

ETHEL. If you're referring to my tea service—don't. (She hands a cup of coffee to Pamela)

JACKY. But it was funny.

ETHEL. There is nothing funny about a very good tea service being smashed to smithereens.

JACKY. But she didn't smash it.

ETHEL. She was instrumental. (She pours coffee for herself)

JACKY. She only knew it was going to happen, like the other things.

ETHEL. No other things are going to happen. That woman admitted to your father, after a long interrogation, that she was wrong.

JACKY. But she wasn't.

PAMELA. Neither was she wrong about the telegram.

JACKY. Or about the clock in the study.

ETHEL. Every study has a clock, and every house has at least one clock that doesn't go. I don't know why, but they do.

JACKY. But ours was in the study.

PAMELA. And it had stopped at ten to four.

ETHEL. Jacky, I don't want to discuss Mrs Puffin or her dream again. No-one knows how much I suffered this afternoon.

PAMELA. I rather enjoyed it on the whole. One wondered what she was going to say next.

ETHEL. She said quite enough. Quite enough! (She picks up her coffee, rises and moves down R) Now, I must check through the invitations and find out who has accepted and who hasn't. Tell your father where I am when he comes in.

(ETHEL exits down R)

PAMELA (crossing and putting her cup on the table R) Oh, what a day it's been.

(JACKY sits holding her cup, deep in thought)

I said—what a day it's been.

(JACKY is silent)

JACKY! (She crosses to Jacky and kneels R of her) Come back to earth.

JACKY. Oh, sorry, Pam. What did you say?

PAMELA. I said what a day it has been.

JACKY. Yes.

PAMELA. Are you thinking—about Mrs Puffin?

JACKY. One can hardly forget her. Apart from what happened this afternoon, father has spent the entire evening reminding us to forget. Completely spoil my dinner.

PAMELA. That's typical of daddy. He spoils his own, as well. Jacky, did you really believe her?

JACKY. No, of course not. Did you?

NICHOLAS #3

PAMELA (loyally) No, of course not, and there couldn't be anyone but Victor, could there?

JACKY. Not connected with water, a week before the wedding.

PAMELA. But in any case there couldn't be.

JACKY. No, of course not.

PAMELA (enthusiastically) Of course, he's not exactly good-looking but he's got wonderful qualities. He's so fine and so dependable.

JACKY (speaking) He'll be a most popular brother-in-law.

PAMELA. Oh, yes.

(NICHOLAS enters up C)

NICHOLAS. I have escaped from father.

JACKY. What do you mean—escaped?

NICHOLAS (moving and sitting on the sofa) You heard him at dinner to everyone. (He pours himself a cup of coffee) Well—I had him—alone ever since.

PAMELA. Puffin?

NICHOLAS. Like hell!

PAMELA (to Jacky) I told you so.

NICHOLAS. He's getting me so nervous I'm getting a complex. The more I'm told not to say a thing, the more I want to. I'm funny that way.

PAMELA (rising) You are funny anyway. (She crosses to R and picks up her coffee) But don't worry, only one person will give the show away.

NICHOLAS. Oh, Gawd, no!

PAMELA. Yes—daddy. He will be so anxious to keep us quiet that he will forget and talk about her himself.

NICHOLAS. I can see we are in for a very jolly evening, trying to stifle father while he tries to stifle us.

JACKY. Why should he be stifled?

NICHOLAS } (Startled) Eh?

PAMELA } (together) What?

JACKY. After all, it really concerns Victor and me; why shouldn't he know?

NICHOLAS. But you don't tell a chap you are going to be swept off your feet by another chap a week before your wedding to the first chap. He might be superstitious. Is he?

JACKY. I don't know.

NICHOLAS. I shouldn't tell him. He might be upset. I couldn't imagine Victor having a jolly good laugh over it. You could tell him on your honeymoon, but choose your moment, of course; I mean, time and place for everything.

JACKY. Perhaps you are right.

NICHOLAS. Anyway, Mrs Puffin's gone. (He looks around) I hope.

(HENRY enters up C)

HENRY (*moving down c*) Ah, coffee! Where's your mother?
 JACKY (*rising and crossing to the sofa*) In the study, checking the invitations. (*She puts her cup on the tray, sits on the sofa and pours coffee for Henry*)

HENRY. That's right. Everything carries on as normal, just as if that woman never came.

NICHOLAS (*rising and crossing to the fireplace*) Here we go again. HENRY. We are not going again. But I don't want this family to be disrupted by that woman's visit. The poor creature was probably . . . (*He taps his head*) Anyhow, she at last admitted her mistake and left.

NICHOLAS. She admitted it—er—handsomely—so let's forget her, and on with the nuptials.

JACKY (*rising and taking the cup of coffee to Henry*) What's Victor's father coming here for?

HENRY (*taking the coffee*) On business. I have to glance through the final deeds of partnership.

(*The front door bell rings. Jacky and Pamela react*)

Ah, that's probably them now. (*He moves up c*) A little early, but all the better. (*He moves down c*) Now, remember, not a word.

NICHOLAS. Our lips are sealed.

HENRY. Good! Stephen and I will go into the study, you, too, Nicholas, as Junior Partner. (*To Pamela*) No doubt you and your mother can find something to do elsewhere. (*Jocularly*) I expect Jacky and Victor have plenty to talk about; I mean their future. And a very bright future it's going to be. Annie's a long time opening that door. (*He mous behind the easy chair lc*) See what's happened, Nicholas.

(*Jacky and Pamela move up r. Nicholas crosses to the doors up c and looks into the hall*)

NICHOLAS. Nobody there.

HENRY (*moving to the fireplace*) That's funny. I could have sworn I heard the bell.

NICHOLAS (*calling*) Annie. Annie.

(*Annie enters up c*)

Annie, who was that at the front door a moment ago?

ANNIE. Her!

HENRY (*moving up lc*) Who?

ANNIE. Her, sir.

HENRY. You don't mean . . . ?

ANNIE. Yes, sir, I do.

PAMELA. Mrs Puffin? Where is she?

ANNIE. Gone, miss.

JACKY. What did she want?

ANNIE. To see the family, miss.

NICHOLAS. And what did you say?

ANNIE. No. I said it was more than my job was worth.

HENRY. Quite right, too. Then what did she say?

ANNIE. "What is to be, will be. You can't escape fate", sir.

HENRY. I'm very pleased with you, Annie. Don't let her in if she comes back. Good heavens, she mustn't meet the Parkers.

(*He crosses to the fireplace*)

NICHOLAS (*solemnly*) "What is to be, will be. You can't escape fate."

HENRY. This is no time for levity.

(*The front door bell rings*)

NICHOLAS. Now, who is that? Puffin or the Parkers?

HENRY. Go and see, Annie.

(*Annie exits up c. The others wait expectantly*)

NICHOLAS (*after a moment's silence*) "There's a breathless 'ush in the Close tonight . . ."

(*Annie enters up c*)

ANNIE. It's her again, sir.

HENRY (*moving above the easy chair lc*) Get rid of her, Annie, get rid of her.

ANNIE. I've closed the door, sir. I can't do more.

HENRY. Oh, she's gone?

ANNIE. No, she isn't. She's parked herself on the doorstep, and she says she's going to stay there, and if you want to get rid of her you'll have to shift her yourself. I'm going back to the kitchen.

HENRY. Take a week's notice.

ANNIE. Too late! I've just given it.

(*Annie exits up c*)

NICHOLAS. What a carry on! HENRY. The Parkers will be here in ten minutes. Nicholas, go out to her.

NICHOLAS (*crossing down r*) Oh, no! Not me. You go.

JACKY (*moving to the door up c*) I'll go.

HENRY. No, Jacky, I forbid it.

JACKY (*as she exits*) Too late. I've gone.

(*Jacky exits up c*)

PAMELA. Now what will happen? (*She mous to Nicholas*) Oh Nick, you should have gone.

NICHOLAS. I like that! It's nothing to do with me. Anyways, I'm pro-Puffin.

HENRY. You are nothing of the sort. (*He moves to the fireplace*)