

Now, Mrs Puffin, since you have been so clever, perhaps you'll explain this.

Mrs Puffin. I'll do anything I can. I only want to help.

(NICHOLAS moves behind the sofa)

(To Pamela) Now then, what was it you said, Pamela, about Jacky being swept off her feet by another man?

PAMELA (glancing above the left end of the sofa) That's what Mrs Puffin said. "You're swept off your feet by another bloke", that's what she said.

Mrs Puffin. My very words.

Henry. Well, who is he?

JACKY. She can't remember. (She mous and sits on the right arm of the easy chair L.C.) This is a fine state of affairs, I must say. I'm to be swept off my feet by someone I don't know a week before my wedding to someone else. I'm not used to being swept off my feet.

Henry. Victor did.

JACKY. I'm very fond of Victor, but ...

NICHOLAS. But he just doesn't sweep.

Henry. This isn't getting us anywhere. Now, Mrs Puffin, who is this other man?

Mrs Puffin. Do you know, it's a funny thing, but I can't remember. That bit's a bit vague. It's funny 'ow bits keep on coming back all of a sudden.

Henry. It's damned annoying! Think, Mrs Puffin, think.

Mrs Puffin. Lummy, I am thinking. I ain't stopped thinking. I'm getting dizzy with thinking.

PAMELA. Is he tall—dark—fair?

JACKY. Short—fat?

Mrs Puffin. No, 'e ain't short and fat.

NICHOLAS. Well, he might be. A lot of these short fat chaps are regular Don Juans.

JACKY. Oh, don't say that, Nick.

Mrs Puffin. I can't see 'im. 'E's 'azy.

Henry. Concentrate! Concentrate! (He kneels in front of Mrs Puffin)

(Mrs Puffin screws up her face in an agony of concentration)

Mrs Puffin. Oh, give over breathing on my knee caps. I do know one thing. He's connected with water.

NICHOLAS. He's a sailor! Now, do they sweep? One in every port.

PAMELA. He's something to do with water.

NICHOLAS. I know. A commercial traveller in Soda Syphons.

Henry (rising) We don't know anyone remotely connected with water.

HENRY #2

JACKY. Mrs Puffin, I'm sorry, but ...

Mrs Puffin (earnestly) Listen, miss, I know I'm right about water.

JACKY. No, it's impossible!

Henry. Of course it's impossible. The whole damn thing is impossible.

(The front door bell rings. There is a ghastly pause)

NICHOLAS (into Mrs Puffin's ear) Exhibit five coming up?

(ANNIE enters up d)

ANNIE. Excuse me, sir.

Henry. Now what is it?

PAMELA. Is it a man?

ANNIE. No, miss, it's the dressmaker.

PAMELA. Heavens! I forgot, Jacky, we've got a fitting.

(PAMELA runs out up c)

Henry. Yes, of course. Now, Jacky, be sensible, forget this nonsense. Go up and have your fitting. Mrs Puffin can't remember a thing about this so-called other man. Forget all about it.

JACKY. Mrs Puffin, if you do remember will you tell me about it?

Mrs Puffin. Don't worry, I'm on the quce wee.

Henry. There isn't onc. (He hustles Jacky to the door)

(JACKY exits up c)

ANNIE. Mrs Fordyce is lying down with a headache, sir, and she says she isn't coming down until Mrs Puffin has left.

(ANNIE exits up c)

NICHOLAS (to Mrs Puffin) You see, you haven't exactly made a hit with my mother.

Mrs Puffin. Well, I've done my best, I'm sure.

Henry. Now, Mrs Puffin ...

Mrs Puffin. It's all right, sir. I'm still thinking.

Henry. Well, don't; stop thinking.

Mrs Puffin. But 'ow am I to remember if I don't think?

Henry (crossing down L) Because I don't want you to think.

Mrs Puffin. Now, look 'ere, make up your mind. One minute you're all on at me to think, now you don't want me to. Lummy, I don't know where I am.

(Henry crosses to Mrs Puffin, takes a deep breath and speaks in a most coaxing voice)

Henry. Mrs Puffin, I've been very hasty. You know how it is. I've spent a hard day in the City, working very hard. I come home, irritated and on edge, and what happens?

Mrs PUFFIN. There, you do want me to start thinking again?
HENRY (*hastily*). No, Mrs Puffin, no. Mrs Puffin, I was rude to you.

Mrs PUFFIN. You were a bit snooty, weren't you?

HENRY. But, Mrs Puffin, madam, you must admit I had a shock when I came in.

Mrs PUFFIN. And saw me.

HENRY. Yes, No, no! I mean, things happened.

NICHOLAS. That's putting it mildly.

HENRY. I wasn't prepared. I was amazed. Bewildered. I was—er . . .

NICHOLAS. Thunderstruck!

HENRY. Thank you, Nicholas.

NICHOLAS. Don't mention it.

HENRY. I was thunderstruck. And what happened?

NICHOLAS. You broke a cup and saucer, and Annie, not to be outdone, smashed the whole service.

Mrs PUFFIN. You know, the moment it 'appened, I knew.

NICHOLAS. Yes, so did we.

HENRY. You see, things piled up on me, and consequently I forgot you were a guest in my house. Now, Mrs Puffin, what did I think when I came in?

Mrs PUFFIN. Gawd knows!

HENRY (*impressively*). Madam, when I came through that door a thought went through my mind the moment I saw you. (*He crosses down R*) I said to myself, "There", I said, "there is a woman of the world".

Mrs PUFFIN (*copy*). Go on! You never!

HENRY (*sitting R of Mrs Puffin on the sofa*). Madam, I assure you it's the truth. "A woman of the world", I said, "and a mother". You are a mother?

Mrs PUFFIN. That's right.

NICHOLAS. Seven times.

HENRY. Seven! Madam, allow me to congratulate you.

Mrs PUFFIN. Thank you very much. You're a bit late, but thanks all the same.

HENRY. A pleasure. A woman of the world, Nicholas, a woman of experience.

NICHOLAS. Indubitably.

Mrs PUFFIN. Well, you can't 'ave seven kids without a bit of know how, can you?

HENRY. Of course you can't, and that's why I am sure you will appreciate my position.

Mrs PUFFIN. Why, dear, what's your trouble?

HENRY. Mrs Puffin, how old is your eldest child?

Mrs PUFFIN. Who? My Elsie? Getting on for twenty, and as nice a girl as you could ever wish to meet. Select and lady-like.

We brought 'er up right. As I always say, she takes after me and my side of the family. Now, my old man, salt of the earth—

HENRY. The fact that he married you proves it.

Mrs PUFFIN.—but rough and ready.

HENRY. With a heart of gold.

Mrs PUFFIN. You never spoke a truer word.

HENRY. I'm sure I never. But your Elsie, select and lady-like, a credit to you both.

Mrs PUFFIN. Class! Oh, she's got class.

HENRY. You don't have to tell me that. That girl will do well for herself. Is she married?

Mrs PUFFIN. Walking out.

HENRY. Ah, courting!

Mrs PUFFIN. Not 'arf! We can't get in the front room of a night. Sitting on the sofa with the lights out. But I've no need to tell you—'ave I?

HENRY (*laughing heartily*). We are both men and women of the world.

Mrs PUFFIN (*laughing*). I bet you've been over a good bit of grass in your time.

NICHOLAS. I bet he has.

HENRY. Hm! Well—between you and me, Mrs Puffin . . . (*He digs her playfully in the ribs*)

Mrs PUFFIN (*reacting strongly*). I bet you were a caution!

NICHOLAS. I bet he was.

HENRY. So Elsie is courting. What's her fiancé like?

Mrs PUFFIN. George Wilkins? A nice lad, ever so nice. He's a plumber. What he don't know about pipes ain't worth knowing.

HENRY. Remember that, Nicholas. If ever we need a plumber—George Wilkins.

NICHOLAS. I'll make a note of it.

Mrs PUFFIN. The way he fixed our "'ow-do-you-do" was a fair treat. 'E adn't been going out with our Elsie for more than a month when 'e completely fixed it up. None of that. (*She makes a gesture of pulling a chain*) A little 'andle on the side. Now, if ever you fancy a little 'andle . . .

HENRY. I'll bear it in mind. When are George and Elsie getting married?

Mrs PUFFIN. In the summer, sir.

HENRY. A proud day for you, Mrs Puffin. I can see you standing in the church—

Mrs PUFFIN. Chapel.

HENRY.—with the organ pealing—

Mrs PUFFIN. Miss Pirbright on the 'armonium.

HENRY.—listening to *Here Comes the Bride*. Suddenly, down the aisle comes Elsie, leaning on your husband's arm.

Mrs PUFFIN. If I know anything about dad, 'e'll be leaning on 'er.

HENRY. There is George awaiting her, all pipes forgotten for the day. Soon they are husband and wife. You go into the vestry and sign the register, then to the strains of *The Wedding March*, George and Elsie pass down the aisle. George and Elsie united until death do them part.

Mrs PUFFIN (*visibly affected*) Just like me and Mr Puffin.

HENRY. Mrs Puffin—I envy you.

Mrs PUFFIN. Why? You've got a daughter, too.

HENRY. I have. Little Jacky. Mrs Puffin, Jacky is engaged to Victor Parker.

Mrs PUFFIN. I know.

HENRY. Exactly. A fine upstanding young man. What George is to plumbing—Victor is to Commerce. What Elsie means to allow this happy couple to be estranged?

Mrs PUFFIN. Well, now, as I said to my Alf . . .

HENRY. Since I dandled my Jacky on my knee, I've dreamt of this day. To walk proudly up the aisle with her on my arm, saying to all the world, "This lovely child—is mine".

NICHOLAS. Seeing the lovely best man, and saying, "He, too—is mine".

Mrs PUFFIN. What about this other bloke what's coming?

HENRY. Mrs Puffin, Mrs Puffin, what other bloke—er—man? Vaguely you remember him. What is he? A dream.

Mrs PUFFIN. Well, my dream ain't done so bad up to now.

HENRY. Have you ever heard that dreams mean the opposite? They are sent as warnings.

Mrs PUFFIN. It's a pity you didn't heed my warning, then your tea service wouldn't have gone for a burton.

HENRY. Ah, if only we had done! I'm afraid that was my fault. But, Mrs Puffin—now we know. If any man comes, we are prepared. (*He ostentatiously takes out his wallet and fingers a bank note*)

Mrs PUFFIN (*eyeing the wallet*) I remember that.

HENRY. But that is all you remember.

Mrs PUFFIN (*fervently*) Oh, no, it ain't. This is coming back. You offer me a fiver.

HENRY. I thought of three, as a slight compensation for your trouble.

Mrs PUFFIN. But you make it five, and—half a sec—it's all coming back.

HENRY (*hastily whipping out five pounds*) Don't let any more come back, Mrs Puffin. (*He hands her the notes*)

Mrs PUFFIN. I get ten eventually.

HENRY (*taking back the notes*) This is blackmail!

Mrs PUFFIN. Cos the phone rings and it's Victor's father. He wants to 'ave a talk with you.

(*The telephone rings*)

There you are.

NICHOLAS. Mrs Puffin never fails.

HENRY. It can't be.

NICHOLAS. You should know Mrs Puffin by now.

HENRY. I know too much about Mrs Puffin.

NICHOLAS. Shall I answer it?

HENRY. Yes, do. It's probably a wrong number. (*He moves away from Mrs Puffin along the sofa seat*)

(*NICHOLAS goes to the telephone and lifts the receiver*)

Mrs PUFFIN. Why 'ave you gone off me, dear?

NICHOLAS (*into the telephone*) Hullo, Stephen, how are you? . . . six-three . . . Who . . . Oh, yes. Just a moment. (*To Henry*) Mr Stephen Parker wishes to speak to you. (*He brings the telephone behind the sofa to Henry*)

Mrs PUFFIN. I said it was 'im. Funny 'ow it keeps on coming back.

(*HENRY takes the receiver. NICHOLAS puts the base on the table R*)

Now if you 'ad asked me ten minutes ago what 'appened next, I'd 'ave been flummoxed.

HENRY (*into the telephone*) Hullo, Stephen, how are you? . . . Oh, fine, thanks . . . Yes, Jacky's very well, she's just having a fitting . . . You're right. It won't be long now . . .

NICHOLAS (*crossing to C*) We hope!

HENRY (*into the telephone*) Tonight? . . . Victor as well? . . . Mrs PUFFIN. Oh, I knew 'e was coming.

(*HENRY signals with a wave of his hand that Mrs PUFFIN should be quiet. She misunderstands and waves cheerfully back*)

HENRY (*into the telephone*) We'll be delighted . . . After dinner . . . Very well . . . The papers? . . . Oh, yes. I'll have to study those, but I am sure they are all right. About eight-thirty, then. Good-bye, old man . . . Bye. (*He rises, moves R and replaces the receiver*)

NICHOLAS. You've got to hand it to her, Father. She's bang on every time.

Mrs PUFFIN. Oh, I know 'e's coming round about you and 'im going into partnership.

HENRY (*moving down R*) Partnership! What do you know about the Parkers?

Mrs PUFFIN. I know 'em both.

HENRY. Know them both?

Mrs PUFFIN. 'Course I do. Saw 'em in my dream. Tell you what they look like. (*She gives descriptions of the actors playing the parts*)

NICHOLAS. Blooming uncanny, isn't it? (*He goes to the table R, picks up the telephone and replaces it on the table up R*)

HENRY. It's nothing of the sort. Now, look here, Mrs Puffin,

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