

SHEILA goes in. A silence. PHILIP moves about uncertainly giving GREG an occasional side-long glance. GREG rises as if to speak.

PHILIP Do sit down, Mr -

GREG (*sitting*) Thanks.

PHILIP My wife tells me you want a word with me.

GREG That's right.

PHILIP Ah.

GREG Been hard at it have you?

PHILIP Eh?

GREG The garden.

PHILIP Ah. Yes. Constant battle.

GREG Man against nature.

PHILIP Quite.

GREG I'd offer to give you a hand, only I'd probably uproot all your flowers.

PHILIP That'd never do. Can't have two of us doing that.

They laugh. Pause.

Was it-er-anything important?

GREG Yes, as a matter of fact.

PHILIP Ah. (*Pause*) Come far?

GREG From London.

PHILIP Really?

GREG (*after a pause*) It's a bit awkward in a way.

PHILIP Oh?

GREG I seem to have plunged in the deep end. I mean, it was only this morning that I woke up and suddenly decided that I'd come and see you-and now-here I am.

PHILIP I see.

GREG Yes.

PHILIP Yes. It's not a bad train service.

GREG I don't know how much you know, that's the point.

PHILIP Nothing.

GREG Oh.

PHILIP I'm afraid I've even forgotten your name.

GREG Gregory.

PHILIP Ah.

GREG She said nothing then?

PHILIP About what?

GREG To you-about us?

PHILIP You and me?

GREG No, me and her.

PHILIP You and her?

GREG Yes.

Pause. PHILIP is puzzled.

PHILIP You and her? *(Dawning)* You *mean-her* and you?

GREG Us.

Pause. PHILIP looks at GREG.

PHILIP *(slowly)* I see.

GREG She has?

PHILIP Oh, yes indeed she has. Oh yes, yes. She's told me about you. She's told me. You needn't worry about that.

GREG Oh. Good. It makes it that bit easier.

PHILIP Makes it easier?

GREG What I came to ask you.

PHILIP Oh yes, she's told me. And the letters.

GREG Letters?

PHILIP Oh yes. And you thought you'd drop in and see me today, did you?

GREG Yes.

PHILIP How kind. I hope you weren't expecting something violent to happen on my part? I don't intend to engage in

a free fight. Nor shall I go upstairs and shoot myself. I've popularly recommended courses, I believe.

GREG You do know why I'm here, don't you?

PHILIP I think you can safely leave me to work that out for myself.

GREG You don't have to.

PHILIP I'd rather.

GREG Oh. *(Pause)* You know, I was in two minds whether or not to come this morning. I thought, have I got the courage to ask him?

PHILIP You're managing very well.

GREG Thanks.

PHILIP I can almost imagine you might have done it before?

GREG Oh, no. Not on your life. The point is, you see, she doesn't know I'm asking you this.

PHILIP She doesn't.

GREG No. But then I thought, what have I got to lose?

PHILIP Very little, I imagine.

GREG Exactly. I thought, good grief, he won't eat me. So here I am. If you want to ask me any questions, go ahead.

PHILIP Yes. What are your immediate plans then?

GREG Ah, well.

PHILIP You don't mind my asking?

GREG No. Well-we're easy, you know. Don't want to rush things. Mind you I'm not one for long engagements. So if it fits in with your plans I thought we'd get married sometime after Christmas.

PHILIP Married?

GREG Yes.

PHILIP *(after a pause)* You're not without a sense of humour, Mr - ?

GREG No. Luckily. I believe that it can come in very handy in a marriage.

PHILIP Indeed it can. Indeed it can.

GREG I am at present earning sixteen pounds a week less insurance, in an insurance company and I'm told I have excellent prospects of promotion after fifteen years. Before that I was, amongst other things, a shoe salesman, an undergardener for the G L C - I got sacked from that. A part-time postman and a temporary porter at Euston Station.

PHILIP Sixteen pounds, hmm?

GREG That's right.

PHILIP Oh well, you should be able to buy her a good breakfast anyhow. That's the important thing.

GREG *(smiling)* I'll do my best to throw in the occasional lunch as well. How about that?

PHILIP I doubt it. Not on sixteen pounds a week less insurance.

GREG I don't know.

PHILIP I do. I've kept her.

GREG Other people manage.

PHILIP Ah, but they're not her, are they? She's unique.

GREG *(lovingly)* Yes, she's certainly that.

PHILIP I worked it out once. She costs me thirty quid a week to run and that doesn't include over-heads. You'd better speed up that promotion of yours, laddie. Tackle your boss first thing tomorrow morning. Tell him that owing to unforeseen circumstances your cost of living has trebled overnight.

GREG I see. *(He broods)* I take it you're not altogether satisfied with my financial position? You don't think I can keep her in the manner to which she is accustomed-and all that?

PHILIP Well, nobody could do that. She tends to become accustomed to a little more each year.

GREG I can't say I've noticed her overspending. I don't know how long it will be before I get a rise.

PHILIP How long have you been with the firm?

GREG Three weeks.

PHILIP Yes. Might be a little premature to stick in a pay claim. It certainly poses a problem, doesn't it? Pity you're no gardener.

GREG So I take it you're turning me down on purely financial grounds, is that it?

PHILIP I'm not. But I think she might.

GREG She knows how-much I earn. She's prepared to risk it.

PHILIP Is she?

GREG Yes.

A pause.

PHILIP *(suddenly)* All right. Carry on.

GREG You mean you give your consent?

PHILIP I've very little option.

GREG We can get married?

PHILIP No, I'm afraid that's quite out of the question.

GREG Uh?

PHILIP I think I ought to get you straight on one or two things, young feller-me-lad. As far as I'm concerned you can leave whenever you like and go wherever you like. You have my blessings. My *only* conditions are these. I am not prepared to finance you and marriage is completely out of the question.