

MRS. BOYLE. I beg your pardon.

MAJOR METCALF. Er – I mean, yes, I quite see what you mean.

(CHRISTOPHER enters left from the stairs unnoticed.)

MRS. BOYLE. No, indeed, I shan't stay here long.

CHRISTOPHER. (laughing) No. No, I don't suppose you will.

(CHRISTOPHER exits into the library up left.)

MRS. BOYLE. Really that is a very peculiar young man. Unbalanced mentally, I shouldn't wonder.

MAJOR METCALF. Think he's escaped from a lunatic asylum.

MRS. BOYLE. I shouldn't be at all surprised.

(MOLLIE enters through the archway up right.)

MOLLIE. (calling upstairs) Giles?

GILES. (off) Yes?

MOLLIE. Can you shovel the snow away again from the back door?

GILES. (off) Coming.

(MOLLIE disappears through the arch.)

MAJOR METCALF. I'll give you a hand, what? (He rises and crosses up right to the arch.) Good exercise. Must have exercise.

(MAJOR METCALF exits. GILES enters from the stairs, crosses and exits up right. MOLLIE returns, carrying a duster and a vacuum cleaner, crosses the hall and runs upstairs. She collides with MISS CASEWELL who is coming down the stairs.)

MOLLIE. Sorry!

MISS CASEWELL. That's all right.

(MOLLIE exits. MISS CASEWELL comes slowly centre.)

START

MRS. BOYLE. Really! What an incredible young woman. Doesn't she know anything about housework? Carrying a carpet sweeper through the front hall. Aren't there any back stairs?

MISS CASEWELL. (*taking a cigarette from a packet in her handbag*)
Oh yes – nice back stairs. (*She crosses to the fire.*) Very
convenient if there was a fire. (*She lights the cigarette.*)

MRS. BOYLE. Then why not use them? Anyway, all the
housework should have been done in the morning
before lunch.

MISS CASEWELL. I gather our hostess had to cook the lunch.

MRS. BOYLE. All very haphazard and amateurish. There
should be a proper staff.

MISS CASEWELL. Not very easy to get nowadays, is it?

MRS. BOYLE. No, indeed, the lower classes seem to have no
idea of their responsibilities.

MISS CASEWELL. Poor old lower classes. Got the bit between
their teeth, haven't they?

MRS. BOYLE. (*frostily*) I gather you are a Socialist.

MISS CASEWELL. Oh, I wouldn't say that. I'm not a Red –
just pale pink. (*She moves to the sofa and sits on the right
arm.*) But I don't take much interest in politics – I live
abroad.

MRS. BOYLE. I suppose conditions are much easier abroad.

MISS CASEWELL. I don't have to cook and clean – as I gather
most people have to do in this country.

MRS. BOYLE. This country has gone sadly downhill. Not
what it used to be. I sold my house last year. Everything
was too difficult.

MISS CASEWELL. Hotels and guest houses are easier.

MRS. BOYLE. They certainly solve some of one's problems.
Are you over in England for long?

MISS CASEWELL. Depends. I've got some business to see to.
When it's done – I shall go back.

MRS. BOYLE. To France?

MISS CASEWELL. No.

MRS. BOYLE. Italy?

MISS CASEWELL. No. (*She grins.*)

(MRS. BOYLE looks at her inquiringly but MISS CASEWELL does not respond. MRS. BOYLE starts writing. MISS CASEWELL grins as she looks at her, crosses to the radio, turns it on, at first softly, then increases the volume.)

MRS. BOYLE. *(annoyed, as she is writing)* Would you mind not having that on quite so loud! I always find the radio rather distracting when one is trying to write letters.

MISS CASEWELL. Do you?

MRS. BOYLE. If you don't particularly want to listen just now...

MISS CASEWELL. It's my favourite music. There's a writing table in there. *(She nods towards the library door up left.)*

MRS. BOYLE. I know. But it's much warmer here.

MISS CASEWELL. Much warmer, I agree. *(She dances to the music.)*

(MRS. BOYLE, after a moment's glare, rises and exits into the library up left. MISS CASEWELL grins, moves to the sofa table, and stubs out her cigarette. She moves up stage and picks up a magazine from the refectory table.)

Bloody old bitch. (She moves to the large armchair and sits.)

(CHRISTOPHER enters from the library up left and moves down left.)

CHRISTOPHER. Oh!

MISS CASEWELL. Hullo.

CHRISTOPHER. *(gesturing back to the library)* Wherever I go that woman seems to hunt me down – and then she glares at me – positively glares.

MISS CASEWELL. *(indicating the radio)* Turn it down a bit.

(CHRISTOPHER turns the radio down until it is playing quite softly.)

CHRISTOPHER. Is that all right?

MISS CASEWELL. Oh yes, it's served its purpose.

CHRISTOPHER. What purpose?

MISS CASEWELL. Tactics, boy.

(CHRISTOPHER looks puzzled. MISS CASEWELL indicates the library.)

CHRISTOPHER. Oh, you mean *her*.

MISS CASEWELL. She'd pinched the best chair. I've got it now.

CHRISTOPHER. You drove her out. I'm glad. I'm very glad. I don't like her a bit. (*crossing quickly to MISS CASEWELL*) Let's think of things we can do to annoy her, shall we? I wish she'd go away from here.

MISS CASEWELL. In this? Not a hope.

CHRISTOPHER. But when the snow melts.

MISS CASEWELL. Oh, when the snow melts lots of things may have happened.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes – yes – that's true. (*He goes to the window.*) Snow's rather lovely, isn't it? So peaceful – and pure... It makes one forget things.

MISS CASEWELL. It doesn't make me forget.

CHRISTOPHER. How fierce you sound.

MISS CASEWELL. I was thinking.

CHRISTOPHER. What sort of thinking? (*He sits on the window seat.*)

MISS CASEWELL. Ice on a bedroom jug, chilblains, raw and bleeding – one thin ragged blanket – a child shivering with cold and fear.

CHRISTOPHER. My dear, it sounds too, too grim – what is it? A novel?

MISS CASEWELL. You didn't know I was a writer, did you?

CHRISTOPHER. Are you? (*He rises and moves down to her.*)

MISS CASEWELL. Sorry to disappoint you. Actually I'm not. (*She puts the magazine up in front of her face.*)

(CHRISTOPHER looks at her doubtfully, then crosses left, turns up the radio very loud and exits into the drawing-room. The telephone rings. MOLLIE runs down the stairs, duster in hand, and goes to the telephone.)

STOP