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# Brief Encounter

By Unknown

Evening, Mr. Godby.

- Hello, hello, hello.
- Quite the stranger, aren't you?
- I couldn't get in yesterday.
- I wondered what had happened to you.
- I had a bit of a dustup.
- What about?

Saw a chap getting out  
of a first-class compartment.

When he came to give up his ticket,  
it was only third class.

I told him to pay the excess,  
and he turned nasty.

- I had to send for Mr. Saunders.
- Fat lot of good he'd be.
- He ticked him off.
- Seeing's believing.

I tell you,

he ticked him off proper.

"You pay the balance at once,  
or I'll hand you over to the police. "  
You ought to have seen the chap's face  
at the mention of the word "police."

Changed his tune.

Then he paid up like lightning.

That's what I mean. He didn't have  
the courage to handle it himself.

- He had to call in the police.
  - Aw, he's not a bad lot, Mr. Saunders.
- You can't expect much spirit from a man  
with one lung and a wife with diabetes.

I thought something must be wrong  
when you didn't come.

- I would've popped in to explain,  
but I had a date and had to run.

- Indeed.

- Chap I know is getting married.

- Very interesting, I'm sure.

- What's up with you, anyway?

- I'm sure I don't know

to what you're referring.

- You're a bit unfriendly  
all of a sudden.

- Beryl, hurry up.

Put some more coal in the stove  
while you're at it.

I'm afraid I can't really  
stand here wasting my time  
in idle gossip, Mr. Godby.

- Aren't you going  
to offer me another cup?

- When you've finished that one.  
Beryl'll give it to you.

I've got my accounts to do.

I see.

I'd rather you gave it to me.  
Time and tide wait for no man,  
Mr. Godby.

- Laura, what a lovely surprise!

- Oh, Dolly.

My dear, I've been shopping  
till I'm dropping.

My feet are nearly off,  
my throat's parched.

I thought of having tea in Spindle's,  
but I was terrified of losing the train.

- Oh, dear.

- This is Dr. Harvey.

- How do you do?

- Would you be a perfect dear  
and get me my cup of tea?

I really don't think I could drag  
my poor old bones over to the counter.

No, please.

Dear, what a nice-looking man.

Who on earth is he?

You're quite a dark horse.

I shall telephone Fred in  
the morning and make mischief.

This is a bit of luck.

I haven't seen you for ages.

I've been meaning to pop in,  
but Tony's had measles and I had  
all that fuss over Phyllis.

- But, of course, you don't know.

My dear, she left me.

- Oh, how dreadful.

Mind you, I never cared for her much,

but Tony adored her.

I'll tell you all about that later  
in the train. Thank you so very much.  
There's certainly enough milk in it,  
but still, it'll be refreshing.

- Oh, dear, no sugar.

- It's in the spoon.

Oh, of course.

What a fool I am.

Laura, you're looking  
frightfully well. I wish I'd  
known you were coming in today.

We could've come together  
and lunched and had a good gossip.

I loathe shopping  
by myself anyway.

- There's your train.

- Yes, I know.

- Aren't you coming with us?

- I go in the opposite direction.

My practice is in Churley.

- Oh, I see.

- I'm a general practitioner.

- Dr. Harvey's going out  
to Africa next week.

- Oh, how thrilling.

**... the 5:**

to Churley, Leigh Green and Langdon.

- I must go.

- Yes, you must.

- Good-bye.

- Good-bye.

He'll have to run, or he'll miss it.

He's got to get over to the platform.

Talking of missing trains reminds me of  
that awful bridge at Broadham Junction.

You've got to go traipsing all up one  
side along the top and down the other.

- Well, the other day, I'd been  
over about renewing the lease.

- Train Engine Chugging]

I arrived at the station at  
exactly half a minute to spare.

My dear, I flew.

I'd got Tony with me,  
and like a fool, I just bought a new  
shade for the lamp in the drawing room.

I could've gotten it  
just as easily here in Milford.

Well, it was the most enormous thing.

I could hardly see over it.

I've never been in such a hurry in  
my life. I nearly knocked a woman down.

By the time I got home,  
it was battered to bits.

- Oh, is that our train?

Is that the Ketchworth train?

- No, it's the express.

- The boat train.

Oh, of course. That doesn't stop,  
does it? I want some chocolate, please.

- Milk or plain?

- Plain, I think.

Or, no, perhaps milk would be nicer.

Have you any with nuts?

Nestle's Nut Milk.

Shilling or sixpence?

I'll take one plain  
and one nut milk.

- Large or small?

- Large, please.

Oh.

Where is she?

I never noticed her go.

Oh, I couldn't think  
where you'd disappeared to.

I just wanted to see  
the express go through.

What on earth's the matter?

Are you feeling ill?

- I feel a little sick.

- My dear, come and sit down.

- Bell Ringing]

- There's our train.

- It's all right.

Have you any brandy?

- I'm afraid it's out of hours.

- Oh, surely,  
if somebody's feeling ill...

- I'm all right, really.

- Just a sip of brandy  
will buck you up. Please.

- Very well.

- Thank you. How much?

- Tenpence, please.

The train for Ketchworth is now  
arriving at platform three.

We shall have to hurry.

Oh, well, this is a bit of luck.

This train's generally packed.

I really am very worried about you,  
dear. You look terribly peaky.

I'm all right. Really, I am. I just  
felt faint for a minute, that's all.

It often happens to me. I did it once  
in the middle of Bobby's school concert.

I don't think he's ever forgiven me.

- Well, he certainly was  
very good-looking.

- Who?

Your friend, Doctor...  
whatever his name was.

- Yes, he's a nice creature.

- Have you known him long?

No, not very long.

I hardly know him at all, really.

Well, my dear, I've always had  
a passion for doctors.

I can well understand how it is  
that women get...

I wish I could trust you.

I wish you were a wise,  
kind friend,

instead of a gossiping acquaintance

I've known casually for years...

and never

particularly cared for.

I wish. I wish.

- Fancy him going all the way  
to Africa. Is he married?

- Yes.

- Any children?

- Yes, two boys.

He's very proud of them.

- Is he taking them with him,  
his wife and children, I mean?

- Yes, he is.

I suppose it's sensible in a way  
rushing off to start life anew  
in the wide open spaces,  
but wild horses wouldn't  
drag me away from England...  
and home and all the things  
I'm used to.

- One has one's roots  
after all, hasn't one?

- Oh, yes, one has one's roots.

I knew a girl once years ago  
who went to Africa.

Her husband was something  
to do with engineering.

She had the most dreadful time.

She caught some awful germ  
through going out on a picnic,  
and she was ill for months.

I wish you'd stop talking.

I wish you'd stop prying,  
trying to find things out.

I wish she were dead.

No, I don't mean that.

That was silly and unkind,  
but I wish you'd stop talking.

My dear, all her hair came out, and she  
said the social life was quite horrid.

- Provincial, you know.

Very nouveau riche.

- Oh, Dolly.

- What's the matter,  
are you feeling ill again?

- No, I feel a bit dizzy.

- I think I'll close my eyes  
for a little.

- Oh, you poor darling.

And here am I chattering away 19  
to the dozen. I won't say another word.

If you drop off, I'll wake you  
when we get to the level crossing.  
That'll give you a chance to pull  
yourself together and powder your nose.  
Thanks, Dolly.

This can't last.

This misery can't last.

I must remember that  
and try to control myself.

Nothing lasts, really...

neither happiness nor despair.

Not even life lasts very long.

There'll come a time in the future  
when I shan't mind about this anymore,  
when I can look back and say  
quite peacefully and cheerfully  
how silly I was.

No, no, I don't want  
that time to come ever.

I want to remember  
every minute...

always...

always to the end of my days.

Ketchworth!

- Wake up, Laura. We're here.

- Ketchworth!

I could easily come

to the house with you, dear.

It isn't very much out of my way.

Thank you. All I have to do is walk down  
Elmore Lane, past the grammar school.

It's sweet of you, Dolly, but I'm  
perfectly all right now, really I am.

- You're quite sure?

- Absolutely positive.

Thank you for being so kind.

Oh, nonsense, dear.

I shall telephone in the morning  
and see if you've had a relapse.

I shall disappoint you.

Good night.

Good night. Oh, give my love  
to Fred and the children.

- Is that you, Laura?



- Yes, dear.

Thank goodness you've come back.

The place has been in an uproar.

- Why? What's the matter?

- Bobby and Margaret

have been fighting again.

They won't go to sleep until you go in  
and talk to them about it.

- Mummy? Is that you, Mummy?

- Yes, Margaret.

Come upstairs at once, Mummy!

I want to talk to you.

You're both very naughty. You should  
have been asleep hours ago. What is it?

Well, Mummy, tomorrow's my birthday,  
and I want to go to the circus.

And tomorrow's not Margaret's birthday,  
and she wants to go to the pantomime.

My birthday's in June.

There aren't any pantomimes in June.

It's far too late

to discuss it tonight,

and if you don't go to sleep, I shall  
tell Daddy not to let you go to either.

Oh, Mummy!

Why not take them to both? One

in the afternoon, one in the evening?

You know that's impossible. We shouldn't  
get them to bed till all hours,

and they'd be tired

and fractious.

Well, then, one on one day

and the other on the other.

You're always accusing me

of spoiling the children.

Their characters would be ruined

in a fortnight if I left them

to your over-tender mercies.

All right, have it

your own way.

- Circus or pantomime?

- Neither.

We'll thrash them both soundly,

lock them up in the attic...

and go to the pictures  
by ourselves.

Oh, Fred.

- What on earth's the matter?

- Nothing. It's nothing.

Darling, what's wrong?

- Tell me, please.

- Really and truly, it's nothing.

I'm just a little rundown,  
that's all.

I had a sort of fainting spell  
at the refreshment room at Milford.

Isn't it idiotic?

Dolly Messiter was with me,  
and she talked and talked and talked  
until I wanted to strangle her.

Still, she meant to be kind.

Isn't it awful about people  
meaning to be kind?

- Would you like to go to bed?

- No, Fred, really.

Come and sit by the fire  
in the library and relax.

You can help me  
with the Times crossword.

- You have the most  
peculiar ideas of relaxation.

- That's better.

- There you are, darling.

- Thank you.

But why a fainting spell?

I can't understand it.

Don't be silly, darling. I've often  
had fainting spells, and you know it.

Don't you remember Bobby's  
school concert and Eileen's wedding...

and that time you insisted  
on taking me to that symphony  
concert at the town hall?

Go on, that was a nosebleed.

I suppose I must be that type of woman.

It's very humiliating.

I still maintain there'd be no harm  
in you seeing Dr. Graves.

- It would be a waste of time.

- Now, listen...

Do shut up about it, darling.

You're making a fuss about nothing.

I'd been shopping and was tired.

The refreshment room was hot,

and I suddenly felt sick.

- Nothing more than that.

- All right.

Really nothing more than that.

Now you get on with your puzzle

and leave me in peace.

Have it your own way.

You're a poetry addict. See if you can

help me over this. It's Keats.

"When I behold

upon the night starred face...

huge cloudy symbols of a high"...

something in seven letters.

Romance, I think.

I'm almost sure it is.

"Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance."

It'll be in the Oxford Book of Verse.

No, that's right, I'm sure,

because it fits in with

"delirium" and "Baluchistan."

- Would some music

throw you off your stride?

- No, dear, I'd like it.

Fred.

Fred,

dear Fred.

There's so much

that I want to say to you.

You're the only one in the world

with enough wisdom

and gentleness to understand.

If only it were

somebody else's story and not mine.

As it is, you are the only one

in the world that I can never tell.

Never, never.

Because even if I waited until we were

old, old people and told you then,

you'd be bound to look back  
over the years and be hurt,  
and, oh, my dear,  
I don't want you to be hurt.  
You see, we are  
a happily married couple...  
and must never forget that.  
This is my home.  
You are my husband,  
and my children  
are upstairs in bed.  
I am a happily married woman...  
or, rather, I was  
until a few weeks ago.  
This is my whole world,  
and it's enough...  
or, rather, it was,  
until a few weeks ago.  
But, oh, Fred,  
I've been so foolish.  
I've fallen in love.  
I'm an ordinary woman.  
I didn't think such violent things  
could happen to ordinary people.  
It all started  
on an ordinary day,  
in the most ordinary place  
in the world,  
the refreshment room  
at Milford Junction.  
I was having a cup of tea...  
and reading a book that I'd got  
that morning from Boots.  
My train wasn't due  
for ten minutes.  
I looked up and saw a man  
come in from the platform.  
He had on an ordinary mac.  
His hat was turned down,  
and I didn't even see his face.  
He got his tea at the counter  
and turned.  
Then I did see his face.  
It was rather a nice face.

- Any sugar? Thank you.
- In the spoon.
- He passed my table on the way to his.
- You're neglecting your duty.

The woman at the counter  
was going on as usual.

You know, I told you about her the other  
day... the one with the refined voice.

- Minnie hasn't touched her milk.
- Did you put it down for her?

Yes, but she never came for it.

- Fond of animals?
- In their place.

My landlady's got  
a positive mania for animals.  
She's got two cats...  
one Manx, one ordinary...  
three rabbits in a hutch  
in the kitchen... they belong  
to her little boy by rights...  
and one of those dark-looking dogs  
with hair over its eyes.

I don't know  
to what breed you refer.  
I don't think it knows itself.  
- Go and clean off number three,  
I can see crumbs from here.

What about my other cup?  
I'll have to be moving.

#### **The 5:**

- Who's on the gate?
  - Young William.
- Please, a glass of water.  
I've got something in my eye,  
and I want to bathe it.
- Would you like me to look?
  - Oh, no, don't trouble.

I expect the water will do.

- Thank you.
- Bit of coal dust, I expect.

A man I knew lost the sight in one eye  
through getting a bit of grit in it.

- Nasty, very nasty.

- Better?  
- I'm afraid not. Ooh.  
- Can I help you?  
Oh, no, please,  
it's only something in my eye.  
- Try pulling your eyelid down  
as far as it'll go.  
- And then blowing your nose.  
- Please let me look.  
I happen to be a doctor.  
- It's very kind of you.  
Turn around  
to the light, please.  
Now look up.  
Now look down.  
Keep still. I see it.  
- There.  
- Oh, what a relief. It was agonizing.  
- It looks like a bit of grit.  
- The express went through.  
Thank you very much, indeed.  
- There we go. I must run.  
- How lucky for me  
you happened to be here.  
- Anybody could've done it.  
- Never mind, you did,  
and I'm most grateful.  
- There's my train. I must go. Good-bye.  
- Good-bye.  
That's how it all began...  
just through me getting  
a little piece of grit in my eye.  
I completely forgot the whole incident.  
It didn't mean anything to me at all...  
at least  
I didn't think it did.  
The next Thursday I went  
into Milford again, as usual.  
I changed my book at Boots.  
Miss Lewis had at last managed  
to get the new Kate O'Brien for me.  
I believe she'd kept it hidden  
under the counter for two days.  
On the way out, I bought

two new toothbrushes for the children.  
I like the smell of a chemist's  
better than any other shop.  
It's such a mixture of nice things...  
herbs and scent and soap.  
That awful Mrs. Leftwich  
was at the other end of the counter...  
wearing one of the silliest hats  
I've ever seen.  
Wearing one of the silliest hats  
I've ever seen.  
Fortunately, she didn't look up, so  
I got out without her buttonholing me.  
Just as I stepped out  
onto the pavement...  
- Good morning. How's the eye?  
- Oh, Good morning.  
Perfectly all right. How kind it was  
of you to take so much trouble.  
- It was nothing at all.  
It's clearing up I think.  
- Yes, it's going to be nice.  
- Well, I must be getting along  
to the hospital.  
- And I to the grocers.  
- What exciting lives we lead,  
don't we? Good-bye.  
- Good-bye.  
That evening I had to  
run nearly all the way to the station.  
I'd been to the Palladium, as usual,  
but it was a terribly long film.  
I was afraid I'd be late.  
As I came up onto the platform,  
the Churley train was just puffing out.  
I looked up idly as the windows  
of the carriages went by,  
wondering if he was there.  
I remember this crossing my mind  
but it was quite unimportant.  
I was really thinking  
of other things.  
The present for your birthday  
was worrying me rather.

It was terribly expensive,  
but I knew you wanted it,  
and I sort of half taken the plunge  
and left a deposit on it...

at Spink and Robson's  
until the next Thursday,  
the next Thursday.

Well, I squared my conscience  
by thinking how pleased  
you would be and bought it.

- Yes, I'll have it.

- Thank you, madam.

It was wildly extravagant,  
I know, but having committed the crime,  
I suddenly felt  
reckless and gay.

The sun was out, and everybody in the  
street looked more cheerful than usual,  
and there was a barrel organ  
at the corner by Harris's,  
and you know how I love  
barrel organs.

It was playing

"Let the Great Big World Keep Turning,"  
and I gave the man sixpence  
and went to the Kardomah for lunch.

It was very full, but two people had got  
up from the table just as I had come in.

That was a bit of luck,  
wasn't it? Or was it?

Just after I had given my order,  
I saw him come in.

He looked a little tired, I thought,  
and there was nowhere for him to sit,

- so I smiled and said...

- Good morning.

- Oh, good morning. Are you all alone?

- Yes, I am.

- Would you mind if I shared your table?

It's very full.

- No, of course not.

I'm afraid we haven't been introduced  
properly. My name's Alec Harvey.

How do you do?



Mine's Laura Jesson.

- Mrs. Or Miss?

- Mrs.

- You're a doctor, aren't you?

I remember you said so that day  
in the refreshment room.

- Yes.

Not a very interesting one. Just an  
ordinary G.P. My practice is in Churley.

- Yes, sir? Excuse me, sir?

- What did you plump for?

Um, the soup and fried sole.

- Yes, I'll have the same.

- Anything to drink?

No, thank you. That is,  
would you like anything to drink?

- No, thank you. Just plain water.

- Plain water, please.

Will you just look  
at the cellist?

It really is dreadful, isn't it?

But we oughtn't laugh.

They might see.

There should be a society  
for the prevention of cruelty  
to musical instruments.

- You don't play the piano, I hope?

- I was forced to as a child.

- You haven't kept it up?

- No, my husband isn't musical at all.

- Good for him.

- For all you know, I might have  
a tremendous burning talent.

- Oh, dear, no.

- Why are you so sure?

You're too sane  
and uncomplicated.

I suppose it's a good thing  
to be uncomplicated  
but it does sound a little dull.

You could never be dull.

- Do you come here every Thursday?

- Yes, to spend a day at hospital.

Stephen Lynn, the chief physician here

graduated with me.

I take over from him once a week.

Gives him a chance to go to London.

- Gives me a chance

to study the hospital patients.

- I see.

- Do you?

- Do I what?

- Come here every Thursday?

- Yes, I do the week's shopping.

Thank you.

Change my library book, have lunch  
and generally go to the pictures.

Not a very exciting routine,  
but it makes a change.

- Are you going to the pictures  
this afternoon?

- Yes.

How extraordinary.

So am I.

I thought you had to spend  
all day at the hospital.

Well, between ourselves, I killed  
two patients by accident this morning.

The matron's very displeased with me.

I simply daren't go back.

- How can you be so silly?

- Seriously, I did get through  
most of my work this morning.

It won't matter at all if I play truant.

Would you mind if I came with you?

- Well, I...

- I could sit downstairs,  
and you could sit upstairs.

Upstairs is too expensive.

The orchestra stopped  
as abruptly as it had started,  
and we began to laugh again.

I had no premonitions,  
although I suppose I should have had.

It all seemed so natural  
and so innocent.

We finished lunch, and that idiot of  
a waitress had put the bill all on one.

- I really must insist.

- I couldn't possibly.

Having forced my company on you,

it's only fair I pay.

Please, don't insist.

I should so much rather we halved it.

- I would really, please.

- I shall give in gracefully.

We halved it meticulously.

We even halved the tip.

Thank you.

We have two choices: The Loves  
of Cardinal Richelieu at the Palace...

- or Love in a Mist at the Palladium.

- You're very knowledgeable.

There must be no argument about buying  
the tickets. We each pay for ourselves.

You must think me a poor doctor

if I can't afford a couple

of one-and-ninepennies.

- I insist.

- I hoped you were going to treat me.

**- Which is it:**

- Palladium.

I was once very sick on a channel  
steamer called Cardinal Richelieu.

Excuse me.

I feel awfully grand perched up here.

It was very extravagant of you.

- It was a famous victory.

- Do you feel guilty as all? I do.

- Guilty?

- You ought to more than me.

You neglected your work.

I worked this morning. A little  
relaxation never did harm to anyone.

Why should either of us

feel guilty?

- I don't know.

- How awfully nice you are.

It can't be.

It is.

We walked back

to the station together.

Just as we reached the gates,

he put his hand under my arm.

I didn't notice it then,

but I remember it now.

- What's she like... your wife?

- Madeleine?

Small, dark,

rather delicate.

How funny. I should have thought

she would've been fair.

And your husband?

What's he like?

Medium height, brown hair, kindly,  
unemotional and not delicate at all.

- You said that proudly.

- Did I?

- Good evening.

- Good evening.

We've just got time for a cup of tea  
before our trains go.

And for the third time in one week, he  
brought that common man and his wife...  
to the house without so much as  
a "by your leave."

- Two teas, please.

- Cake or pastry?

- Cake or pastry?

- No, thank you.

- Are those Bath buns fresh?

- Certainly they are. Made this morning.

Two, please.

That'll be sevenpence.

- Take the tea to the table, Beryl.

- I'll carry the buns.

You must eat one of these.

Fresh this morning.

- Very fattening.

- I don't hold to such foolishness.

- They do look good, I must say.

- One of my earliest passions in life...  
never outgrown it.

- What happened then, Mrs. Bagot?

- Well...

Well, it's all very fine, I said,  
expecting me to do this,  
that and that other,  
but what do I get out of it?  
You can't expect me to be a cook,  
housekeeper and char during the day...  
and a loving wife in the evening,  
just because you feel like it.  
Oh, dear me, no. There are just as good  
fish in the sea as ever came out of it.  
And I packed me boxes  
then and there and left him.  
- Didn't you never go back?  
- Never.  
Went to my sister's place  
at Folkestone for a bit.  
Then I went in with a friend of mine,  
and we opened a tea shop in Hythe.  
- What happened to him?  
- Dead as a doornail inside three years.  
Well, I never.  
Is tea bad for one?  
Worse than coffee, I mean?  
If this is a professional interview,  
my fee is a guinea.  
- Why did you become a doctor?  
- That's a long story.  
- Perhaps because I'm an idealist.  
- I should think all doctors  
ought to have ideals.  
- Otherwise their work  
would be unbearable.  
- Encouraging me to talk shop?  
It's what interests you most.  
Yes, it is.  
I'm terribly ambitious really.  
Not ambitious for myself  
so much as for my special pigeon.  
- What is your special pigeon?  
- Preventive medicine.  
- I see.  
- I'm afraid you don't.  
- I was trying to be intelligent.  
- Most good doctors,

especially when they're young,  
have private dreams.  
That's the best part of them.  
Sometimes, though,  
those get over-professionalized  
and strangulated... am I boring you?  
No, I don't quite understand,  
but you're not boring me.  
What I mean is this: All good doctors  
must primarily be enthusiasts.  
They must, like writers  
and painters and priests...  
they must have  
a sense of vocation,  
- a deep-rooted, unsentimental  
desire to do good.  
- Yes, I see that.  
Well, obviously one way of preventing  
disease is worth 50 ways of curing it.  
That's where my ideal comes in.  
Preventive medicine isn't  
anything to do with medicine at all.  
It's concerned with conditions... living  
conditions, hygiene and common sense.  
For instance,  
my speciality is pneumoconiosis.  
- Oh, dear.  
- Don't be alarmed.  
It's simpler than it sounds.  
It's nothing but a slow process  
of fibrosis of the lung...  
due to the inhalation  
of particles of dust.  
In the hospital here there are  
splendid opportunities for  
observing cures, making notes...  
- because of the coal mines.  
- You suddenly look much younger.  
- Do I?  
- Almost like a little boy.  
What made you say that?  
I don't know. Yes, I do.  
Tell me.  
Oh, no, I couldn't, really.

You were saying about the coal mines.  
Oh, yes, the inhalation  
of coal dust.  
That's one specific form of the disease.  
It's called anthracosis.  
What are the others?  
Chalicosis...  
that comes from metal dust...  
steel works, you know.  
Yes, of course, steel works.  
And silicosis...  
that's stone dust...  
gold mines.  
I see.  
- There's your train.  
- Yes.  
- You mustn't miss it.  
- No.  
- What's the matter?  
- Nothing. Nothing at all, really.  
It's been so very nice.  
I've enjoyed my afternoon enormously.  
I'm so glad. So have I. I apologize  
for boring you with long medical words.  
I feel dull and stupid  
not to be able to understand more.  
Shall I see you again?  
It's the other platform, isn't it?  
You'll have to run.  
Don't bother about me.  
- Shall I see you again?  
- Yes, of course. Perhaps you'd  
come to Ketchworth one Sunday.  
- It's rather far, I know,  
but we should be delighted.  
- Please, please.  
- What is it?  
- Next Thursday, the same time.  
- No, I couldn't possibly.  
- Please.  
I ask you most humbly.  
- You'll miss your train.  
- All right.  
- Run. I'll be there.

- Good-bye.  
Thank you, my dear.  
I stood there and watched  
his train draw out of the station.  
I stared after it until its taillight  
had vanished into the darkness.  
I imagined him getting out  
at Churley,  
giving up his ticket,  
walking back  
through the streets,  
letting himself into his house  
with his latchkey.  
His wife... Madeleine...  
would probably be in the hall  
to meet him.  
Or perhaps upstairs in her room,  
not feeling very well.  
"Small, dark  
and rather delicate. "  
I wondered if he'd say,  
"I met such a nice woman  
at the Kardomah.  
We had lunch  
and went to the pictures. "  
Then suddenly,  
I knew that he wouldn't.  
I knew beyond a shadow of doubt  
that he wouldn't say a word,  
At that moment, the first awful feeling  
of danger swept over me.  
I got into the first compartment  
I saw.  
I wanted to get home  
as quickly as possible.  
I looked hurriedly around the carriage  
to see if anyone was looking at me,  
as if they could read  
my secret thoughts.  
No one was, except a clergyman  
in the opposite corner.  
I felt myself blushing and opened  
my library book and pretended to read.  
By the time I'd got to Ketchworth,



I had made up my mind definitely...  
- that I wasn't going  
to see Alec anymore.  
- Good evening, Mrs. Jesson.  
It was silly and undignified flirting  
like that with a complete stranger.  
Oh, good evening.  
I walked up to the house  
quite briskly and cheerfully.  
I'd been behaving like an idiot,  
admittedly, but after all,  
no harm had been done.  
You met me in the hall. Your face was  
strained and worried, and my heart sank.  
Fred, what's the matter?  
- It's all right, but you must  
keep calm and not be upset.  
- What is it? What's wrong?  
It's Bobby. He was knocked down  
by a car on the way home from school.  
Now it's not serious.  
He was just grazed by the mudguard,  
but it knocked him against the curb,  
and he's got slight concussion.  
The doctor's upstairs  
with him now.  
It's all right, Mrs. Jesson.  
Nothing to worry about.  
He'll be as right as rain  
in a few hours.  
You're sure?  
You're sure it's not serious?  
Quite sure, but it was  
certainly a very lucky escape.  
I've given him a little sedative,  
and I shall advise...  
keeping him at home  
for a couple of days.  
It must have been a bit of a shock...  
I felt so dreadful,  
Fred, looking at him, lying there...  
with that bandage  
round his head.  
I tried not to show it,

but I was quite hysterical inside,  
as though the whole thing  
were my fault...  
a sort of punishment,  
an awful, sinister warning.  
An hour or two later, of course,  
everything became quite normal again.  
He began to enjoy  
the whole thing thoroughly...  
and revelled in the fact  
that he was the center of attraction.  
Oh, good!  
Do you remember how we spent  
the whole evening planning his future?  
But he's much too young  
to decide really.  
Good life, if the boy has  
a feeling for it.  
How can he possibly really know  
if he has a feeling for it?  
He'll probably want to be  
an engine driver next week.  
No, it was last week  
he wanted to be an engine driver.  
It seems so final, somehow, entering  
a child of that age for the navy.  
- It's a healthy life.  
- I know it's a good life,  
and I know it's a healthy life,  
and I know he'll be able to see the  
world and have a wife in every port...  
and keep on calling everybody "sir,"  
but what about us?  
- What do you mean, "What about us?"  
- We shall hardly ever see him.  
- Oh, nonsense.  
- It isn't nonsense.  
He'll be sent away to sea  
as a smooth-faced boy,  
and the next thing we know,  
he'll come walking in  
with a long beard and a parrot.  
I think you take rather  
a Victorian view of the navy, my dear.

He's our only son, and I should like to be there while he's growing up. All right, old girl. Then we'll put him into an office, and you can see him off

**on the 8:**

And you can see him off

**on the 8:**

You really are very annoying. You know perfectly well I should hate that.

All right, have it your own way.

- Fred?

- Hmm?

I had lunch with a strange man today, and he took me to the movies.

- Good for you.

- He's awfully nice. He's a doctor.

- A very noble profession.

- Oh, dear.

It was Richard III who said, "My kingdom for a horse," wasn't it? Yes, darling.

Well, I wish to goodness he hadn't because it spoils everything.

I thought perhaps we might ask him to dinner one night.

By all means.

Who?

Dr. Harvey... the one I was telling you about.

- Must it be dinner?

- Well, you're never at home for lunch.

Exactly.

Oh, Fred.

Now what on earth's the matter?

It's nothing.

It's only that... Oh, Fred.

I really don't see what's so frightfully funny.

Oh, I do. It's all right, darling.

I'm not laughing at you.  
I'm laughing at me.  
I'm the one that's funny.  
I'm an absolute idiot, worrying myself  
about things that don't exist...  
and making mountains  
out of molehills.  
I told you when you came in  
that it was nothing serious.  
There was nothing to get  
into such a state about.  
I do see that now,  
I really do.  
When Thursday came,  
I went to meet Alec,  
more as a matter of politeness  
than for any other reason.  
It didn't seem of any importance,  
but, after all, I had promised.  
I managed to get  
the same table.  
I wanted a bit,  
but he didn't come.  
The ladies' orchestra  
was playing away, as usual.  
I looked at the cellist.  
She seemed to be so funny last week,  
but today, she didn't seem  
funny anymore.  
She looked pathetic,  
poor thing.  
After lunch, I happened to pass  
by the hospital.  
I remember looking up at the windows  
and wondering if he were there...  
or whether something awful  
had happened to prevent him turning up.  
I got to the station  
earlier than usual.  
I hadn't enjoyed  
the pictures much.  
It was one of those noisy  
musical things, and I'm so sick of them.  
I had come out

before it was over.

As I took my tea to the table, I suddenly wondered if I'd made a mistake, and he'd meant me to meet him there.

Albert Godby, how dare you!

- I couldn't resist.

- I'll trouble you to keep your hands to yourself.

You're blushing.

You look wonderful when you're angry, just like an avenging angel.

I'll give you avenging angel, coming in here taking liberties.

I thought after what you said last Monday you wouldn't object to a friendly little slap.

Never you mind about last Monday.

I'm on duty now.

A nice thing if Mr. Saunders happened to be looking through the window.

If Mr. Saunders is in the habit of looking through windows, it's about time he saw something worth looking at.

- You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

- It's high spirits, don't be mad.

High spirits, indeed.

Take your tea, and be quiet.

- It's all your fault, really.

- I don't know to what you're referring.

I was thinking of tonight.

If you don't learn to behave there won't be a tonight or any other night, either.

- Give us a kiss.

- I'll do no such thing.

The lady might see us.

- Come on, a quick one across the bar.

- Albert, stop it!

- Come, there's a love.

- Let go of me this minute.

Albert! Now look at me Banburys all over the floor.

Just in time

or born in the vestry.  
You shut your mouth and help  
Mr. Godby pick up them cakes.  
Come along now...  
what are you standing there gaping at?  
As I left the refreshment room,  
I saw a train coming in... his train.  
He wasn't on the platform,  
and I suddenly felt panic-stricken...  
at the thought  
of not seeing him again.  
My dear, I'm so sorry.  
I'd no way of letting you know.  
- Your train, you'll miss it.  
- The house surgeon  
had to operate suddenly.  
I was going to send a note  
to the Kardomah, but I thought  
they might shout your name.  
Please don't say anymore.  
Quickly, quickly, the whistle's gone.  
I'm so glad I had a chance to explain.  
I didn't think I'd see you again.  
How absurd.  
Quickly, quickly.  
- Next Thursday?  
- Yes, next Thursday.  
- Good-bye! Next Thursday! Good-bye!  
- Good-bye!  
The train for Ketchworth is  
about to leave from platform three.  
The stars can change in their courses,  
the universe go up in flames,  
and the world crash around us,  
but there'll always be Donald Duck.  
I do love him so... his dreadful energy,  
his blind frustrated rages.  
It's the big picture now. Here we go.  
No more laughter. Prepare for tears.  
It was a terribly bad picture.  
We crept out before the end,  
rather furtively,  
as though  
we were committing a crime.

The usherette at the door  
looked at us with contempt.  
It was a lovely afternoon, and  
it was a relief to be in the fresh air.  
We decided we'd go  
to the botanical gardens.  
Do you know, I believe we should  
all behave quite differently...  
if we lived in a warm,  
sunny climate all the time.  
We shouldn't be so withdrawn  
and shy and difficult.  
Oh, Fred, it really was  
a lovely afternoon.  
There were some little boys  
sailing their boats.  
One of them looked like Bobby.  
That should have given me  
a pang of conscience, I know,  
but it didn't... I was enjoying myself,  
enjoying every single minute.  
Alec suddenly said that he was  
sick of staring at the water...  
and that he wanted to be on it.  
All the boats were covered up,  
but we managed to persuade  
the old man to let us have one.  
He thought we were raving mad.  
Perhaps he was right.  
Alec rode off at a great rate,  
and I trailed my hand  
in the water.  
It was very cold,  
but a lovely feeling.  
You don't row  
very well, do you?  
I'm going to be perfectly honest  
with you... I don't row at all,  
and unless you want to go round  
and round in ever-narrowing circles,  
you'd better start steering.  
Oh, we had such fun, Fred.  
I felt gay and happy  
and sort of released.

That's what's so shameful  
about it all.

That's what would hurt you  
so much if you knew...  
that I could feel  
as intensely as that...  
away from you,  
with a stranger.

- Oh, look out! We can't get through!

- Pull on your left!

Oh. Oh, dear, I never could  
tell left from right.

I'm most awfully sorry.

You know the British have always  
been nice to mad people.

That boatman thinks we are quite dotty,  
but look how sweet he's been.

Tea, milk, even sugar.

Thank you.

You know what's happened,  
don't you?

Yes.

Yes, I do.

I've fallen in love  
with you.

Yes, I know.

Tell me honestly. Please tell me  
honestly if what I believe is true.

- What do you believe?

- That it's the same with you...  
that you've fallen in love too.

- It sounds so silly.

- Why?

- I know you so little.

- It is true, though, isn't it?

- Yes, it's true.

- Laura.

No, please, we must be sensible.

Please help me to be sensible.

We mustn't behave like this. We must  
forget that we've said what we've said.

- Not yet, not quite yet.

- But we must. Don't you see?

Listen, it's too late now



to be as sensible as all that.  
It's too late to forget  
what we've said,  
and anyway, whether we'd said it or not  
couldn't have mattered.  
We know.  
We've both of us known for a long time.  
How can you say that?  
I've only known you for four weeks.  
We only talked for the first time  
last Thursday week.  
Last Thursday week. Has it been  
a long time for you since then?  
- Answer me truly.  
- Yes.  
How often did you decide that you were  
never going to see me again?  
- Several times a day. Oh, Alec.  
- So did I.  
I love you.  
I love your wide eyes...  
and the way you smile  
and your shyness...  
- and the way you laugh at my jokes.  
- Please, don't.  
I love you. I love you.  
You love me too.  
It's no use pretending  
it hasn't happened, because it has.  
Yes, it has.  
I don't want to pretend anything either  
to you or to anyone else,  
but from now on,  
I shall have to.  
That's what's wrong, don't you see?  
That's what spoils everything.  
That's why we must stop  
here and now talking like this.  
We're neither of us free to love  
each other. There's too much in the way.  
There's still time,  
if we control ourselves  
and behave like sensible human beings.  
There's still time to...

There's no time at all.

- There's your train.

- Yes.

I'll come over  
to the platform with you.

No, Alec, not here.

Someone will see.

I love you so.

Do you think we might  
have that down a bit, darling?

Hi, Laura.

- Yes, dear?

- You were miles away.

Was I?

Yes, I suppose I was.

Do you mind if we turn that down  
a little? It really is deafening.

No, of course not.

I shan't be long over this,  
darling, then we'll go to bed.

You look a bit tired, you know?

Don't hurry.

I'm perfectly happy.

How can I possibly say that?

"Don't hurry.

I'm perfectly happy. "

If only it were true.

Not, I suppose, that anybody  
is ever perfectly happy, really.

But just to be ordinarily contented,  
to be at peace.

It's such a little while ago, really,  
but it seems an eternity...

since that train  
went out of the station,  
taking him away  
into the darkness.

I was happy then.

As I went back through  
the subway to my own platform,  
I was walking on air.

When I got into the train,  
I didn't even pretend to read.

I didn't care whether people were

looking at me or not. I had to think.  
I should have been utterly wretched and  
ashamed. I know I should, but I wasn't.  
I felt suddenly  
quite wildly happy,  
like a romantic schoolgirl,  
like a romantic fool.  
You see, he'd said he loved me,  
and I had said I loved him.  
And it was true.  
It was true.  
I imagined him holding me  
in his arms.  
I imagined being with him in all sorts  
of glamorous circumstances.  
It was one of those absurd fantasies,  
just like one has when one is a girl,  
being wooed and married  
by the ideal of one's dreams.  
I stared out of that  
railway carriage window into the dark...  
and watched the dim trees  
and the telegraph posts slipping by,  
and through them,  
I saw Alec and me.  
Alec and me...  
perhaps a little younger than we are  
now, but just as much in love...  
and with nothing in the way.  
I saw us in Paris,  
in a box at the opera.  
The orchestra was tuning up.  
Then we were in Venice, drifting along  
the Grand Canal in a gondola...  
with the sound of mandolins  
coming to us over the water.  
I saw us traveling  
far away together,  
all the places  
I've always longed to go.  
I saw us leaning on the rail of a ship,  
looking at the sea and stars,  
standing on a tropical beach  
in the moonlight...

with the palm trees  
sighing above us.  
Then the palm trees changed into those  
pollarded willows by the canal...  
just before the level crossing,  
and all the silly dreams  
disappeared,  
and I got out at Ketchworth  
and gave up my ticket...  
and walked home as usual,  
quite soberly  
and without wings...  
without any wings at all.  
When I had changed for dinner and was  
doing my face a bit... Do you remember?  
I don't suppose you do,  
but I do.  
You see, you didn't know that that was  
the first time in our life together...  
that I had ever lied to you.  
It started then...  
the shame of the whole thing,  
the guiltiness, the fear.  
- Good evening, Mrs. Jesson.  
- Hello, dear.  
- Had a good day?  
- Yes, lovely.  
- What'd you do?  
- Well, I shopped and had lunch  
and went to the pictures.  
- All by yourself?  
- Yes.  
Uh, no, not exactly.  
What do you mean,  
"not exactly"?  
Well, I went to the pictures by myself,  
but I had lunch with Mary Norton.  
She couldn't come to the pictures  
'cause she had to see her in-laws.  
They live just outside  
Milford, you know?  
So I walked with her to the bus  
and then came home on my own.  
I haven't seen Mary Norton for ages.

How is she looking?

Very well, really.

A little fatter, I thought.

Hurry up with all this beautifying.

I want my dinner.

You go on down.

I won't be five minutes.

- Number, please?

- Ketchworth 3-7, please.

Ketchworth 3-7.

- Hello?

- Hello, is Mrs. Norton there, please?

- Yes. Will you hold on?

- Yes, I'll hold on.

- Hello?

- Hello? Is that you, Mary?

Oh, Laura! Fancy hearing from you.

I thought you were dead.

No, I haven't seen you for ages.

Listen, my dear,

will you be a saint and back me up  
in the most appalling domestic lie?

- As bad as all that?

- My life depends on it.

Well, today, I went into Milford,  
as usual, to do my shopping.

With the special intention  
of buying a far too expensive  
present for Fred's birthday.

Well, Spink and Robson's  
hadn't got what I wanted,  
which was one of those clocks  
with barometers and everything in one,  
but they rang up their branch in  
Broadham and said there was one there,  
so I hopped on the 1:30 train  
and went to get it.

- Go on.

- Well, this is where  
the black lie comes in.

Fred asked me if I'd had a good day,  
and I said yes,  
and that you and I had lunch and  
that you had gone to see your in-laws...

and I had gone  
to the pictures.

- If you run into him,  
don't let me down, will you?

- Darling, of course not.

- I'll do as much for you, I promise.

- Let's really lunch one day.

- Yes, that'd be lovely.

- What about next Thursday?

No, I can't on Thursday. That's  
my Milford day. What about Friday?

- Fine, better make it here.

- All right, perfect.

You know what my cook's like.

It'll have to be early.

Yes, all right.

- Good-bye.

- Good-bye.

That week was misery.

I went through it  
in a sort of trance.

How odd of you not to have  
noticed that you were living  
with a stranger in the house.

Thursday came at last.

I had arranged to meet Alec  
outside the hospital at 12:30.

- Hello.

- Hello.

I thought you wouldn't come.

I've been thinking all week  
that you wouldn't come.

I didn't mean to really,  
but here I am.

I hadn't been inside the Royal  
since Violet's wedding reception.

It all seemed very grand.

He actually ordered  
a bottle of champagne,  
and when I protested, he said  
that we were only middle-aged once.

We were very gay during lunch and  
talked about quite ordinary things.

Fred, he really was charming.

I know you would have liked him  
if things had been different.  
As we were going out he said  
that he had a surprise for me...  
and that if I would wait  
in the lounge for five minutes,  
he'd show me what it was.  
He went out  
and down the steps at a run,  
more like an excited schoolboy  
than a respectable doctor.  
Suddenly out of the dining room  
came Mary Norton and that rich  
over-made-up cousin of hers.  
They must have been  
in the dining room all the time...  
and seen Alec and me  
and the champagne and everything.  
Laura! So it was you after all.  
Hermione said it was.  
- How are you?  
- You know how shortsighted I am.  
I peered and peered  
and still couldn't be sure.  
I never saw you at all. How awful of me.  
I expect it was the champagne.  
I'm not used to champagne for lunch  
or for dinner either, but Alec insisted.  
Alec? Alec who, dear?  
Alec Harvey, of course.  
Surely you remember the Harveys.  
I've known them for years.  
- No, I don't think I ever...  
- He'll be back in a minute.  
You'll probably recognize him  
when you peer very closely.  
He looks very charming  
and very attentive.  
He's a dear. One of the nicest people  
in the world and a wonderful doctor.  
- Oh, Alec, you remember  
Mrs. Norton, don't you?  
- I'm afraid I don't.  
It's no use, Laura.

We've never seen each other  
before in our lives, I'm sure.  
How absurd. I made certain  
he and Madeleine were there  
when you dined with us...  
just before Christmas  
last year.

- Alec, this is Mrs. Rolandson.

- How do you do?

- Horrid weather, isn't it?

- Yes.

Of course, one can't really  
expect spring at this time  
of the year, can one?

No.

Well, we must be going.

I'm taking Hermione with me  
to the in-laws as moral support.

- Good-bye, Dr. Harvey.

Good-bye, my dear.

- Good-bye.

- I do so envy you your champagne.

- Good-bye.

Good-bye.

- That was awful.

- Never mind.

They had been watching us  
all through lunch. Oh, dear.

Forget it. Come out  
and look at the surprise.

There at the foot of the steps  
was a little two-seater car.

Alec had borrowed it  
from Stephen Lynn for the afternoon.

I tried so hard to look pleased,  
but it wasn't any good.

I kept thinking of those two  
laughing and talking,  
laughing and talking about us,  
and I couldn't get them out of my mind.  
When we were out in the real country...  
a few miles beyond Brayfield...  
we stopped the car just outside  
a village and got out.



There was a little bridge  
and a stream,  
and the sun was making an effort  
to come out, but really  
not succeeding very well.  
We leaned on the parapet of the bridge  
and looked down into the water.  
I shivered,  
and Alec put his arm round me.  
- Cold?  
- No, not really.  
Happy?  
No, not really.  
I know exactly what  
you're going to say.  
That it isn't worth it.  
That the furtiveness and lying outweigh  
the happiness we might have together.  
Isn't that it?  
Something like that.  
I want to ask you something,  
just to reassure myself.  
What is it?  
It is true for you, isn't it?  
This overwhelming feeling  
we have for each other...  
it's as true for you  
as it is for me, isn't it?  
Yes, it's true.  
We must have stayed  
on that bridge for a long time,  
because when we got back to Stephen  
Lynn's garage, it was getting dark.  
I remember feeling as if  
I was on the edge of a precipice.  
I think Alec felt that too.  
You see, we both knew  
how desperately we loved each other.  
Alec said he had to leave the keys  
of the car in Stephen Lynn's flat...  
and suggested  
that I came up with him.  
I refused rather too vehemently.  
Alec reminded me that Stephen

wasn't coming back till late,  
but I still refused.

I'm going back.

I'm going to miss my train.

- Back where?

- To Stephen's flat.

- Train Whistle Blowing]

- Oh, Alec.

Alec, I must go home now.

I really must go home.

A cup of tea, please.

- Good afternoon.

- Afternoon, lady.

- Afternoon.

- Couple of whiskeys, please.

- Very sorry. It's out of hours.

Well, just sneak 'em to us under  
the cover of them poor old sandwiches.

Them sandwiches were fresh this morning,  
and I shall do no such thing.

- Come on, be a sport.

- You can have as much  
as you want after 6:00.

My throat's like a parrot's cage.

Listen.

I'm sorry. My license does not  
permit me to serve alcohol out of hours.

That's final. You wouldn't want  
to get me into trouble, would you?

Just give us the chance, lady. That's  
all we ask. Just give us the chance.

- Beryl!

- Yes, Mrs. Bagot?

- Ask Mr. Godby to come here  
a moment, will you?

- Yes, Mrs. Bagot.

- Oh, and who's he when he's at home?

- You'll soon see.

- Coming in here cheeking me.

- Come off it, Mother. Be a pal.

- I'll give you "Mother,"

you saucy upstart.

- Oi, who you callin' an upstart?

You! And I'll trouble you

to get out of here double quick.

Disturbing the customers and  
making a nuisance of yourselves.

Here, where's the fre,  
where's the fre?

- What's going on in here?

- Mr. Godby,  
these gentlemen are annoying me.

- What? We haven't done nothing,  
have we, Johnnie?

- All we did was ask for drinks.

- They insulted me, Mr. Godby.

- We never did anything of the kind.

- Just having a little joke, that's all.

- Hop it, both of you.

- We've got a right to stay here  
as long as we like.

- You heard what I said. Hop it.

Now, look here. What is this, a free  
country or a bloomin' Sunday school?

I checked your warrants at the gate.

Your train's due in one minute. Hop it.

- Now, look here...

- Aw, come on, Johnnie. Come on.

- Don't argue with the poor basket.

- Hop it.

Cheerio, Mother.

And if them sandwiches were made  
this morning, you're Shirley Temple.

- Thank you, Albert.

- What a nerve... talking to you  
like that, Mrs. Bagot.

Be quiet, Beryl. Pour me out a nip  
of Three Star. I'm feeling quite upset.

- I have to get back to the gate.

- I'll be seeing you later, Albert.

Okay.

The train  
now arriving at platform three...

**is the 5:**

- I really must go home.

- I'm going back to the flat.

- I must go home.

I really must go home.  
- I'm going back to the flat.  
I'm going home.  
Excuse me.  
I've forgotten something.  
Darling.  
It's raining.  
It started just as I turned out  
of the High Street.  
You had no umbrella,  
and your coat's wet.  
You mustn't catch cold.  
That would never do.  
- I look an absolute fright.  
- Let me put that down for you.  
Thank you.  
I hope the fire will  
perk up in a few minutes.  
- I expect the wood was damp.  
- Yes, I expect it was.  
Do sit down, darling.  
I got right into the train and then  
got out again. Wasn't it idiotic?  
We're both very,  
very foolish.  
- Alec, I can't stay, you know.  
Really, I can't.  
- Just a little while.  
Just a little while.  
Quickly, quickly!  
I must go.  
- Here, through the kitchen.  
There's a tradesman's staircase.  
- Is that you, Alec?  
- Yes.  
- You're back early.  
- Yes, I felt a cold coming on,  
so I denied myself  
the questionable pleasure of dining...  
with that arch-arguer Roger Hinchley  
and decided to come back to bed.  
- Inflamed membranes are  
unsympathetic to a dialectic.  
- What'll you do about food?

I can always ring down to the restaurant  
if I want any later on.

- We live in a modern age,  
and this is a service flat.

- Yes, yes, of course.

It caters for all tastes.

You know, my dear Alec, you have hidden  
depths which I never even suspected.

- Look here, Stephen...

- Oh, for heaven's sake, Alec.

No explanations or apologies.

I am the one who should apologize  
for returning so inopportunistly.

It's quite obvious to me that you were  
interviewing a patient privately.

Women are frequently  
rather neurotic creatures,  
and the hospital atmosphere  
is upsetting to them.

By the rather undignified scuffling  
which I heard when I came into the hall,  
I gather that she beat  
a hasty retreat down the back stairs.

I'm surprised at this farcical streak  
in your nature, Alec.

Such carryings-on are quite unnecessary.  
After all, we've been friends for years,  
and I am the most  
broad-minded of men.

I'm really very sorry,  
Stephen.

I'm sure that the whole situation  
must seem inexpressibly vulgar to you.

Actually,  
it isn't in the least.

However, you're perfectly right:

Explanations are unnecessary,  
particularly between friends.

- I must go now.

I'll collect my hat and coat.

- Very well.

- Good-bye.

- Perhaps you'll let me  
have my latchkey back.

I only have two,  
and I'm so afraid of losing them.  
You know how absentminded I am.  
- You're very angry, aren't you?  
- No, Alec, not angry, just disappointed.  
I ran until I couldn't run any longer.  
I leant against a lamppost  
to get my breath.  
I was in one of those side roads  
that lead out of the High Street.  
I know it was stupid to run,  
but I couldn't help myself.  
I felt so utterly humiliated  
and defeated and so dreadfully,  
dreadfully ashamed.  
After a moment or two  
I pulled myself together...  
and walked on  
in the direction of the station.  
It was still raining,  
but not very much.  
I suddenly realized  
that I couldn't go home,  
not until I had got myself more under  
control and had a little time to think.  
Then I thought of you waiting at home  
and the dinner being spoilt,  
so I went into the High Street and found  
a tobacconist and telephoned to you.  
Do you remember?  
Hello, Fred, is that you?  
Yes, dear, it's me, Laura.  
Yes, everything's perfectly all right,  
but I shan't be home to dinner.  
I'm with Miss Lewis.  
Miss Lewis, dear. You know,  
the librarian I told you about at Boots.  
Y- Yes, I can't explain in any detail  
because she's outside the box now.  
I met her in the High Street a little  
while ago in a terrible state.  
Her mother's been taken ill,  
and I've promised to stay  
with her until the doctor comes.

Yes, I know, but she's always  
been awfully kind to me,  
and I feel so sorry for her.  
No, I'll get a sandwich, but  
ask Ethel to leave me some soup  
in a saucepan in the kitchen.  
Yes, of course,  
as soon as I can.  
All right. Good-bye.  
It's awfully easy to lie when you know  
that you're trusted implicitly...  
so very easy  
and so very degrading.  
I started walking  
without much purpose.  
I turned out of the High Street  
almost immediately.  
I was terrified  
that I might run into Alec.  
I was pretty certain that he'd  
come after me to the station.  
I walked for a long while. Finally,  
I found myself at the war memorial...  
you know, it's right  
at the other side of the town.  
It had stopped raining altogether,  
and I felt stifflingly hot,  
so I sat down  
on one of the seats.  
There was nobody about,  
and I lit a cigarette.  
I know how you disapprove  
of women smoking in the street...  
I do too, really...  
but I wanted to calm my nerves,  
and I thought it might help.  
I sat there for ages...  
I don't know how long...  
then I noticed a policeman  
walking up and down a little way off.  
He was looking at me  
rather suspiciously.  
Presently he came up to me.  
Feeling all right, miss?

- Yes, thank you.

- Waiting for someone?

No. No, I'm not

waiting for anybody.

Don't go and catch cold now. It's a damp  
night for sitting about on seats.

I'm going now anyhow.

I've got to catch a train.

You're sure you feel  
quite all right?

Quite, thank you.

Good night.

Good night, miss.

I walked away, trying to look casual,  
knowing that he was watching me.

I felt like a criminal.

I walked rather quickly back  
in the direction of the High Street.

I got to the station 15 minutes  
before the last train to Ketchworth.

And then I realized that I'd been  
wandering about for over three hours,  
but it didn't seem to be  
any time at all.

Stan, you are awful.

- See ya in the yard.

- All right.

- I'd like a glass of brandy, please.

- We're just closin'.

Yes, I see you are, but you're  
not quite closed yet, are you?

- Three Star?

- That'll do.

Oh, and have you got  
a piece of paper and an envelope?

- I'm afraid you'll have to  
get that at the book stall.

- Well, the book stall's closed.

Please, it's very important.

I should be so much obliged.

All right.

Just a minute.

- Thank you very much.

- We close in a few minutes, you know.



Yes, I know.

- Darling, I've been  
looking for you everywhere.  
- Please go away. Please don't.  
- I've watched every train.  
- Please go away.  
- I can't leave you like this.  
- You must. It'll be better,  
really it will.

You're being dreadfully cruel.  
It was just an accident  
that he came back early.

- He doesn't know who you are.  
He never even saw you.

- He laughed, didn't he?  
- I suppose you spoke of me  
together as men of the world.  
- We didn't speak of you.  
- We spoke of some nameless  
creature who has no reality.  
- Why didn't you tell him?

Why didn't you say we were cheap  
and low and without courage?

- Stop it, Laura. Pull yourself together.  
- It's true.

It's nothing of the sort.

We know we love each other.

That's all that matters.

It isn't all that matters.

Other things matter too.

Self-respect matters, and decency.

I can't go on any longer.

Could you really say good-bye,  
never see me again?

Yes, if you'd help me.

I love you, Laura. I shall love you  
always until the end of my life.

I can't look at you now  
because I know something.

I know that this is

the beginning of the end...

not the end of my loving you,  
the end of our being together.

But not quite yet, darling.

Please, not quite yet.

Very well.

Not quite yet.

I know what you feel about this evening... about the sordidness of it.

I know about the strain of our different lives... our lives apart from each other.

The feeling of guilt, doing wrong is too strong, isn't it?

Too great a price to pay for the happiness we have together.

I know all this because it's the same for me too.

You can look at me now.

I'm all right.

Let's be very careful.

Let's prepare ourselves.

A sudden break now, however brave and admirable, would be too cruel.

We can't do such violence to our hearts and minds.

Very well.

- I'm going away.

- I see.

- But not quite yet.

- Please, not quite yet.

**- That's the 10:**

It's after closing time.

- Oh, is it?

- I shall have to lock up.

- All right.

- I want you to promise me something.

- What is it?

Promise me that however unhappy you are...

and however much

you think things over,

- that you'll meet me again next Thursday.

- Where?

Outside the hospital

**at 12:**

- All right. I promise.  
- I've got to talk to you.  
I've got to explain.  
- About going away?  
- Yes.  
- Where will you go?  
Where can you go?  
- You can't give up your practice.  
I've had a job offered me.  
I wasn't going to tell you.  
I wasn't going to take it,  
but I know now it's the only way out.  
- Where?  
- A long way away... Johannesburg.  
- Oh, Alec.  
- My brother's out there.  
They're opening a new hospital.  
They want me in it.  
It's a fine opportunity, really.  
I'll take Madeleine and the boys.  
It's been torturing me...  
the necessity of making  
a decision one way or the other.  
I haven't told anybody,  
not even Madeleine.  
I couldn't bear  
the thought of leaving you,  
but now I see it's  
got to happen soon anyway.  
It's almost happening already.  
Stanley!  
When will you go?  
Almost immediately,  
in about two weeks' time.  
- Quite near, isn't it?  
- Do you want me to stay?  
- Do you want me to turn down the offer?  
- Don't be foolish, Alec.  
- I'll do whatever you say.  
- That's unkind of you, my darling.  
The train for Ketchworth is  
now arriving at platform three.  
You're not  
angry with me, are you?

No, I'm not angry.  
I don't think I'm anything, really.  
I just feel tired.  
- Forgive me?  
- Forgive you for what?  
For everything...  
for meeting you in the first place,  
for taking the piece  
of grit out of your eye,  
for loving you,  
for bringing you so much misery.  
I'll forgive you  
if you'll forgive me.  
Thursday.  
All that was a week ago.  
It's hardly credible  
that it should be so short a time.  
Today was  
our last day together...  
our very last together  
in all our lives.  
I met him outside the hospital  
as I had promised at 12:30...

**at 12:**

That was only this morning.  
We drove into the country again,  
but this time he hired a car.  
I lit cigarettes for him  
every now and then as we went along.  
We didn't talk much.  
I felt numbed and hardly alive at all.  
We had lunch in a village pub.  
Afterwards, we went to the same bridge  
over the stream,  
the bridge that we'd  
been to before.  
Those last few hours  
went by so quickly.  
As we walked through the station  
I remember thinking,  
"This is the last time  
with Alec.  
I shall see all this again,

but without Alec. "

I tried not to think of it,  
not to let it spoil  
our last moments together.  
Are you all right,  
darling?

Yes, I'm all right.  
I wish I could think of something  
to say. It doesn't matter...

- not saying anything, I mean.  
- I'll miss my train  
and see you to yours.  
- Please don't. I'll come over  
to your platform. I'd rather.  
- Very well.

Do you think we shall ever  
see each other again?  
I don't know.  
Not for years anyway.  
The children will  
all be grown up.  
I wonder if they'll ever  
meet and know each other.  
Couldn't I write to you,  
just once in a while?  
No, Alec, please.  
You know we promised.  
Well, all right, dear.  
I do love you so very much.  
I love you with  
all my heart and soul.  
I want to die.  
If only I could die.  
If you died, you'd forget me.  
I want to be remembered.  
Yes, I know. I do too.  
- We've still got a few minutes.  
- Laura!

What a lovely surprise.  
My dear, I've been  
shopping till I'm dropping.  
My feet are nearly falling off.  
My throat's parched.  
I thought of having tea at Spindle's,

but I was terrified of losing the train.

- Oh, dear!

- Oh, this is Dr. Harvey.

- How do you do?

- How do you do? Would you be a dear and get me a cup of tea?

- I don't think I could drag my poor bones to the counter.

- No, please.

It was cruel of fate to be against us right up to the very last minute.

Dolly Messiter... poor, well-meaning, irritating Dolly Messiter...

crashing into those last few precious minutes we had together.

She chattered and fussed, but I didn't hear what she said.

- I felt dazed and bewildered.

- Oh, dear. No sugar.

- It's in the spoon.

- Alec behaved so beautifully, with such perfect politeness.

No one could have guessed what he was really feeling.

And then...

- There's your train.

- Yes, I know.

- Oh, aren't you coming with us?

- I go in the opposite direction.

My practice is in Churley.

- Oh, I see.

- I'm a general practitioner at the moment.

- Dr. Harvey's going out to Africa next week.

- Oh, how thrilling.

The train now arriving at platform four...

**is the 5:**

Leigh Green and Langdon.

- I must go. Good-bye.

- Yes, you must.

Good-bye.

I felt the touch of his hand  
on my shoulder for a moment,  
and then he walked away...

away,

out of my life forever.

He's got to get

right over to the other platform.

Talking of missing trains reminds me of  
that awful bridge at Broadham Junction.

Dolly still went on talking,

but I wasn't listening to her.

- I was listening for the sound  
of his train starting.

Then it did.

I said to myself,

"He didn't go.

"At the last minute his courage  
failed him. He couldn't have gone.

Any minute he'll come back into  
the refreshment room pretending  
he's forgotten something. "

I prayed for him to do that,

just so that I could

see him again for an instant.

But the minutes went by.

Is that the train? Oh, can you tell me,  
is that the Ketchworth train?

- No, it's the express.

- The boat train.

That doesn't stop,

does it?

- I want some chocolate, please.

- Milk or plain?

I meant to do it, Fred.

I really meant to do it.

I stood there trembling

right on the edge,

but I couldn't.

I wasn't brave enough.

I'd like to say it was the thought of  
you and the children that prevented me,  
but it wasn't.

I had no thoughts at all,

only an overwhelming desire  
not to feel anything ever again,  
not to be unhappy anymore.  
I turned...  
and went back  
into the refreshment room.  
That's when I nearly fainted.  
Laura.  
Yes, dear?  
Whatever your dream was,  
it wasn't a very happy one, was it?  
No.  
Is there anything  
I can do to help?  
Yes, Fred.  
You always help.  
You've been  
a long way away.  
Yes.  
Thank you for coming  
back to me.