

WALTER. But I gave you my card.

EDWARD. Every man who meets the modestly talented Sorel Bennett offers his card. Our bedroom in town is strewn with them. It looks as if a ticker-tape parade has passed through. One would think she had swum the English Channel.

SOREL. Perhaps I may.

EDWARD. Soon, I hope.

SOREL. Do shut up, Edward. And if you wouldn't mind, Walter and I wish to resume our *tete-a-tete*.

EDWARD. I shall attend to the garden, whilst you and Caligula here -

WALTER. *(interrupting)* Now just a minute, sir.

EDWARD. You needn't falter, Walter. Your secrets are safe with me.

WALTER. Secrets?

EDWARD. That I discovered my wife locked in your embrace mustn't persuade you that I would use this information to interfere in any way with your vaulting political ambitions. Ta-ta.
(He exits through the French doors to the garden.)

SOREL. Edward is beastly when he becomes jealous. I'm quite certain that's why his first wife left him. He wounds me deeply. Comfort me, kind sir.

WALTER. Perhaps we might take a stroll to Maidenhead.

SOREL. *(assuming a helpless pose)* Walter, can't you see that I am prostrate with grief.

WALTER. I suppose there's no harm - *(sits next to her)* Sorel, my dear - you deserve much more than that popinjay could ever hope to supply.

SOREL. *(moves in closer)* Tell me, Walter, in what ways am I extraordinary?

(BRIDGIT opens the kitchen door, peering out at WALTER and SOREL. She growls audibly. WALTER pushes SOREL away. BRIDGIT returns into the kitchen with a harrumph.)

WALTER. What an appalling creature!

SOREL. Rest assured that she treats Edward and me with equal disdain.

WALTER. Why ever do you keep her on?

SOREL. We can only keep on very bad maids. Good maids won't have us.

(SOREL and WALTER settle comfortably again for a moment, then the front door bursts open and ERIC, disheveled and sweaty, charges in.)

ERIC. *(breathlessly)* Where is Edward Bennett?

SOREL. Gardening.

(ERIC dashes out of the French doors.)

WALTER. Who on earth was that?

SOREL. Pay him no mind. You were about to enumerate my charms. Now be quick about it. *(She tries to reinsinuate herself into WALTER's arms.)*

(EDWARD dashes in through the French windows, holding the hat. He heads to the bar and pours a drink.)

ERIC barges in. WALTER, frightened, separates from SOREL, who is amused.)

ERIC. Mr. Bennett - I've found you at last!

EDWARD. How did you know I was in Cookham?

ERIC. Your flat in London was empty.

EDWARD. You've been prohibited from entering our flat.

ERIC. I crawled up the drainpipe and peered through the window. No one was inside - just a pile of rubble, so I bicycled here.

WALTER. From London? That's thirty-five miles!

SOREL. You must have very muscular thighs.

ERIC. There is no time to waste! Conservatives have taken control of Parliament. We are all doomed!

WALTER. Rubbish. *(to SOREL)* Who is this lunatic?

SOREL. *(to WALTER)* Careful. Eric is perpetually feverish. You mustn't inflame him further or he might explode.

WALTER. Now is the perfect time for us to take a stroll to Maidenhead.

EDWARD. That would be an exceedingly long stroll for you, Sorel.

ERIC. Cease this bourgeois prattle!

EDWARD. I found that remark quite amusing, actually. I shall put it in my next play.

SOREL. Eric, I thought you had been institutionalized.

ERIC. I just escaped.

SOREL. (*impressed*) How very clever.

ERIC. Mr. Bennett, you are a celebrated writer –

SOREL. But not a very good one, actually.

ERIC. The world adores you –

SOREL. For an opposing view, I refer you to today's *Daily Mail*.

ERIC. The time has come for you to put your influence to the greater good. You must forsake cocktails and caviar, and write plays which inspire the working class.

SOREL. Don't be silly, Eric. Those people can't afford to go to the theatre.

EDWARD. Why is everyone dead set against cocktails and caviar of late? I've been quite partial to them since the day I was weaned.

ERIC. I bemoan the waste you have made of your skills.

SOREL. If I am forced to attend a play with a message, I shan't dress.

(**BRIDGIT** enters from the kitchen.)

BRIDGIT. What's all this hollerin'? (*re: ERIC*) Who's this mangy mutt?

ERIC. (*to EDWARD, re: BRIDGIT*) You flaunt your wealth, whilst workers such as she can barely scrape by.

EDWARD. I must keep Sorel in hats.

SOREL. Thank you, darling.

ERIC. (*to EDWARD*) Face facts, Mr. Bennett. Your days as a Bright Young Thing are over.

EDWARD. (*stung*) I should like a cocktail. (*He heads for the bar trolley.*)

ERIC. There is no time for drink!

SOREL. (*casually*) Surely you must make time, Eric, or you will dehydrate.

ERIC. I shall not imbibe while one person is thirsty – nor shall I consume while one person is hungry.

BRIDGIT. How long will you be stayin', lad?

ERIC. Till I persuade Mr. Bennett to see the evil of his ways!

EDWARD. Don't behave like an hysteric, Eric.

BRIDGIT. If you're spendin' the night, you'll have to sleep in the root cellar. (*indicating the kitchen*) It's through here.

ERIC. There is no time for sleep! The world is on the brink of collapse – (*to EDWARD*) but you hold the key to its survival.

WALTER. Young man, let me assure you that the planet's endurance hardly depends upon the likes of Edward Bennett.

ERIC. (*to WALTER*) Hold on – you're Walter Pearce! You're the worst of the lot! You and your ilk will drag this country into the sewer!

WALTER. The country is already in the sewer. My – ilk and I shall exhume it.

EDWARD. And your first initiative is to seduce my wife?

SOREL. Am I part of a political agenda? How delicious!

ERIC. Mr. Bennett, let's away to your study, and toil together. (*He puts a foot on the chair, and poses valiantly.*) With my vision and your talent, we shall create a work that will enrich all mankind!

BRIDGIT. Off the furniture, laddie.

SOREL. Eric, mightn't you tidy up after all that pedaling?

ERIC. There is no time for tidiness!

EDWARD. (*to SOREL*) You should have seen that coming.

ERIC. "Who is the greater sinner – he who robs a bank, or he who owns a bank?"