

subsided over time. (*wistfully*) I suspect it's that way with all marriages.

JACK. Precisely why I'm a bachelor, Mr. B, and shall remain so all me days.

EDWARD. Jack, have you ever struck a woman?

JACK. Not a once, sir. On me 'onor.

EDWARD. You don't say. I assumed that in the heat of argument, servants knocked each other about like cricket balls.

JACK. I admire the ladies, Mr. B. Wouldn't biff 'em if me life depended on it.

EDWARD. Truth be told, Sorel is the only woman I've ever assaulted – and only when she strikes me first.

JACK. Admirable, sir. And to your credit, you usually wind up the worse for wear.

EDWARD. Jack, what if the right woman happens by?

JACK (*confused*) Do ya mean, would I stike 'er?

EDWARD. Would you marry her.

JACK. The right women 'appen by on a regular basis, Mr.

B – in town, 'ere in Cook'am, and back 'ome in Kent.

EDWARD. You should have joined the Navy, and expanded your harem.

JACK. Don't take much to water, sir – it shrinks me willy.

EDWARD. The ideal woman is out there for you somewhere, my boy – unless the popular songs have it entirely wrong.

JACK. Beg pardon, Mr. B, but when I see the way you and Mrs. B carry on, any desire I might 'arbor for wedlock is squashed like a gnat.

EDWARD. Don't be slack, Jack – or you'll end a lonely bachelor.

JACK. Keep the ladies smilin', that's the ticket.

(**JACK** exits out the front door, as **SOREL** enters through the French windows, grandly. *She is wearing*

an enormous hat with feathers, and carrying a basket of what looks like weeds. She poses as a "country maiden" for EDWARD's benefit, but he doesn't turn to look. She places a record on the gramophone – a waltz instrumental, then heads to a mirror on the wall.)

EDWARD. Sorel, darling, what is an eight letter word for "murder?" Final letter "e."

SOREL. (*instantly*) Marriage.

EDWARD. I believe the editor prefers a synonym – not motivation.

SOREL. I offered a synonym.

EDWARD. Do you intend to murder me? Are you planning a (*as he writes in the word*) hom-i-cide?

SOREL. (*removes the hat*) Time will tell, dear. The week-end has only begun.

EDWARD. It appears a few pigeons have roosted in your bonnet.

SOREL. Is it your intention this afternoon to hurl insults at me like javelins?

EDWARD. Did you choose that lethal metaphor deliberately?

SOREL. Entirely subconscious, darling – but you know what Dr. Freud says.

EDWARD. I was unaware that you were remotely familiar with anything Viennese, apart from the waltz.

SOREL. (*She turns and looks at EDWARD directly, with deep romantic longing:*) We danced to this tune on the Isle of Capri, do you recall?

EDWARD. Would you be so kind as to have this dance with me now?

SOREL. Oh, darling! (*They dance, blissfully content for a few moments, then:*) I suppose I shan't go anywhere without you pursuing me like a demented hound.

(*They space their lines around the music, taking time to dance and dip between.*)

EDWARD. Did you think I would remain in our flat amidst a pile of shattered glass?

SOREL. You flung me to the ground, darling. That was uncharitable.

EDWARD. It was no excuse for you to launch a vase – especially the Ming.

SOREL. You are heartless.

EDWARD. And we are Ming-less. It was spiteful of you, Sorel.

SOREL. Spiteful, that's rich. I'm crawling about on my hands and knees, and you ask if I would like a cocktail.

EDWARD. An exceedingly generous offer given that my face was beginning to swell.

SOREL. The so-called "Ming" belonged to your first wife. It was a cheap imitation, and has been irritating me for years.

EDWARD. You are my first wife, as I have oft reminded you. But very likely not my last.

SOREL. What could I have done to inspire such venom?

EDWARD. Your snoring is particularly oppressive.

SOREL. That bandage is quite dashing.

EDWARD. Before we retire for the night, might I have a look-see at your black and blues?

(The record starts to skip.)

SOREL. *(re: the skipping record)* I believe that fate is trying to tell us something, Edward.

EDWARD. I find fate quite impertinent, actually – always interjecting its views gratuitously, in the vaguest of terms.

(SOREL picks up her basket and sifts through. EDWARD yanks the needle off the record.)

SOREL. Our song is ended. The time has come for us to go our several ways.

EDWARD. But we're Siamese Twins. Bosom buddies. Juno's swans. Two peas in a pod –

SOREL. *(interrupting)* You may cling to those tedious idioms when I tell you my news.

EDWARD. Who is it this time?

SOREL. I have invited Walter Pearce for the week-end. You must return to London at once.

EDWARD. You impudent cat. Invite anyone you like – a missionary, or an American for all I care – but I will not permit a politician inside my home.

SOREL. I had not expected you to put in an appearance or I wouldn't have asked him.

EDWARD. You desperately wanted me to follow you here, Sorel – admit it.

SOREL. Can I help if I am irresistible to those in the halls of government?

EDWARD. – where they denounce immorality the week long and totter off to their mistresses come week-end.

SOREL. I am not Walter's mistress, of yet. And he is not a mere politician, darling – he's a diplomatist. I intend to travel the world with him, wearing extravagant hats.

EDWARD. In fact, Mr. Pearce was recently elected, along with many other like-minded charlatans, on a platform dedicated to eliminating decadent behavior entirely.

SOREL. Entirely? That should keep him quite occupied.

EDWARD. They despise people like us, Sorel.

SOREL. Walter Pearce adores me.

EDWARD. *(enraged)* He adores the characters I have written for you – my Daphne, my Beryl, my Ariadne...

SOREL. *(interrupting)* He wants to save me from you!

(SOREL picks up a vase and prepares to hurl it at EDWARD, who raises his fists as JACK enters. They resume their composure.)

EDWARD. We mustn't quarrel, Sorel. It will set a bad example for the servants.

JACK. Afternoon, Mrs. B. Done some gardenin'?