

GUDGEON. *(announcing)* Mr. Edward.

(EDWARD ANGKATELL enters left. He is a tall, slightly stooping man, between thirty-five and forty-five, with a pleasant smile and a diffident manner. He is a bookish man and wears well-cut but rather shabby tweeds.

GUDGEON *exits left.*)

LADY ANGKATELL. *(rising and crossing to EDWARD)*

Edward. *(She kisses him.)* We were just saying how nice it was of you to come.

EDWARD. Lucy, Lucy. How nice of you to *let* me come. *(He turns to MIDGE. Pleased and surprised.)* Why - it's little Midge. *(He talks throughout to MIDGE with indulgent affection as to a child.)* You look very grown up.

MIDGE. *(with slight acidity)* I've been grown up for quite a few years now.

EDWARD. I suppose you have. I haven't noticed it.

MIDGE. I know.

EDWARD. At Ainswick, you see, time stands still.

(**LADY ANGKATELL** turns with a brusque movement, puts the newspaper on the coffee table, then moves to the drinks table, picks up the book from it and puts it in the bookshelves over the drinks table.)

I always remember you as you used to be in the holidays when Uncle Hugh was alive. (*He turns to* **LADY ANGKATELL**.) I wish you'd come more often to Ainswick, Lucy. It's looking so beautiful just now.

LADY ANGKATELL. Is it, darling?

(**GUDGEON** enters left.)

GUDGEON. Excuse me, m'lady, but Mrs. Medway would like to see you a moment. It's about the savoury for dinner.

LADY ANGKATELL. Chicken livers. (*She crosses to right of* **GUDGEON**.) Butchers have no conscience about chicken livers. Don't tell me they haven't arrived.

GUDGEON. They have arrived, m'lady, but Mrs. Medway is a little dubious ...

(**LADY ANGKATELL** crosses and exits left. **GUDGEON** follows her off, closing the door behind him.)

EDWARD. (*taking his cigarette case from his pocket*) I sometimes wonder whether Lucy minds very much about Ainswick.

MIDGE. In what way?

EDWARD. Well, it was her home. (*He takes a cigarette from his case.*)

MIDGE. May I?

EDWARD. (*offering the case to her*) Yes, of course.

(**MIDGE** takes a cigarette.)

If she'd been born a boy it would have gone to her instead of to me. I wonder if she resents it? (*He replaces the case in his pocket and takes out his lighter.*)

MIDGE. Not in the sense you mean. After all, you're an Angkatell and that's all that matters. The Angkatells stick together. They even marry their cousins.

EDWARD. Yes, but she does care very much about Ainswick.

MIDGE. Oh yes. Lucy cares more about Ainswick than anything in the world. *(She looks up at the picture over the mantelpiece.)* That picture up there is the dominating note of this house. *(She turns to EDWARD.)* But if you think Lucy resents *you*, you're wrong, Edward.

EDWARD. *(lighting MIDGE s cigarette)* I never quite understand Lucy. *(He turns, moves to left of the sofa and lights his own cigarette.)* She's got the most extraordinary charm.

MIDGE. Lucy is the most adorable creature I know - and the most maddening.

(HENRIETTA enters left and closes the door behind her. She has tidied herself)

HENRIETTA. Hullo, Edward.

EDWARD. Henrietta, lovely to see you.

HENRIETTA. *(crossing to left of EDWARD)* How's Ainswick?

EDWARD. It's looking beautiful just now.

HENRIETTA. *(turning to MIDGE)* Hullo, Midge darling. How are you?

EDWARD. *(offering HENRIETTA a cigarette)* You ought to come, Henrietta.

HENRIETTA. *(taking a cigarette)* Yes, I know I ought - what fun we all had there as children.

(LADY ANGKATELL enters left. She carries a large lobster on a short length of string.)

LADY ANGKATELL. *(crossing to right of the coffee table)*

Tradespeople are just like gardeners. They take advantage of your not knowing. Don't you agree, Edward? When you want them to mass in big clumps - they start fiddling about with ... *(She suddenly becomes conscious of the lobster.)* Now what is that?

EDWARD. It looks to me like a lobster.

LADY ANGKATELL. It is a lobster. Where did I get it? How did I come by it?

HENRIETTA. I should think you got it off the kitchen table.

LADY ANGKATELL. *(holding the lobster against the back of the sofa)* Oh I remember. I thought a cushion this colour would look nice here. What do you feel about it?

HENRIETTA. No!

LADY ANGKATELL. No. Well it was just a little thought.

(GUDGEON enters left and crosses to LADY ANGKATELL. He carries a salver.)

GUDGEON. *(impassively)* Excuse me, m'lady, Mrs. Medway says, may she have the lobster.

(LADY ANGKATELL puts the lobster on the salver.)

Thank you, m'lady.

(He turns, crosses and exits left. They all laugh.)

LADY ANGKATELL. Gudgeon is wonderful. *(She sits on the sofa.)* He always appears at the right moment.

HENRIETTA. *(aside)* Could I have a light, Midge?

EDWARD. *(moving to LADY ANGKATELL and offering her a cigarette)* How's the sculpture, Henrietta?

LADY ANGKATELL. You know I don't smoke, dear.

(MIDGE picks up the table lighter from the mantelpiece.)

HENRIETTA. Getting along. I've finished the big wooden figure for the International Group. Would you like to see it?

EDWARD. Yes.

HENRIETTA. It's concealed in what I believe the house agent who sold Henry this house calls the "breakfast nook."

(MIDGE lights HENRIETTA's cigarette then replaces the lighter on the mantelpiece.)

LADY ANGKATELL. Thank heavens that's something I have never had - my breakfast in a nook.

(They all laugh. HENRIETTA moves to the alcove up left, draws back the curtain, switches on the light, then moves up centre. EDWARD leads MIDGE to the alcove and stands right of her as they both look off left.)

HENRIETTA. It's called The Worshipper

EDWARD. (*impressed*) That's a very powerful figure. Beautiful graining. What wood is it?

HENRIETTA. Pearwood.

EDWARD. (*slowly*) It's - an uncomfortable sort of thing.

MIDGE. (*nervously*) It's horrible.

EDWARD. That heavy forward slant of the neck and shoulders - the submission. The fanaticism of the face - the eyes - she's blind? (*He turns to face HENRIETTA.*)

HENRIETTA. Yes.

EDWARD. What's she looking at - with her blind eyes?

HENRIETTA. (*turning away*) I don't know. Her God, I suppose.

LADY ANGKATELL. (*softly*) Poor Henrietta.

HENRIETTA. (*moving to right of the armchair left centre*) What did you say, Lucy?

(**EDWARD** crosses to the fireplace and flicks his ash into it.)

LADY ANGKATELL. (*rising*) Nothing. (*She moves to right of the sofa and glances off right.*) Ah look, chaffinches. Sweet. One ought to look at birds through glasses, on tops of trees, oughtn't one? (*She turns.*) Are there still herons at Ainswick, Edward?

EDWARD. Ah, yes - down by the river.

LADY ANGKATELL. (*softly*) Down by the river - ah dear. (*Her voice fades away as she exits right.*)

EDWARD. Why did she say "Poor Henrietta?"

(**MIDGE** closes the alcove curtain, switches off the light, crosses above the sofa to right of it, then sits on it at the right end.)

HENRIETTA. Lucy isn't blind.

EDWARD. (*stopping out his cigarette in the ashtray on the mantelpiece*) Shall we go for a walk, Henrietta? (*He moves left centre.*) I'd like to stretch my legs after that drive.

HENRIETTA. I'd love to. *(She moves to the coffee table and stubs out her cigarette in the ashtray on it.)* I've been modelling most of the day. Coming, Midge?

MIDGE. No, thank you.

(EDWARD moves slowly up centre.)

I'll stay here and help Lucy with the Cristows when they arrive.

EDWARD. *(stopping and turning; sharply)* Cristow? Is he coming?

HENRIETTA. Yes.

EDWARD. I wish I'd known.

HENRIETTA. *(belligerently)* Why?

EDWARD. *(very quietly)* I could have come - some other weekend.

dear. I knew this weekend was going to be awkward.

(MIDGE rises, stubs out her cigarette in the ashtray on the coffee table, picks up her handbag and gloves and moves to LADY ANGKATELL.)

MIDGE. Let's go round the garden, Lucy. What's on in the flower world at the moment? I'm such a hopeless cockney nowadays. Mostly dahlias?