

JOHN. Thank you, Gudgeon.

(GUDGEON exits right.)

(He goes out on to the terrace up centre and looks off left.) Mm, wonderful to get out of town into this.

GERDA. *(easing to right of the armchair left centre; flatly)* Yes, it's very nice.

JOHN. God, I hate being penned up in London. Sitting in that blasted consulting room, listening to whining women. How I hate sick people!

GERDA. Oh, John, you don't mean that.

JOHN. I loathe illness.

GERDA. If you hated sick people, you wouldn't be a doctor, would you, dear?

JOHN. *(moving above the sofa)* A man doesn't become a doctor because he has a partiality for sick people. It's the disease that's interesting, not the patient. *(He crosses to right and studies the piece of sculpture on the pedestal .)* You have odd ideas, Gerda.

GERDA. But you do like curing people.

JOHN. *(turning)* I don't cure them. *(He moves and sits on the sofa at the right end.)* Just hand out faith, hope and probably a laxative. Oh, good Lord, I'm tired.

GERDA. *(moving below the sofa)* John, you work too hard. You're so unselfish. *(She sits on the sofa at the left end of it.)* I'm always telling the children how a doctor's life is almost a dedication. I'm so proud of the way you give all your time and all your energy and never spare yourself.

JOHN. Oh, for heaven's sake, Gerda. You don't know in the least what you're talking about. Don't YOU realize I enjoy my profession? It's damned interesting and I make a lot of money.

GERDA. It's not the money you do it for, dear. Look how interested you are in your hospital work. It's to relieve pain and suffering.

JOHN. Pain is a biological necessity and suffering will always be with us. It's the techniques of medicine that interest me.

GERDA. And - people suffering.

JOHN. *(rising and moving above the sofa)* Oh, for God's sake ... *(He breaks off, suddenly ashamed.)* I'm sorry, Gerda. I didn't mean to shout at you. *(He takes a cigarette case from his pocket.)* I'm afraid I've been terribly nervy and bad-tempered lately. I'm - I'm sorry.

GERDA. It's quite all right, dear. I understand.

(There is a pause as JOHN moves below the armchair left centre and takes a cigarette out of his case.)

JOHN. You know, Gerda, if you weren't so patient, so long-suffering, it would be better. Why don't you turn on me sometimes, swear at me, give as good as you get? Oh, don't look so shocked. It would be better if you did. No man likes being drowned in treacle. *(He shuts his cigarette case with a snap and replaces it in his pocket.)*

GERDA. You're tired, John.

JOHN. (*sitting in the armchair left centre; sombrely*) Yes, I'm tired. (*He leans back and closes his eyes.*)

GERDA. You need a holiday.

JOHN. (*dreamily*) I'd like to go to the South of France - the Mediterranean - the sun, the mimosa in flower. ..

GERDA. (*rising and crossing to right of JOHN*) Why shouldn't we go, then? (*doubtfully*) Oh, I don't quite know how we should manage about the children; of course, Terence is at school all day, but he's so rude to Mademoiselle. She really has very little authority even over Zena. No, I don't think I should be very happy. Of course, they could go to Elsie at Bexhill. Or perhaps Mary Foley would take them ...

JOHN. (*opening his eyes; vaguely*) 'M, what were you saying?

GERDA. The children.

JOHN. What about them?

GERDA. I was wondering how we could manage about them if we went to the South of France.

JOHN. (*taking his lighter from his pocket*) Why should we go to the South of France, what are you talking about? (*He lights his cigarette.*)

GERDA. Because you said - you - would - like to.

JOHN. Oh that! I was day-dreaming.

GERDA. (*crossing above the armchair left centre to left of it*) I don't see why we couldn't manage it - only it's a little worrying if one feels that the person left in charge isn't really reliable, and I do sometimes feel ...

JOHN. (*rising and crossing below the sofa to right*) You never stop worrying about something or other. For heaven's sake let's relax and enjoy this weekend. At least you have a respite from domestic bothers.

GERDA. Yes, I know.

JOHN. (*moving above the sofa*) Wonderful people - the Angkatells. I always find them an absolute tonic.

GERDA. Yes ..

JOHN. *(moving on to the terrace up centre)* I wonder where they all are? *(He glances off left.)*

GERDA. *(sitting in the armchair left centre)* Will Henrietta be here?

JOHN. *(turning)* Yes, she's here.

GERDA. Oh, I'm so glad. I do like Henrietta.

JOHN. *(rather shortly)* Henrietta's all right.

GERDA. I wonder if she's finished that statuette she was doing of me?

JOHN. *(moving above the left end of the sofa; sharply)* I don't know why she asked you to sit for her. Most extraordinary.

(GERDA flinches at his tone and look.)

(He crosses to right.) I always think it's rather a good thing if people are around to meet their guests.

(He exits right. GERDA rises, crosses below the sofa to right, looks off, turns, looks left, hesitates, fidgets with her handbag; then gives a nervous cough and crosses to left centre.)