

STEPHEN. Thank you. I was going to ask if you had received an acceptance from Sir William and Lady Francis?

ETHEL. Oh, yes, they are coming.

STEPHEN. Good! Good! Excellent business contact there, Henry.

HENRY. Oh, undoubtedly.

STEPHEN. And, by the way, I nearly forgot. A business representative will be coming here tonight. I hope you don't mind, but I want you to meet him. Perhaps you would invite him to the wedding, Mrs Fordyce; he will be here for a month.

ETHEL. Yes, of course.

HENRY. Delighted to meet him. Any friend of yours, Parker, friend of mine, you know.

STEPHEN. Thank you, very kind of you, I'm sure. Well, this has been delightful, and now to business. *(He puts his glass on the table to and picks up his case)* I have the deeds of the partnership here, Fordyce. Ah, I'm a happy man, Fordyce. Immediately after the wedding, when Jacqueline and Victor become one, "Parker and Son" and "Fordyce and Son" become "Parker, Fordyce and Sons". As I said to Victor tonight, a love marriage and a business marriage.

HENRY. Yes, yes, a great day. *(He looks frantically at Jacky)*

STEPHEN *(rising)* Well, shall we adjourn to your study?

HENRY *(moving down c)* Yes, yes, of course.

ETHEL *(gesturing with her head towards the study)* Henry!

HENRY. What, my dear? *(Loudly)* Oh, no—I mean—*(softly)* no.

STEPHEN. Why? Isn't it convenient? We went in there before.

HENRY. Well, it's warmer in here, yes, much warmer.

STEPHEN. But there is an electric fire there.

HENRY. Yes, oh yes—but we—well....

ETHEL. It's the decorators.

STEPHEN. The what?

HENRY. Yes, the decorators—in there—very messy.

(The telephone rings. PAMELA rises and moves r)

It's the telephone.

(There is a pause)

(He moves to the telephone and lifts the receiver) Oh, the phone, excuse me a moment. *(Into the telephone)* Hampstead five-nine-six-three.... Yes, this is the Fordyce residence.... What?... Who?... Your old woman?....

(Mrs PURFIN enters down r. She has discarded her coat and wears an overlong crocheted silk-jersey. STEPHEN puts his case on the floor r of the easy chair to and moves down l)

Mrs PURFIN *(moving to Henry)* All right, dearie, I'll answer 'im.

(Henry swings round)

(She takes the receiver from Henry. To the Company in general) 'E's a damnkerous old devil if I ain't there for 'is meal.

(Henry backs up c)

START

Scuse me. *(To Henry)* Five minutes ago I knew this was going to 'appen, and I knew I answered it, so of course I 'ad to. *(Into the telephone)* 'Allo, Alf... What?... Course I'm 'ere... Well, pop round the corner for some fish and chips. You ain't bloody 'elpless, are yer?... *(To the others)* 'Scuse me, that slipped out. But old Alf's like a baby. *(Into the telephone)* I don't know 'ow long I'll be, Alf, but I was right. Dead right... Yes, uncanny, ain't it?... Fancy you remembering the name and address... Eh, what?... Now, shut your gob, Alfred Puffin, you know I feel it's my duty. 'Ave yer supper, get young Charlie to bed and see that 'e—*(she glances round at the others)* goes before this time, then you can pop off to the *Hit and Miss* until closing time... What?

'Course I do. *(She replaces the receiver and turns to the others)* Silly ass! Do I still love 'im? 'E's all right, really, 'eart of gold but a bit abstopperous if 'e misses 'is grub. But 'e'll be all right in the pub. *(She sees Stephen and Victor)* Oooh, I say!

END

STEPHEN *(stupefied)* Who—who—is that?

Mrs PURFIN *(moving to Henry)* 'Erc. *(She whispers)* Knew 'im at once. *(She moves c)*

(Nicholas rises and moves up r)

STEPHEN. Who is this woman?

ETHEL. It's—it's our help.

HENRY. She's just been cleaning up. Good night, Mrs Puffin.

(He moves up l)

Mrs PURFIN. Oh, I don't go.

STEPHEN. What on earth does she mean?

JACKY *(rising)* It's no good, Daddy. Mr Parker—Victor—let me introduce you to Mrs Puffin from Clapham Junction.

VICTOR *(rising and crossing to r of Mrs Puffin)* How do you do?

(He holds out his hand)

Mrs PURFIN *(shaking hands with Victor)* Very well, I'm sure.

STEPHEN. 'Evening. *(To Henry)* But what was she doing in your study?

Mrs PURFIN. Waiting.

STEPHEN. Waiting? What for?

Mrs PURFIN. Well, you see, when I first went in there I wasn't sure, but after about five minutes, I know, and I waited for the phone to ring.

STEPHEN. You waited for the phone to ring?

VICTOR. Oh, you were expecting the call?