

#1

ETHEL, JACQUELINE & PAMELA

GOOD NIGHT MRS PUFFIN

ACT I

SCENE—The drawing-room of the Fordyce family at their house in Hampstead. A week before Christmas. About 4 p.m.

It is a nicely furnished room that has the air of being lived-in. Double doors C of the back wall, approached by two steps, lead to the hall and other parts of the house off L. A door down R leads to the study. A bay window R overlooks the garden, with the bare branches of the trees and houses in the distance. The fireplace is L. There are built-in shelves filling the back wall, R and L of the double doors. A long table stands in the window bay, with a Christmas tree and Christmas cards on it. A smaller table, on which there is a large table-lamp and a telephone, stands in the corner up R. A small console for drinks is under the shelves up L. Above the fireplace there is a television set on which stands a table-lamp. A large sofa is RC with easy chairs to match up LC and down L. A low coffee-table is in front of the sofa. The shelves up R carry books, ornaments and Christmas cards. The shelves up L have ornaments, Christmas cards and various bottles of drinks on the bottom shelf. There are more Christmas cards on the mantelpiece along with an ornate gill clock. A good picture, in a heavy frame, hangs over the fireplace. There are electric wall-brackets over the fireplace, with the switches R of the doors up C. A small occasional table stands down L of the easy chair LC. Against the back wall of the hall is a console table with a bowl of flowers, and above it, an electric wall-bracket. The window has heavy curtains and pelmet.

When the CURTAIN rises, it is about 4 p.m. The light is beginning to fade and the room is brightened by the glow from the fire. **ETHEL FORDYCE** is seated on the sofa, opening letters from a pile on the coffee-table in front of her. She is aged about fifty, plump and rather *sturdy*. She opens a letter and reads it aloud.

ETHEL, (reading) "Mr and Mrs Hicks thank Mr and Mrs Fordyce for their kind invitation to the wedding of their daughter Jacqueline on December the twenty-sixth, which they have much pleasure in accepting". They would! (She picks up another, opens it and reads) "Sir William and Lady Francis . . ." (She mumbles away to herself and finishes triumphantly) ". . . and have much pleasure in accepting". Oh, I am glad! (And very obviously she is)

(**JACQUELINE** and **PAMELA FORDYCE** enter up C. **JACKY** is aged about twenty-three and is very attractive. **PAMELA** is aged about twenty and is pleasant rather than pretty. They wear outdoor clothes and are both loaded with parcels)

PAMELA } (as they enter; together) Hallo, Mummy darling!
 JACKY }
 ETHEL. Hallo, darlings, you're back.

(JACKY kisses Ethel, drops her parcels on the floor down L.C., kneels and sorts them)

JACKY. Tea ready, yet? I'm absolutely dying for a cup.

(PAMELA moves to the fireplace, drops her parcels on the hearth-rug, kneels and sorts them)

PAMELA. So am I. Isn't Christmas shopping sheer hell!

ETHEL. You will have to wait. Annie's busy and so am I.

PAMELA (rising and running to Ethel) Oh, Mummy, more

acceptances and regrets? (She sits L. of Ethel on the sofa)
 ETHEL. The usual acceptances from those we don't want and regrets from those we do. (She reads another letter) "Mr and Mrs Higglethorpe . . ." Higglethorpe—who on earth are they? We don't know anyone of that name.

JACKY. Higglethorpe? Oh, they're cousins of Victor, once or twice removed.

PAMELA. I bet they are coming.

ETHEL. Oh, they are. And we've had an acceptance from Sir William and Lady Francis. Isn't that nice?

JACKY. Why? We don't know them.

ETHEL. No, but we will.

PAMELA (rising) Of course. (She removes her coat and throws it over the back of the easy chair L.C.) People can hardly come to the wedding without meeting the bride's mother. (She collects her parcels, crosses and puts them on the table R.)

ETHEL. Well, it's very nice to meet people. (She opens another letter)

PAMELA. Oh, Mummy. (She crosses and kneels on the hearth-rug)

ETHEL (reading the letter) Oh, your Aunt Alice is coming. (She is not too happy about this)

JACKY. Not with our ghastly cousin Hector?

ETHEL. That's no way to speak of your cousin. I cannot imagine why you didn't have him as a page boy. I always think a page in white satin gives tone.

(JACKY rises, collects her parcels and puts them on the table R.)

JACKY. You could dress Hector in royal purple and he'd still look ghastly.

ETHEL (opening another letter) That's most unkind. (She reads the letter) There, I knew it! Aunt Vera has accepted and wants to know why the wedding is so rushed. Reading between the lines . . .

JACKY (leaning over the back of the sofa, L. of Ethel) Aunt Vera has a dirty mind.

ETHEL. Darling, I wouldn't say that, but I do hope you don't have a baby too soon. People talk so. Look at poor Cynthia. She got married all of a sudden and had a baby in eight months.

PAMELA. Very suspicious.

ETHEL. But it was premature, and every time Cynthia said so, everybody said "Yes".

PAMELA. Quite right, too.

ETHEL. But it was the way they said it.

JACKY (crossing to the easy chair L.C.) Don't worry, darling—(she removes her coat) I shan't have a baby for at least two years—for Aunt Vera's benefit. (She puts her coat over the back of the easy chair L.C.) But we've got to get married quickly as Victor and I go to Paris in the New Year. (She sits in the easy chair L.C.) We can't help it if his father suddenly wants to open a branch there.

ETHEL. Of course you can't, darling, and it's such a good match.

PAMELA. So beneficial to the Fordyce family.

ETHEL. That's no way to speak of it. It's the uniting of two—er—families in—er—closer bonds.

PAMELA. You mean the uniting of two firms in closer bonds.

ETHEL. Pam, darling! Jacky's in love with Victor—aren't you, darling?

JACKY. Of course I am.

ETHEL. Of course she is.

(NICHOLAS FORDYCE enters up C. He is aged about nineteen and is pleasant and amusing)

NICHOLAS. Good afternoon, all. (He goes to Ethel and kisses her) Wait until you see me in my morning coat. They'll think I'm the bridegroom.

ETHEL. Have you been measured, dear?

NICHOLAS. Ran the tape over me and said I had the perfect figure. I like those chaps, so good for one's ego.

ETHEL. What a blessing one can hire those things.

NICHOLAS. Three cheers for Moss Bros! (He moves to the table R and looks at the parcels) What are these—presents?

JACKY. Yes, and it was hell getting them.

NICHOLAS (picking up a parcel) Any for me?

PAMELA (rising and running to Nicholas) Hey, not to be opened until Christmas.

(NICHOLAS side-steps to C. PAMELA passes to R. of him.)

ANNIE, the maid, enters up C with a tray of tea-things. She passes between Nicholas and Pamela and bends over as she puts the tray on the coffee-table. NICHOLAS tosses the parcel to PAMELA and moves behind Annie)

ETHEL. Thank you, Annie.

(ANNIE straightens quickly with a yelp)

Nick!