

TREVES. Ah, Thomas, have you been down to the ferry?

ROYDE. No, I've been reading a detective story.

(He holds it up.)

Not very good. Always seems to me these yarns begin in the wrong place. Begin with the murder. But the murder's not really the beginning.

TREVES. Indeed? Where would you begin?

ROYDE. As I see it, the murder is the end of the story. I mean, the real story begins long before – years before, sometimes. Must do. All the causes and events that bring the people concerned to a certain place, on a certain day, at a certain time. And then, over the top –

(He pauses, considering.)

– zero hour.

TREVES. That is an interesting point of view.

ROYDE. *(Apologetically.)* Not very good at explaining myself, I'm afraid.

TREVES. I think you've put it very clearly, Thomas. All sorts of people converging towards a given spot and hour – all going towards zero.

(He pauses briefly.)

Towards Zero.

Scene Two

(Four days later. Dinner has just finished. A portable record player has been set up with some loose records. The night is very warm, sultry and cloudy. KAY is seated on the sofa, smoking a cigarette. She is in evening dress and looks rather sulky and bored. TED LATIMER is gazing out the bay window. He is a very dark, good looking man of about twenty-six. His dinner suit fits him a shade too well.)

KAY. This is what I call a wildly hilarious evening, Ted.

LATIMER. You should have come over to the hotel as I suggested. They've got a dance on. The band's not so hot, but it's fun.

KAY. I wanted to but Nevile wasn't keen.

LATIMER. So you behaved like a dutiful wife.

KAY. Yes, and I've been rewarded by being bored to death.

LATIMER. The fate of most dutiful wives.

(He moves to the record player.)

Aren't there any dance records? We could at least dance.

KAY. There's nothing like that here. Only Mozart and Bach – all classical stuff.

LATIMER. Oh well, at least we've been spared the old battle-axe tonight. Doesn't she ever appear at dinner, or did she just shirk it because I was there?

KAY. Camilla always goes to bed at seven. She's got a groggy heart or something. She has her dinner sent up on a tray.

LATIMER. Not what you'd call a gay life.

(KAY rises abruptly.)

KAY. I hate this place. I wish to God we'd never come here.

LATIMER. Steady, honey. What's the matter?

KAY. I don't know. It's just sometimes I get scared.

LATIMER. That doesn't sound like you, Kay.

KAY. (*Recovering.*) It doesn't, does it? But there's something queer going on. I don't know what, but I'll swear that Audrey's behind it all.

LATIMER. It was a damn silly idea of Nevile's coming here with you at the same time as his ex-wife.

KAY. I don't think it *was* his idea. I'm convinced she put him up to it.

LATIMER. Why?

KAY. I don't know. To cause trouble probably.

LATIMER. What you want is a drink, my girl.

(He touches her arm. KAY removes it promptly.)

KAY. (*Irritably.*) I don't want a drink and I'm not your girl.

LATIMER. You would have been if Nevile hadn't come along.

(He pours two glasses of whisky and soda.)

Where is Nevile, by the way?

KAY. I've no idea.

LATIMER. They're not a very sociable crowd, are they? Audrey's out on the terrace talking to old Treves, and that fellow Royde's strolling about the garden all by himself, puffing at that eternal pipe of his. Nice, cheery lot.

KAY. (*Crossly.*) I wouldn't care a damn if they were all at the bottom of the sea – except Nevile.

LATIMER. I should have felt much happier, darling, if you'd included Nevile.

(He picks up the drinks and takes one to KAY.)

You drink that, my sweet. You'll feel much better.

(KAY takes her drink and sips it.)

KAY. God, it's strong.

LATIMER. More soda?

KAY. No, thanks.

(There is a pause.)

I wish you wouldn't make it so clear you don't like Nevile.

LATIMER. (*Bitterly.*) Why should I like him? He's not my sort. The ideal Englishman – good at sport, modest, good looking, always the little pukka sahib. Getting everything he wants all along the line – even pinched my girl.

KAY. I wasn't your girl.

LATIMER. Yes, you were. If I'd been as well off as Nevile –

KAY. I didn't marry Nevile for his money.

LATIMER. Oh, I know, and I understand – Mediterranean nights and dewy eyed romance...

KAY. I married Nevile because I fell in love with him.

LATIMER. I'm not saying you didn't, my sweet, but his money helped you to fall.

KAY. Do you really think that?

LATIMER. I try to. It helps soothe my injured vanity.

(KAY approaches him affectionately.)

KAY. You're rather a dear, Ted. I don't know what I should do without you, sometimes.

LATIMER. Why try? I'm always around. You should know that by this time. The faithful swain. Or should it be swine? Probably depends which you happen to be – the wife or the husband.

(He kisses KAY's shoulder. MARY enters from the house wearing a plain dinner frock. KAY moves hastily away from LATIMER.)

MARY. (*Pointedly.*) Have either of you seen Mr. Treves? Lady Fressilian wants him.

LATIMER. He's out on the terrace, Miss Alam.

MARY. Thank you, Mr. Latimer.

(She makes for the French windows.)

Isn't it stifling? I'm sure there's going to be a storm.