have to. Leave it to me, trust my judgement, and you and Olive will benefit soon enough.
MANNING

I hope you're right but whilst we are holdin' our breath you can make yourself useful and put the kettle on.
FANNY

MANNING exits.

SFX: Door opens and closes off. OLIVE bursts into the room.

OLIVE

Mum! Mum! Look at this, look Mum! *(Pulls off her gloves)*

FANNY

Alright, alright! What's got you all of a tizz?

OLIVE

(Holds out the back of her left hand)

Look!

FANNY

Oh My! he's making it official then, eh?

OLIVE

Yeah, asked me to meet him in Union Street, lunch break. Went straight to Conway Couch and choose it. I'm engaged Mum, I'm really engaged! No funny remarks from Dad anymore. Is he here?

FANNY

He's just putting the kettle on. But Sam's not spoken to your Dad you know, has he?

OLIVE

No, not properly. Not formal, no.

FANNY

Well he should have asked him, even if he knows we'll say yes. So we'll have to think about a date then won't we? Not that you should rush it mind.

During this FANNY takes hold of her hand and carefully scrutinizes the ring and describes it (ad lib).

OLIVE

Could be tomorrow for all I care.

FANNY

Here, steady on, don't you go rushin' it, you'll have tongues wagging'. Weddings take time my girl, it'll be your big day, want to get everything planned right. There's more to it than you imagine, Ol, and there's the money to find. As bride's parents we'll pay for it.

(Turning towards the door; shouts)

Hurry up Joe. Olive's back, and there's news for you.

OLIVE

Come and look at this Dad!

MANNING, *Off*

(Shouts)

With you in a jiffy.

FANNY

(Turning back to Olive)

And where are you going to live and....

(A new thought strikes her)

Now Olive you're not going to get carried away and do anything you're going to regret are you?

MANNING enters carrying a tea tray with a knitted cosy over the pot. He has just heard the two women.

MANNING

Who's doin' things they might regret then?

OLIVE

Oh really! What to you take me for! He won't rush me like that, but I don't want a long engagement, it's taken 'im long enough already.

OLIVE hastens over to him holding out her hand.

OLIVE

Look, a diamond!

MANNING

(Sees it and answers in a distracted manner)

Very nice.

He puts down the tray and turns to look at her.

OLIVE

It's an engagement ring Dad!

MANNING

Oh yes, it's congratulations then.

FANNY

Men!

OLIVE

I told him he should be asking your permission first, but it won't matter will it because I know you won't say no.

MANNING

I'll have a talk with 'im. Be alright, a time-served tradesman, skilled Joiner is Sam, he'll see you ok.

FANNY

(Excited)

I've told her, it's a big thing arranging a wedding. There's the vicar to talk to, think about bridesmaids, a dress, somewhere for the wedding breakfast, oh my! And have to think about the cost.

OLIVE

Well, there's Mr. Acutt's money.

FANNY

That's true.

MANNING

Not so fast, that money's not lying around idle waiting for you to spend it. It's put away for the moment. Investments have to mature. It ain't like your Post Office book, you can't just go and draw it out willy nilly.

FANNY

That's no good, we might need that money, your only daughter doesn't get married every day you know!

OLIVE

I don't want a long engagement Dad.

MANNING

Alright, alright. I – er – I'll take a look and see when we can bring forward a payout.

FANNY

Well you'd better had. I'm not having Olive and Sam down at the registry office like people marrying in shame, nor a wedding breakfast done at home like Mary Southcott, and she had to get married a bit quick!

BLACKOUT.

ACT III

Scene 1

SETTING: *Same; the Manning's sitting room; months later, daylight.*

AT RISE: *Enter MANNING. He is pensive. He goes to look out of the window, turns to pace up and down a couple of times, then walks directly to the desk, pulls out a writing pad and pen and starts to pen a letter. His words are heard as he scribbles. His voice is troubled.*

MANNING'S VOICE

Dear Mr. Courtney,

I received your letter about a month ago, saying that you were going to call on me if I was at home.

I replied by return of post that I would be at home on the Monday, the day you proposed to call and I waited in for you.

I also received next morning a type-written letter of the (Burma Proposition) which is a vast concern when completed and I sincerely hope have been completed by now? I do not think but what the interest are extremely good.

But as I have pointed out to you, I am now in want of money, and now I think I waited patiently for a long time just twelve months after our agreed time and that is not a bad time for a small man to wait. It does not affect a man of big means, but as you are well aware it's the small man that suffers. So I shall be glad to have a definite reply as to when this money is to be paid out and the whole business settled. I remain yours....”

*As he is signing, SFX: A knock on the door.
MANNING drops his pen and he exits.
Voices are heard off and he returns with
MRS. Draper in coat and hat and carrying a
wicker shopping basket.*

MANNING

(As entering with MRS. DRAPER)

It's good of you to call Mary.

MRS. DRAPER

I was hoping to speak to Fanny about Olive?

MANNING

Oh. She's down in the town shopping

MRS. DRAPER

On your own?

MANNING

Aye. I was just penning a letter. Olive's at work o' course.

MRS. DRAPER

It won't do me being seen here if you're on your own, but I've been meaning to call for some while. I have this little silver condiment set that belonged to my mother. I wanted to ask Fanny if that would serve nicely as a wedding present for Olive. They're solid silver you know.

She hands over a small parcel.

MANNING

That's real good of you Mary, if you wait on she'll be here afore long.

There is an awkward pause for a beat or two.

MRS. DRAPER

Mmmm, I don't want to give rise to comments, Joe.

MANNING

There won't have any concerns on that score.

MRS. DRAPER

Even so...

MANNING

No harm in staying for a cuppa, catch up on the tittle tattle, eh?

MRS. DRAPER

(Looks at the clock or her watch)

Very well then, I'll keep my hat and coat on. This house alright for you?

MANNING

It'll do 'til the bungalow's finished.

MRS. DRAPER

Lady Banbury owns several others in this street.

MANNING

This is one of hers. How come you know that?

MRS. DRAPER

Who do you think told her that you were needing a place?

MANNING

You?

MRS. DRAPER

(Nods)

I told Elsie Thompson her house keeper 'n she told Lady Banbury who said to Waycotts to offer it to you.

MANNING

I didn't realise.... That was good of you.

MRS. DRAPER

Not really, I'm not a vindictive woman, Joe, you don't think that about me surely.

They stand looking at each other. There is another awkward moment.

MANNING

Aye Mary, I know well enough, not in your nature. Take a seat. I'll put the kettle on.

He exits. MRS. Draper who has not sat down looks about, glancing out the window and spinning the globe. Her eye is taken by the letter which MANNING was writing before she arrived. She bends down and turns her head to read it and while she does this, MANNING calls from off.

MANNING, *Off*

Slades have got Darjeeling Red Label in again, I remember how Mr. Acutt used to plague you when they ran out of it, 'e hated Brooke Bond, warehouse sweepings 'e called it.

MRS. DRAPER does not answer him, being taken up reading the letter. There is a beat or two before MANNING appears in the doorway with a tea tray. She has not heard him approach and he sees her reading the letter. She looks up startled to see him there.

MRS. DRAPER

Oh, Joe I'm sorry, it was just open here and I just happened to...

MANNING

Don't fret yourself.

An awkward silence; he moves to put down the tray.

MRS. DRAPER

Would that be Mr. Saint – er – what's 'is name...

(MANNING nods the affirmative)

Well he's not much of a saint now seems to me.... Want to tell me about it?

MANNING shakes his head "no."

MRS. DRAPER

Painful eh?..... Joe, if you don't talk about painful things, the pain just gets worse, believe me.

MANNING

'spose so

MRS. DRAPER

Turned out a bit too good to be true, eh?

MANNING

Maybe not, maybe more of a setback. It's not easy setting up a big company, thousands of miles away an' all. Got to satisfy the folks in Burma. It'll still come good alright, and then...

MRS. DRAPER

And then pigs might fly! Seems to me you've been duped Joe.

MANNING

No! No! He really is connected to top people, here look at this...

MANNING moves to open a drawer. He hands her a single typewritten sheet. She reads from it silently, her lips gently moving. We hear the words she is reading in ST. JOHN COURTNEY'S VOICE or alternately, LIGHTS DIM and ST. JOHN COURTNEY is seen in a pin spot sitting at a desk, writing as he speaks the words.

ST. JOHN COURTNEY'S VOICE

The delay in completion of this is very much to be regretted. When, however, the following factors are considered it will be seen how unavoidable this delay has been and actually how valuable it has turned out.

Burma from April this year, is entirely a separate country, governed by the Burmese themselves. The enormous amount of work entailed has naturally affected all private business.

MANNING

See, there's a good reason for the delay.

MRS. DRAPER reads on.

ST JOHN COURTNEY'S VOICE

About a year ago a Trade Delegation from Burma, headed by the Minister for Trade – Dr. Thein Moun – arrived in England. I naturally met them and made it my business to cultivate a very close and friendly relationship with Dr. Moun and his delegation. I entertained them in London and as guests at my home in Devon for ten days.

The fact that my wife took an active part in the entertaining was greatly appreciated by Dr. Moun and his associates. When leaving, the good Dr. turned to me and remarked that, being a big man in his country he had official receptions accorded him by the government of Great Britain, but I was the only one to invite them to my home and have them entertained by Mistress Courtney.

The Dr. added, "I will never forget this, and in the name of the Burmese Government, I promise to help you to get whatever business you want in Burma."

ST JOHN COURTNEY'S VOICE, *Continued*

Following on this, through the Burmese Government I have been offered the following concessions:

1. Wofram 2. Halium 3. Teak Forest 4 Salt Manufacture.

It is my intention that my present associates in the ARAKAN proposition shall benefit by some participation in these others just mentioned

MANNING

And the last bit, read that, that's the main thing.

ST JOHN COURTNEY'S VOICE

It will only be now a matter of a very short time before final details will have been completed and the flotation effected.

MANNING

Now he's not making all that up, is he?

MRS. DRAPER

Isn't he? Who's to say? This is only typewriting on paper. Anyone could set this up to fool someone.

MANNING

(Indignantly)

Fool someone! It's all facts, you don't know anything different.

MRS. DRAPER

Facts you say! Has he shown you anything from this "Dr. Mounq," On proper headed paper of the Government people, or even Company headed paper?

(MANNING does not meet her eye)

You've been a fool Joe!

MANNING

No, no, there's this as well...

He ruffles in the drawer and produces another piece of paper which he unfolds and quotes from.

MANNING

This is the updated Proposition.

MRS. DRAPER

Go on....

MANNING

It's a new report from him. He accepts there's been delays but in addition to the bamboo concession he's now won the purchase of a big oil concern producing 400,000 barrels a year, teak forests, sugar mills and other stuff and to compensate the investors for all the

MANNING, *Continued*

delays he's pooling this in the business. So, as he says, the value of the original offer has increased enormously! I could be in for a really big payout!

He hands her the paper and she studies it briefly.

MRS. DRAPER

But Joe! It's still only bits of typing, it's not even that, it's a copy from carbon paper. He's probably running off lots of copies— there'll be others beside you chasing their money. Anyone, even me, I could have typed this. There's nothing to confirm anything, not even a Company address!

MANNING

Don't be daft! You can't type, and you wouldn't know anything about trade concessions in Burma. Alright he's run into problems, that doesn't make him a rogue... I'll get me money and a load more on top. You'll see!

MRS. DRAPER

(Shakes her head; a beat or two)

Does Fanny know about this?

MANNING

Aye she knows I've invested a bit with him.

MRS. DRAPER

And?

MANNING

Not about the delays, no?

MRS. DRAPER

And Olive?

MANNING

No.

MRS. DRAPER

My God Joe, you'd better hope he does pay out. And you'd best say something to her. I don't think a man should have secrets from his wife.

MANNING

(Slightly sarcastic)

Don't you now! I don't recall that always applyin'

MRS. DRAPER

That's nasty Joe, and well you know it!

MANNING

Alright, I'm sorry, but sometimes 'tis best not to alarm 'em.

MRS. DRAPER

This is more than just a white lie Joe.

MANNING

I can't worry 'em now, they're all excited planning Ol's wedding. Fact is, if Courtney does not pay up soon the wedding'll be an embarrassment, moneywise, can't see it happenin', not in the manner they're talking about.

SFX: Knock on door.

MANNING, *Continued*

Oh! We're not expecting anyone.

MANNING exits to answer and returns while MRS. DRAPER takes another look at the paperwork.

MANNING

Look who's here!

He is followed in by MAISIE looking a bit older and more sophisticated in smarter clothes.

MRS. DRAPER

(Hastily putting down the paperwork)

My, my. Look who the tide's washed in.

MAISIE

Hello Mary, you're looking well.

MANNING

You come to see Olive, Maisie?

MAISIE

I was hoping to.

MRS. DRAPER

I'd heard you left Parkhill?

MAISIE

's right. Didn't stay long, worked me to the bone they did.

MRS. DRAPER

Not so good as Octon then, eh?

MAISIE

Not in domestic service now, Mum got me a position in the Grand Hotel.

MRS. DRAPER

Good for you.

MAISIE

More money. Assistant housekeeper. And I go to evening classes now.

MRS. DRAPER

Hotel and caterin'?

MAISIE

Typewriting and shorthand. Nearly finished the course.

MANNING

Maisie and Olive have become good pals, tell her Maisie.

MAISIE

Olive's asked me to be her bridesmaid.

MRS. DRAPER

You'll have to catch her bouquet, then you'll be next.

MANNING

You still courting him, James was it?

MAISIE

No, that ended a long time since, it didn't work out... he started walking out with a doctor's daughter, Pricilla.

MANNING

Big upset yeh?

MAISIE

Not really, I'd ended it as it happened.

MRS. DRAPER

Didn't come up to your high standards then eh?

MAISIE

(Looking rather coy)

Didn't respect me

MANNING

'ow do you mean?

MRS. DRAPER

(To MANNING)

Can't you guess! Come on too fresh, wandering hands, is that what you're saying?

MAISIE nods.

MANNING

Oh, I see.

MRS. DRAPER

They're all the same.

MAISIE

Anyhow there's someone else.

MRS. DRAPER

Go on then, don't keep us in the dark.

MAISIE

Stan. He's real kind and very clever. He's built his own short-wave radio and, you won't believe this, he's got his own transmitter!

MANNING

You have to know what you're about for that.

MAISIE

Oh he does—passed an exam and got a license. He let me talk into the microphone. I talked to a man in America last night, clear as the telephone. How many people in Torquay have done that!

MANNING

You'll be talking to your film stars next!

MAISIE

And he can do Morse code. You should see 'im tapping away real quick, and he's a good dancer as well.

MRS. DRAPER

Smitten eh?

MAISIE nods coyly; then responds in a more subdued, reflective tone.

MAISIE

Thing is though, he says he'll volunteer, Royal Corps of Signals. they need men who can do Morse and radio and...

MANNING and MRS. DRAPER give each other a knowing look. MAISIE takes notice.

MAISIE, *Continued*

He's not bothered about all this talk of war though, not really. Our boys and the Americans beat the Germans last time. He reckons Hitler's all hot air, and if it comes to a scrap we'll lick 'em in no time Stan says... And they won't want a scrap against our army, and France, and all the other countries.

MAISIE, *Continued*

(Looks from one to the other)

Will they?

MANNING

Who knows Maisie, who knows.

BLACKOUT.

ACT III

Scene 2

AT RISE: *Evening in the Manning's sitting room. OLIVE is working on a dress doing a bit of sewing. On a chair there is a gas mask case. FANNY enters.*

OLIVE

Dad going to be here?

FANNY

ARP meeting tonight, second one this week.

OLIVE

Why's he such a grump, bit my head off this morning. I suppose all this war stuff's worrying him?

FANNY

Maybe that, or something else. What's he say to you then.

OLIVE

I just told him we are wanting to have the choir, and book the hotel and stuff, and Sam's Mum has suggested a date. Then he flew off the handle.

FANNY

He's got a lot on his mind, Ol, what with the Ambulance training, and his ARP stuff as well.

OLIVE

Not my fault. I'm not threatening war, but I have to say something to Sam's family.

FANNY

He's just comin' in the back.

OLIVE

I'm going up to me room.

FANNY

Ol.

(OLIVE already leaving stops)

Don't get upset love, leave it to me, I'll have a word with him

*OLIVE gathers up the dress and exits. SFX
A door closes off.*

*MANNING enters wearing his ARP hat and
arm band and looking around.*

MANNING

Seen my gas mask, t'was in here?

FANNY

Over there. When will you get out of the habit of leaving things on chairs? I nearly sat on it. *(Beat)* Busy meeting?

MANNING

Aye, planning black-out patrols.

FANNY

St. John Ambulance training last night, you're hardly ever in.

MANNING

There's plenty to get on with, better'n stayin' in listening to you two always prattling on about weddings...

FANNY

(Suddenly angry)

You behave as though you don't want nothing to do with Olive's wedding. For God's sake Joe, we've only one daughter and she'll only ever marry once...but when? We should sit down with Ol and Sam and sort it out, but you won't talk about it and you upset Olive snapping at her this morning. You're always out for this or that.

MANNING

(Sarcastically; raising his voice)

"Out for this or that"? Haven't you noticed! Air raid shelters bein' built round the harbor, anti-aircraft guns on Corbyn Head, just everyday things like that.

FANNY

Well, we still don't know it will happen for definite, war's not been declared?

MANNING

More likely than not, might as well get used to it. What do you think we're all doing? Blackout exercises over Plymouth. There's a Brigadier Montgomery down at Slapton exercising an amphibious force. Why do you think we're handing out gas masks?

FANNY

Mr. Chamberlain's made peace with 'em, didn't he?

MANNING

Huh! you think waving a bit of paper at the airport, you think that's puts an end to Germany's ambitions. Hitler's tricky, Churchill knows that.

FANNY

Churchill! He isn't in charge and he's been wrong before. What about the Dardenells then?

MANNING

That was then, this is different, he won't be wrong about these Nazi's and when war breaks out, Chamberlain will be out on 'is ear.

FANNY

We can argue the toss about Churchill all night but people won't stop getting married and we have a wedding to prepare for – so give some thoughts to that won't you!

(MANNING fidgets with his gas mask)

Well?

MANNING

Well What?

FANNY

Sam's coming around tomorrow, what's Olive to tell him, where do they stand eh? He could well be called up for the Army if your war comes along. They need to arrange a date with the Vicar, we need money to pay a deposit for the wedding breakfast. You have to say something to her. There's Maisie's dress to buy, can't expect her widowed Mum to pay for it. Rev. Richards'll need to know if we're having the choir.

(A beat or two)

Are you heedin' me Joe!

MANNING drops his gas mask on a chair and sits. Fidgets a bit and clears his throat.

MANNING

Things are not what I had – er – hoped they would be right now, Fan.

FANNY

What things?

MANNING

We've got the money for the bungalow, no mortgage nor nothing.

FANNY

I know that, thanks to Mr. Acutt.

He goes over to a table, unlocks the drawer and brings out some papers.

MANNING

(Speaks slowly and with apprehension)

And to secure our future, maybe against not getting work, I invested nearly all the remaining money, a bit in some oil bonds which did very well, and then in shares in a new venture.

FANNY

Oh ho! Is that it? All those letters you kept quiet about....This is 'im—that Saint John what's 'is name again?

MANNING

The thing is though, there's been a bit of a setback, St. John's had problems in – er – setting up his company.

FANNY

Has he now. Well you'd better go see him and say to 'im, Company or no Company you need your money back now.

MANNING

Thing is, he's no longer got the office down the Harbor.

FANNY

Well, get to Newton Abbot, you told me he lives over there. Well...

MANNING

He's – er – left there.

FANNY

Gone!... Are you saying that....that... he's on the run, is that what you're saying?

MANNING

No, no, no! He went to the Mount Royal Hotel in London

FANNY

Oh.

MANNING

The manager there has forwarded my letter to the Ship Inn at Brighton

FANNY

Oh my God! He IS on the run. Mr. Acutt's money, you've gambled with it and—

MANNING

Gambled. O' course not, most of it's going to pay for the bungalow and I've made a proper investment, but you have to bide your time 'til the Company's trading and starts to earn back, it takes time to come good like. Mr. Acutt used to make investments like this.

FANNY

Oh no! Not like this, he didn't. He wouldn't hand his money over to a smarmy clever dick with a fancy name, pretending he knows Latin.

MANNING

But it's practically backed by the Government of Burma, his friend Dr. Mounq is all set to be in their Govt.

FANNY

WHAT! Mr. Saint thingy in his little room down at Torquay harbor? You think he's in big with the Government of Burma? Come on Joe!

MANNING

(Looks to her rather lamely)

I believe him. It all made sense, he's no fool, he made me money on the oil bonds.

FANNY

So, what happened to that?

MANNING

He – er... I didn't get to cash it in, it was added in to the Arakan Company investment.

FANNY

So you've never actually got any proper money back from 'im.

MANNING avoids her gaze and there is a beat or two while she smoulders.

MANNING

(Crestfallen, now a beat or two)

I did it for you, and Olive, isn't that good enough for you?

FANNY

Never mind who it's good for, how're you going to get your money? OUR money?

MANNING

It's a temporary setback, I have had a couple of cheques...

MANNING pulls one from the papers in his hand.

FANNY

You have had some money then!

MANNING

Not paid through, no.

FANNY

What does that mean?

MANNING

The bank returned 'em.

FANNY

(Unhinged)

Dud cheques! Dud cheques! Oh my, that's real dandy! He's gone away and there's dud cheques! What else Joe? Any more to tell me?

MANNING

Alright, alright. I know, but I'm trying to sort it out; problem is he can't be contacted at the moment.

FANNY

Where is he then? In a plush hotel busy spending our money, that's where he is!

MANNING

No, he has written...from a steam ship, The Orontes.

FANNY

A Luxury liner! same difference.

MANNING

He says he's been called urgently to Burma to sign up important papers. What I'm countin' on is that once he gets there he can sort it all out with them and be ready to pay out to the original investors.

FANNY

Whereabouts in Burma?

(MANNING does not answer)

Well, where? what's 'is address?

MANNING

(Very quietly)

I don't have it...yet

FANNY

In... Burma... somewhere. Dear God! What use is that!

There is a standoff for a few beats.

MANNING cannot look at her.

FANNY, *Continued*

Can't you contact this Dr. Mong? If Courtney's not telling you a total pack of lies Mong should know where Courtney is surely? Can't you get in touch through him?

MANNING

(Almost distraught)

I don't have an address for 'im.

(FANNY shakes her head in disbelief)

But I've been thinkin' about it. There must be those in our Government up in London who do business with them.

FANNY

How would they know about him?

MANNING

No, but Burma's a British colony, there's an office for the Colonies, I've found out about it down the Library. The Colonial Office, we can contact 'im through them?

FANNY

(Restrained fury)

Well you'd better do something, and quickly! Write to London, be our last hope of seeing any money, and us with a Bungalow to finish, furniture to buy AND Olive's Wedding coming up.

MANNING

I'm sorry Fan, you know I was only.....

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes

AUTHOR'S NOTES BEGIN NEXT PAGE

LEGACY

AUTHOR'S NOTES

“Legacy” is a true story taken from the tin box of letters, unpaid cheques, etc. that were left by Thomas Manning and found in the effects of his daughter Olive. A certain degree of artistic license has been inevitable to create a rounded and workable play. The letters quoted in the script are verbatim with the exception of Lady Banbury’s letter in the final scene, “enclosing check.” Some names have been changed where I could not discover enough about the real person to use their identity. Lady Banbury for instance is based on two titled Ladies I knew of but was not the aristocrat who really was a neighbour to Noble Acutt at 'Octon'.

Maisie is fearful that Torquay will be bombed. In reality it was bombed a number of times by the German Luftwaffe, including a notorious Sunday morning ‘hit and run’ raid which was a direct hit on a Church full of Sunday School children, many of whom were killed and injured.

Von Ribbontrop was the German Ambassador to the UK, and visited Torquay before the War and was fated with a civic dinner. He had a naval attachment with him and they toured the area. It would have been no coincidence that the Britannia Royal Naval College and Naval facilities were nearby at Dartmouth, and at Plymouth.

British Brigadier Bernard Montgomery arranged beach landing trials at Slapton Sands (12 miles for Torquay) before the war as mentioned in the play. Later in the war he became General Montgomery and worked under General Eisenhower. Also, later – during the war – Slapton was again used for landing exercises, in preparation for ‘D Day’, when American troops on ‘Operation Tiger’ were ambushed at sea by German E boats causing huge loss of life. A Tank which was sunk that night has been bought ashore and preserved at Slapton Lay as a memorial to the many young American servicemen who were lost or injured that night.

Noble Acutt left the bulk of his estate to his nephew Kenelm Acutt who remained in South Africa where he was a partner in Acutts a real estate and insurance firm. Acutt’s has thrived over the generations and is now the principle Real Estate Company in the South African Republic. Currently headed by Col. Pat Accept who is also an officer in the Country’s Army. (Col. Acutt has read and approved the script of ‘Legacy’.)

Little further has been discovered about Leonard Saint John Courtney. That he travelled the World has been established from the manifests of luxury liners in the 1930’s. Was he an out-and-out ‘con man’ or an adventurer with an exaggerated opinion of his abilities, who really believed that he could create a successful corporate venture in Burma? (Now Myanmar).