

As the play starts, Simon Balcairn sits down at the table centre stage with the typewriter on. He is smoking a cigarette and, as he sits at the typewriter, he starts typing in a rather rhythmic way; hard to tell as of yet, but it is Benny Goodman's 'Sing Sing Sing', as he writes.

Act 1

Balcairn

Mr Chatterbox Gossip Column, 1st January 1938. At Archie Schwert's New Years party the fifteenth Marquess of Vanburgh, Earl Vanburgh de Brendon, Baron Brendon, Lord of the Five Isles and Hereditary Grand Falconer to the Kingdom of Connaught, said...

(He pauses for a second. He is struggling to think of anything to write. Head in hands, he tries to type but nothing comes to him. He is now typing- or maybe he gets up and stops typing entirely- but regardless, what he says now is aimed at the audience.)

I can't think of what to say. My editor said yesterday he was tired of seeing the same old names over and over again- and here they are again, all of them.

(As he names them, they step from the darkness one by one and begin an elegant parade around the circle of the centre stage; first Archie, then Agatha, then Archie then Miles.)

Agatha Runcible's usually worth a couple of paragraphs, but they're featuring her as a front-page news story tomorrow over the Customs House business... I made rather a good thing over Archie Schwert in a log shanty in Canada last week which he built himself with the help of one Red Indian. I thought that was fairly good because, you see, I could contrast that with Miles Malpractice being dressed as a Red Indian tonight. Miles is as present living in the house of his brother, Lord Throbbing, at which yesterday's party was held.

(A sound begins to be heard. It is the sound of people drumming. Here, there and everywhere there is the same sound. This is most definitely the start of 'Sing Sing Sing' being performed. As the music begins, only Balcairn seems to be able to resist the thump-thump-thump of the music. He continues to talk, but he is no longer the focus. The chorus, all dressed in fantastic costumes, are all beginning to perform Sing Sing Sing a capella, separated into instrument sections. They begin to crawl from the darkness like beasts of the night, still singing, crawling through the audience as they all take to the centre stage. Miles and Agatha are at its centre, doing a wild and jazzy dance. Simon's next paragraph is said during.)

His choice of costume was particularly- what shall I say?- particularly piquant... Yes, I shall put that in italics... since the latest reports of Archie Schwert say that he is living in a log shack...

(At this, the music explodes and Simon Balcairn is completely ignored. Either a band come in and start to join in and perform the song it remains just in the domain of the actors as they continue to dance. The middle circle is a mass of writhing bodies, completely indistinguishable from one another. There are drinks, and cigarettes, and people are doing drugs openly. Sexuality is completely open to debate now; everybody wants everybody. Amongst the audience, members of the paparazzi try to get pictures as people join the dance but cannot. One, however, joins the gay throng. In the midst of it all, the chorus disperse to the sides and amongst the audience and dancing around the space, finding secluded corners for dark deeds, but Agatha and Miles remain dancing.)

Agatha
Miles!

Miles

Agatha, darling! How was Cannes?

Agatha

Paris.

Miles

Wherever.

Agatha

Too, too griefmaking. There was some awful bosh about some gastly German man who they consider to be some sort of threat to Europe.

Miles

Awful load of mess that. Mummy says that Hitler- that's his name isn't it, Hitler?- that he doesn't have a chance because he has the most awful moustache.

Agatha

How dreadful! Doesn't he know facial hair's no longer in vogue?

Miles

Exactly... Oh Agatha, would you look? All these awful things dancing so energetically. My, they're positively PERSPIRING.

Agatha

How too, too sweatmaking!

(Into the dance arrives Nina, who we have not been introduced to yet. This will come in a minute. Miles spots her, runs over, they dance together in the centre. Agatha is very happy to dance on her own. She grabs the rat, who is watching the encounters, and begins to dance with him.)

Miles

Nina!

Nina

Miles!

Miles

Adam not back yet?

Nina

What?

Miles

Adam! Not back yet!

Nina

Any day now!

Miles

Isn't this too dull?

Nina

I've never been more bored in my life!

Miles

Drink?

Nina

I'd kill for a martini!

Miles

Spot of absinthe?

Nina

Yes! At least a spot!

(The rat breaks free of Agatha's grip as Miles dances past in search of drinks. Agatha runs over to Nina.)

Agatha

Nina!

Nina

Agatha! How was Cannes?

Agatha

Paris.

Nina

Same thing! Was it awful? Isn't it frightful, all this Nazi business?

Agatha

Indeed. It's all so... Frightmaking!

Nina

Agatha dear, you always have had the most fantastic ability to turn topics of gravitas into complete tosh.

Agatha

Thank you. Daddy always says the same thing!

(With this, the throng has returned to the centre. Balcairn in the chaos has made his way to the upper balcony. Miles now heads up in the company of a handsome young man in very little clothing. Balcairn watches Miles and his companion pass by and Miles sees him spying.)

Miles

Are you wishing to join in Simon darling?

Simon

Not quite my bag, I'm afraid.

Miles

Shame... Maybe a few drinks later you'll change your mind.

Balcairn

Maybe a few more candid gossip columns later and you'll change your's.

Miles

Toodles darling!

(Miles and his lover begin to kiss on the balcony. The rat runs past Balcairn in an attempt to follow but Balcairn stops him.)

Balcairn

I know you, don't I?

Rat

Lord Balcairn! How ARE you?

Balcairn

Very well! I... I know you but I... I don't know you.

(The rat begins to sweat. Nina and Agatha have now danced their way up the staircase to Balcairn's side. The party below has become more and more lustfilled. The rat is partially torn between his situation and wanting to snap the scene below.)

Nina

Simon!

Balcairn

N-Nina! And Agatha Runcible, my dear ladies, how are you?

Agatha

Tight!

Nina

Oh Simon it's been the most awful day... What brings you here, business or pleasure?

Simon

Oh, both, both... Adam not back yet?

Nina

Any day, poor lamb.

Rat

I'll just... Excuse me.

Agatha

I say... Weren't we dancing together earlier? You were the most frightful cold fish...

Rat

I really must go, excuse me...

(The rat runs in the direction of Miles and his lover.)

Agatha

Who's your ferrety friend Simon?

Balcairn

Lord knows! What a foul party though, eh?

Nina

Isn't it? I was just saying to Miles I don't think I've been so frantically bored in my life... I say, Miles is supposed to be fetching me a drink...

Balcairn

Unless it's down the throat of that handsome young thing he's got in his clutches I daresay you'll be waiting some time. He really should be more discreet!

(The rat takes a photo of Miles and his lover. Miles just poses for the camera but Balcairn is suddenly alert, like a meerkat guard.)

Agatha

Simon, what is it?

Balcairn

I just remembered who that man is... He's a bloody photo rat! A RAT! A RAT! BEGIN THE HUNT LADIES AND GENTS, THERE'S VERMIN IN OUR MIDST, AROOOOOOO!

(The rat flees down the other stairwell as everybody chases out of the party. Agatha must exit out the balcony doorway but everybody else flees down into the main centre, the chaotic party failing to catch the photo rat who flees out the studio entrance. The chase ends as does the song as everybody flees the stage but Simon and Nina, who are left in the central staging area.)

Nina

Oh golly, imagine what the front pages will say tomorrow.

Balcairn

Never fear, Agatha's skirmish at customs this morning will take precedence. We may be lucky and only reach the back pages.

Nina

I don't see why you're so worried, you're the writer of that awful Mr Chatterbox! You know Daddy said if one more candid piece of gossip came out about me...

Balcairn

If you were ever cut off, you know I'm always here for you.

Nina

Oh Simon...

Balcairn

I love you, Nina.

Nina

Oh Simon, you must be tight, you're being either frightfully hyperbolic or frightfully candid and I can't tell what's worse.

Balcairn

I'm being both. Nina..

Nina

Don't Simon, Adam's back any day now...

Balcairn

He's already back in the country.

Nina

He is?

Balcairn

Yes, Agatha told me earlier, they ran into each other at customs.

Nina

Then why the devil hasn't he come to see me! Oh I must go phone him right away.

Balcairn

Nina...

Nina

We're supposed to be getting married, isn't it silly him coming back into the country and not telling me a jot?

Balcairn

... Yes. Most silly indeed.

(Nina walks to a table in the room, where there are two old phones. She picks it up, puts the receiver to her ear.)

Nina

Hello? Can I please speak to Mr Adam Fenwick-Symes? Yes, the Shepheard's Hotel...

(She goes silent although she mouths a conversation with Adam. Simon sits back down at his typewriter.)

Simon

Then there's Nina Blount. Perfect angel, Miss Nina Blount. Oh Nina my love...

(At the same time, Adam rushes onto the stage, picks up the second phone, and responds to Nina's call. At the same time as Simon says 'Nina my love', Adam starts with the same. Simon, unable to write any further, rips the paper out and leaves the stage.)

Adam

Nina my love, I'm afraid we shan't be able to get married after all.

Nina

Oh darling why not? Did they steal your foreign fortunes from you at customs?

Adam

Something like that yes. You see, I'd written a book.

Nina

A book! Oh how marvellous Adam, you're the first writer I know to have managed to do such a thing!

Adam

Thank you.

Nina

There should be a medal.

Adam

Or a parade.

Nina

Now now Adam, you're just being silly.

Adam

Quite right... Where was I?

Nina

You were telling me how you'd been frightfully clever and written a book that would make you thousands.

Adam

Quite, yes. Well, I'd finished the book, ready to receive my advance from Lord Monomark... And then...

Nina

Oh goodness, what next?

(Enter, from one side of the walkway, The Customs Officer.)

Adam

Well I told him I had some old clothes and some books on me.

Customs Officer

Books eh?

(He opens Adam's suitcase upon the table the typewriter- taken off by Simon- was on, in centre stage.)

And what sort of books, may I ask?

Adam

Look for yourself.

Customs officer

Thank YOU, that's what I mean to do. BOOKS indeed.

(He finally looks down at the contents of the suitcase.)

Customs Officer

Yes. I should just about say you had some books.

Adam *(to Nina on the phone)*

Then one by one he took the books out and piled them on the counter. A copy of Dante excited his especial disgust.

Nina

Philestine!

Customs Officer

French eh? I guessed as much, and pretty dirty, too, I shouldn't wonder. Now just you wait while I look up these here books-

Adam

How he said it!

Customs Officer

-in my list. Particularly against books the Home Secretary is. If we can't stamp out literature in the country, we can at least stop its being brought in from outside... Hullo hullo, what's this, may I ask?

(He produces a manuscript from inside the case.)

Adam

He produced and laid on the counter a large pile of typescript...

Nina

How?

Adam

What?

Nina

How did he produce it?

Adam

Gingerly! As though it may explode at any moment!

Nina

How comic! What did you say to that?

Adam *(to Customs Officer)*

That's a book too. One I've just written. It is my memoirs.

Customs Officer

Ho, it is, is it? Well, I'll take that along too.

Adam

But I've got to catch the train...

Customs Officer

There's worse things than missing trains!

Nina

How ominous!

Adam

He took me into this inner office, the walls of which were lined with contraband pornography and strange instruments...

Nina

Oooh, it sounds like a real den of thieves!

Adam

Then from the next room came the shrieks and yells of poor Miss Runcible, who had been taken for a well known jewel smuggler, and was being stripped to the skin by two terrific wardresses.

(Agatha runs out of the upstairs door, followed by two wardresses. She is adjusting the shoulder strap of her top. She is beautifully dressed and notably in trousers- a veritable Katherine Hepburn.)

Agatha

Get your withered old hands off me! As soon as I get back to London I shall ring up every Cabinet Minister and ALL the newspapers and give them the most shy-making details.

(By this point, she has run down to the ground floor and spots Adam.)

Adam, darling, I never saw you on the boat! My dear, I can't tell you the things that have been happening to me in there. The way they looked... Too, too shaming, positively surgical my dear, and SUCH wicked old women, just like DOWAGERS my dear!

Adam

Lovely to see you too, Agatha.

Agatha

Why are you here darling? Is this your pornography?

Adam

I should say it isn't!

Agatha

Shame, would have given us something frightfully amusing to read on the train, and how the old pensioners would blush!

Nina *(not regarded by either.)*

Oh Agatha!

Adam

I'm afraid I've been hauled up about some books.

(The customs officer, who left with the books, now returns.)

Customs Officer

You can take these books on architecture and the dictionary, and I don't mind stretching a point for once and letting you have the history books, too. But this book on Economics comes under Subversive Propaganda. That you leaves behind. And this here Purgatorio doesn't look right to me, so that stays behind, pending inquiries...

Adam

But its Dante!

Customs Officer

We don't like foreigners here sunshine, dead or alive! But as for this autobiography... That's just downright dirt, and we burns that straight away, see.

Agatha

I say, I'm so glad we've made your life so smutty Adam!

Adam

But good heavens there isn't a word in the book... You must be misinterpreting it!

Customs Officer

I know dirt when I sees it or I shouldn't be where I am to-day.

Adam

But do you realise that my whole livelihood depends on this book?

Customs Officer

And MY livelihood depends on stopping works like this coming into the country. Now 'look it quick if you don't want a police court case.

Agatha

Adam, angel, don't fuss or we shall miss the train.

(On stage charges Melrose Ape, followed by a series of angels; at their head, Chastity.)

Melrose Ape

Coins for God's soldiers! Coins for God's soldiers! Salvation doesn't do you the same good if you think it's free!

Agatha

I say, who's that?

Adam

Miss Melrose Ape, a most disagreeable woman indeed... She has a meeting next week in the Albert Hall. Those girls are her choir.

Agatha

Soldiers AND a choir? I hope she pays them double for that.

Melrose Ape

There's one great evil in the world today girls. Despair. I know all about England, and I tell you straight, boys, I've got the goods for you. Hope...

Hope

Yes?

Melrose Ape

No, I'm not... I'm talking ABOUT Hope.

Hope

What about me?

Chastity

The concept, not the person!

Hope

Oh, well it's all very confusing. She should have given us names less common to our vernacular!

Melrose Ape

Hope's what you want and Hope's what I got. Here, sir, hand round these leaflets.

(She hands the leaflets to the stunned customs officer.)

There's the song on the back. Five bob for you, sir, if you can shout me down. Splendid, all together now!

(Melrose leads the girls out in a chorus of some hymn. The customs officer follows behind, singing from the hymn sheet.)

Agatha

So like one's first parties, being sick with other people singing. Anyway, we must get the train Adam, I fear we may be pushed out of our favourite compartment by the middle-classes if we delay and that shall never do.

Adam

Quite...

Agatha

All those little people... What do they all do with their lives?

(Agatha for a second looks rather pensieve, then turns to Adam, smiles, and walks off.)

Nina

She sounds positively beastly! What a hectic time you did have!

Adam

Precisely- I wish I could have got in contact with you sooner, but losing one's means of marrying you rather puts a damper on the day, you see.

Nina

Quite. Sorry to call you so out of the blue, but Simon mentioned...

Adam

Ah yes, we ran into him on the train. Kept saying how beastly Agatha's treatment was at the hands of the harpies at customs. Then he began talking about this Archie Schwert's party tonight... I must say darling, who is he?

Nina

Oh, he's someone new since you went away. Terribly bogus, Miles discovered him and since then he's been climbing and climbing and CLIMBING till he hardly knows us.

Adam

I see.

Nina

He's rather sweet, really, only too terribly common, poor darling. He lives at the Ritz, and I think that's rather grand, don't you?

Adam

Indeed... Was the party there?

Nina

No, at Edward Throbbing's House.

Adam

I see. I wish I could have been there but...

Nina

No, it doesn't matter, it was frightfully dull anyway. Nothing on the old days.

Adam

Are we old enough to have 'old days'?

Nina

I should say we are. We're positively thirty!

Adam

I say, so we are! Oh Nina... Shall I dine with you tomorrow? I need to see Lord Monomark but afterwards...

Nina

Of course darling. 7, at our usual haunt?

Adam

Fabulous. See you then.

(Nina puts the phone back on the table. For a moment we see a crack in her beautiful, aloof facade as the reality that her and Adam once again won't get married hits home. She walks off attempting to regain her composure. Adam is alone on stage. He takes his bag and puts it down, opening it to take out the clothing from inside. Lottie Crump and her doddering servant, Doge, arrive.)

Lottie

Adam!

Adam

Lottie, how are you?

Lottie

Oh, same old, same old... So, now you're back from France, I'm sure you can pay your little bill, can't you?

Adam

Not right now I'm... Still waiting to convert my Francs back into pounds.

Lottie

Oh, right, yes, I see how it is... Awful things these foreign currencies, why can't they all just use the pound, isn't that what the empire was for?

Adam

I'm not quite-

Lottie

Come into the parlour, there's a chap here having a few drinks I think could do with some company... Oh, here he is now!

(Enter Ginger, with a drink in one hand and a pack of cards in the other.)

Lottie

Adam, meet Mr...

Ginger

Littlejohn. Ginger Littlejohn.

Adam

Adam Fenwick-Symes, pleased to meet you.

Lottie

Ginger here's a very rich fellow. Also very gifted at card tricks. What a combination, eh?

Ginger

Oh, 'very gifted' is an overstatement... But here, I'll show you what I know... Unless you're one of those real magician types who can see right through a poor man's illusion?

Adam

I'll make sure I keep my wand at bay.

Ginger

Very good, very good...

(Ginger sets up the first party trick on the table.)

Ginger

Now, watch this... (He talks as a form of instruction through the game.) ... There, you see? Bloody clever!

Lottie

Again, again!

(Enter the wheezy butler, Doge.)

Doge
Excuse me, Ma'am...

Lottie
Blimey, what is it you human bagpipes?

Doge
There's a person asking for you at the front desk.

Lottie
Isn't there always? You'd think I didn't have a receptionist.

Doge
You don't.

Lottie
Really? Who am I thinking of then? Anyway, I'll leave you two to your skulduggery. Don't get too carried away!

(Lottie follows Doge out. Adam and Ginger are left alone. There's an awkward pause.)

Adam
Awfully clever trick, old chap.

Ginger
Why thank you. I've made a good deal of money on it on the train up here.

Adam
Really?

Ginger
I challenge people to try and replicate it and if they can, I give them £500.

Adam
Really? Just like that?

Ginger
Well when you're from old money like myself, £500 isn't much at all.

Adam
... How's about if I was to replicate it here? Right now?

Ginger
What?

Adam
I mean, I know we're not on a train or...

Ginger
If you can replicate what I just did I'll give you £500 just like that old thing!

(Adam takes the cards and replicates the trick exactly.)

Ginger

Well I'll be jiggered! You are a clever fellow. Where did you study?

Adam

Oxford.

Ginger

Shame, I'm a Cambridge man myself... And there I was thinking we could be friends. I tell you what, double or nothing- heads or tails.

Adam

Oh, um... Heads.

Ginger (*flipping coin*)

... Well aren't you a lucky thing. You've just earned yourself £500!

(Lottie and Doge return with a man behind them- a red-faced man, the Drunken Major.)

Lottie

Only me again. Look who I found dallying round the atrium? It's only the Major!

Adam

I'm sorry, I'm afraid I've never seen you before.

Ginger

Neither have I. Then again, I'm new here.

Drunken Major

Can't say I've seen either of you before... Can't say I remember this place particularly well either...

Lottie

Major, you were here just last night! Honestly, get a few drinks down him and he can't remember the words to the National Anthem.

Doge

I don't even know those when I'm sober.

Lottie

That's because you're a foolish old codger, aren't you Doge? Now Major, this is Ginger, he's very rich and this is Adam, who isn't.

Ginger

Richer than he used to be- he just cleaned me out of £1000!

Lottie

A grand? Good lord Adam, what did you do, hold him at gunpoint?

Ginger

The man is an absolute whizz at games of luck, that's for sure.

Lottie

He's rather fortunate, yes. Fortunate enough to have escaped paying my bill a few times. Lemme just take what I'm owed from your new fortune Adam...

Adam

Not just yet Lottie. I need to phone Nina first.

Lottie

Yes, yes, of course...

(Adam picks up the phone. Nina arrives and looks at the phone with trepidation. She finally picks it up and adopts a false cockney tone.)

Nina

Ma'am Blount's gaff, who's speaking?

Adam

It's Adam Fenwick-Symes!

Nina *(breaking back into normal tones)*

Oh Adam? It's you? Oh, sorry, I thought it was going to be that awful bore, Archie Schwert, trying to ask to be my escort to Mary Brown's party tonight.

Adam

Mary Brown?

Nina

Very plain girl, puts in a lot of effort, very rich.

Adam

Sounds like Archie should be escorting her, doesn't he know you're engaged?

Nina

Well Adam darling, the engagement was off last I checked, or have you recovered your lost manuscript?

Adam

Not quite. Nina darling, I've just won myself a thousand pounds.

Nina

Oh Adam! Whatever did you do to manage that?

Adam

I'm not quite sure myself, but now we can most definitely get married.

Nina

Oh Adam, I'm so pleased!

Adam

I'll call you again later. See you at yours tonight and I'll take you to this girl's party?

Nina

Sounds divine!

(They hang up at the same time.)

Major
Know what I'd do if I'd won £1000?

Lottie
Spend it on alcohol?

Major
Mercy no! Deuce of a lot of alcohol that, wouldn't know what to do with it... No, I'd put it on a horse!

Adam
Risky, isn't it? Betting, I mean?

Ginger
Father does it all the time!

Major
Besides, I have a friend on the inside.

Lottie
Of a horse?

Major
Of the Summer Handicap! He told me that there's a real outsider, Indian Runner, 30 to 1 chance of winning at the moment, that's a devil of a lot if you put a thousand on it.

Adam
You're quite right! Here... Can you put my £1000 on Indian Runner?

Major
Of course I can old boy, will do so right away.

Adam
Excellent. I must dash, I've got to see a girl about a party.

(Adam rushes off.)

Lottie
But Adam what about my bill? Oh forget it, I'll try next time. Here, how do you boys fancy a game of strip poker?

Ginger
I've never heard of that one before.

Doge
Good for you...

(They all walk off in the opposite direction. The paparazzi stand up in the audience and begin snapping as Agatha and Miles lead a procession of bright young things onto the stage.)

Agatha

Oh what beasts, they do know how to catch me at the most unflattering angle!

Miles

My dear, I could give you one or two of my flattering angles- I swear I haven't a bad one on me! But must they always wait outside these parties at such demonic hours? We finish one event and walk right onto the red carpet for another it seems!

(Nina and Adam are next out, followed by Archie, Simon, Mary and Mary's friend Martha.)

Nina

So, when shall we set the date for?

Adam

Oh, did I not tell you? I placed the money on a horse.

Nina

But Adam... Why would you go and do a thing like that?

Adam

Apparently he's a real outsider but has a chance of winning and if he does...

Nina

What's he called?

Adam

Indian Runner!

Nina and Mary

Oh Adam!

Mary

Adam, Martha's mother owns the horse, doesn't she Martha?

Martha

She does, she does, and oh Adam what a silly mistake, Indian Runner's practically a donkey!

Adam

I see... So I suppose we shan't be getting married at all once again, Nina.

Nina

That's quite alright darling. Tomorrow, after you've gone to see Lord Monomark about this book business, head down to the country and go see my father and check what he can do for you, it's an awfully quick drive.

Adam

I shall do just that... Say where are we headed?

Agatha

The after party, of course! Where is it, Mary?

Mary

Well I... I wasn't aware it was expected!

Miles

My dear, there is ALWAYS an after party. It's what makes the party itself so bearable!

Mary

Well I...

Martha

We could always head back to your's, Mary. To the dining room. It's simply splendid there.

Agatha

That sounds too divine! Shall we get a taxi?

Miles

Shall we? I fear if we remain on the streets much longer we may be raped and pillaged like a town laid siege to by Vikings! Taxi!

(Miles, Agatha, Mary, Simon, Archie and Martha run off. Before they go, Martha turns.)

Martha

I say, are you two coming?

Nina

I can't, I have the most frightful pain.

Adam

And I have to be up jolly early. Have a lovely time though.

Martha

Awfully sweet of you, toodle pip!

Adam and Nina

Toodle pip!

(The stage is cleared of all but them.)

Nina

Now you go have a good night's sleep.

Adam

Are you sure you don't want to go with them?

Nina

No, I told you, I've got a pain.

Adam

You didn't earlier.

Nina

They come and go darling, you know that.

Adam

...I'm sorry again.

Nina

What for?

Adam

For... For Indian Runner.

Nina

Darling, you can't apologise for a horse's existence.

Adam

You know what I mean.

Nina

I do, I do... Don't worry at all darling. There's always papa. I believe he's really much nicer than he looks. He might give us some money... Anyway, it'll all be fine and soon you will make your fortune and we shall marry and have a hundred little children who shall all be foolish and beautiful, just as people should be!

(Nina kisses Adam and runs off. He smiles to himself, and then follows after in the same direction. The others all now stumble back on from the other side.)

Mary

Welcome!

Agatha

Oh how smashing. What part of London is this?

Mary

Oh, fairly central to things...

Miles

Look at all the busts and portraits! What frightening ancestors you have Miss Brown, it's as if they're gazing into my soul and finding something rather horrid!

Simon

I'd dare say they are, you raging queen.

Miles

Silence, Balcairn, what if the papers heard you?

Simon

That would never do.

Archie

I say, could we get some breakfast? It's getting awfully light outside and I have the most incredible hankering for something cut from a pig.

Agatha

For once I agree Archie, let us have bacon and eggs and let us have them now!

Mary
I'll see what I can do...

Miles
My dear, is there a piano nearby? I fancy tinkling away something crimson and obscene.

Mary
I can't promise that we'll have access to one but... We can sit in the drawing room.

Miles
What good is a room when I want an instrument?

Agatha
You ALWAYS want instruments.

Miles
But this time I want a grand, not a flute.

Simon
How vulgar. I'm off.

Archie
Before the breakfast?

Martha
Oh Simon, how bogus!

Agatha
Miles, did you hear that?

Miles
I do believe I did!

Simon
I'm so sorry. I shall see you soon.

(Simon exits.)

Martha
How awful. I rather liked him.

Miles
He was never going to stay around when Nina had already left.

Archie
Does Simon like Nina?

Agatha
Archie you are wonderfully thick! Simon's love for Nina is worthy of a very fine sonnet sequence if only because it is equally unrequited.

Miles

All this talk of literature and that Simon is proving draining. Shall we enjoy some naughty salt in the drawing room?

Mary

Of... Of course, I can go get the salt from the pantry.

Miles

No darling. NAUGHTY salt. Mummy may have a dash in her compact.

(Miles, Agatha and a bemused Archie leave in the opposite direction Simon left. Martha follows after with Mary.)

Martha

Come along Mary, we cannot be bogus!

Mary

I do wish you'd stop saying that word!

(They clear the stage. Simon narrates from the balcony as the stage is set for breakfast by the help. Alternatively he comes back on and picks up a telephone, and recites the same speech but including punctuation as if dictating. As he talks, Mrs Brown and two children arrive and sit down to breakfast. Servants bring in plates to the tables- now brought together- and they eat in respectful silence with the odd interjection.)

Simon

What must be the most extraordinary party of the little season took place in the small hours of this morning at No. 10 Downing Street. At about 4am the policemen who are always posted outside the Prime Minister's residence were surprised to witness the arrival of a fleet of taxis, from which emerged a gay throng in fancy dress. The hostess of what was described by one of the guests as the brightest party the Bright Young People have yet given was no other than the youngest of the Prime Minister's daughters, Miss Brown. Flushed with successful hospitality, she trotted from guest to guest, offering here a box of matches, there a cigar, there a fruit from the enormous gilt dishes on the sideboard. To think that all these brilliant people, whom she had heard so much about, with what envy, should be here in papa's dining room, calling her 'my dear' and 'darling'. And when at last they said they really had to go, Miss Runcible said 'Well I can't go, because I've lost my latchkey. D'you mind awfully if I sleep here?'

Miss Brown, her heart in her mouth, but in the most natural way possible, said, 'Of course not, Agatha darling, that would be divine.'

And then Miss Runcible said, 'How too divine of you, darling.'

Rapture!

At half-nine the next morning the Brown family came down for breakfast in the dining room.

Mrs Brown

Now children,

Simon

Said Mrs Brown,

Mrs Brown

Do try to remember to talk to your father at breakfast. He was quite hurt yesterday. He feels out of things. It's so easy to bring him into the conversation if you take a little trouble, and he does so enjoy hearing about anything.

First Daughter
Yes Mama.

Second Daughter
We do try, you know.

(Mary runs down from the balcony as if having just emerged from her room. Mary gives her mother a kiss on the cheek- her mother only stops slicing her bacon in an attempt to assist the operation.)

Mrs Brown
And how was the dance Mary? Did you have a good time?

Mary
It was too divine.

Mrs Brown
It was WHAT, child?

Mary
I mean it was lovely, mama.

Mrs Brown
So I should think. You girls are very lucky nowadays. There were not nearly so many dances when I was your age...

Mary
Mama.

Mrs Brown
Yes Mary.

Mary
Mama, I asked a girl to stay the night.

Mrs Brown
Yes, dear. When? We're rather full up, you know.

Mary
Last night, Mama.

(Everyone, at the same time, puts down their cutlery.)

Mrs Brown
What an extraordinary thing to do. Did she accept?

Mary
Yes! She's here now.

Mrs Brown

Well... Ambrose, please tell Mrs Sparrow to put on another egg.

(A male servant leaves at these words with a bow. He returns mere seconds later.)

Ambrose

I'm very sorry m'lady, Mrs Sparrow can't understand it but there ARE no eggs this morning. She thinks there must have been burglars.

Mrs Brown

Nonsense Ambrose, who ever heard of burglars coming into a house to steal eggs?

Simon

At this moment Agatha Runcible came down to breakfast. She was not looking her best really in the morning light.

(At this, Agatha emerges on the balcony from one of the doors in the same costume from the night before. She talks as she stumbles down to the table. Mrs Brown has a face of thunder.)

Agatha

Good morning all! I've found the right room at last! D'you know, I popped into a study or something. There was a sweet old boy sitting at a desk. He DID look surprised to see me. Was it your papa?

Mary

This is Mama.

Agatha

How are you? I say, I think it's quite too sweet of you to let me come down to breakfast like this-

Simon

-It must be remembered that she was still in Hawaiian costume-

Agatha

Are you sure you're not furious with me? All this is really much more embarrassing for me, isn't it, don't you think... Or don't you?

Simon

At last Mary's mother managed to say...

Mrs Brown

Do you take tea or coffee? Ambrose, please give Mary's friend some breakfast.

(Ambrose leaves.)

Simon

For in the course of a long public life she had formed the opinion that a judicious offer of food eased most social situations. Then Jane's father came in.

The Prime Minister

I think I must be losing my reason. I was in my study just now going over that speech for this afternoon, when suddenly the door opened and in came a sort of dancing Hottentot woman half-naked. It just said, 'Oh, how shy-making' and then disappeared and... Oh...

(Awkward pause.)

I hope you slept well. Forgive me if I appeared inhospitable I... Er... Oh, why doesn't somebody else say something?

Agatha

Look, the paper!

(She picks it up and starts reading it.)

Agatha

What must be the most extraordinary party of the little season took place in the small hours of this morning at No. 10 Downing Street. At about 4am the policemen who are always posted outside the Prime Minister's residence were surprised to witness- isn't this too amusing- the arrival of a fleet of taxis, from which emerged a gay throng in fancy dress. How I should have loved to have seen it! The hostess of what was described by one of the guests as the brightest party the Bright Young People have yet given was no other than...

(Agatha drops the paper. Suddenly it clicks.)

Oh my God.

(Ambrose returns.)

Ambrose

Excuse me, ma'am, but Mrs Sparrow has found what seems to be talcum powder in the drawing room.

Prime Minister

Talcum powder?

Mary

Oh my...

Ambrose

Only it doesn't smell of talcum powder at all sir, and there is only a small line of it...

Agatha

Oh God... This is all too, too bogus...

(Agatha flees from the scene, but, as she leaves, the paparazzi snap her again. She flees up the opposite staircase and up through the door. Lord Monomark walks on stage as the Prime Minister's family all leave, reading the newspaper story himself. Adam follows.)

Monomark

Miss Brown, her heart in her mouth, but in the most natural way possible, said, 'Of course not, Agatha darling, that would be divine.' And then Miss Runcible said, 'How too divine of you, darling.'

Rapture!

Rapture? RAPTURE? How is one of your set able to incite the sort of feeling that impending war cannot?

Adam
I can't-

Monomark

Put Adolf Hitler on the front page and no one buys a copy. Put Agatha Runcible on the front dressed as the bastard and we can't print enough!

Adam
People love the Bright Young Things.

Monomark

No, they hate them- that's why they love hearing about their mistakes. Something I dislike about you Brits, your schadenfreue, happiness at the misfortune of others... No wonder your royal family are of German descent.

Adam
I say, we aren't at all like the Germans!

Monomark

That's your other problem- the fact you think you're so different! The only difference is class, and that's why people enjoy hearing about the Bright Young Things even though they hate them, because they want to be them. The Wall Street Crash...

Adam
It's been almost ten years since the Wall Street Crash, isn't the depression over now?

Monomark

You aristocrats really are dumb, by golly! America's still in a state of disillusionment, but at least they can understand the truth. Anyway, enough about this. About your book. Where is it?

Adam
Gone, Lord Monomark, sir.

Monomark

Gone? Whaddyamean gone? Did your book learn how to grow legs?

Adam
Customs, sir. They confiscated it.

Monomark

Didn't you do a copy?

Adam
I hadn't the funds for typewriter ribbon, sir.

Monomark

Was it any good?

Adam
Well...

Monomark
Don't try and be modest, boy. We Americans have never cared for this air of humility you limeys-

Adam
It was exceptional. All about the bright young things, all about our set, it would have sold millions.

Monomark
I like it when you talk about money, Adam. That's a commodity I can never get enough of. I like how you think big, Adam. Mark of a man who hasn't rested on the laurels of old money.

(Monomark walks over to the fourth wall as if staring out of a massive window.)

London... What a city. What a city, you hear? Up there with New York, Paris... The biggest town I ever saw growing up was Necessity, Manatoba. You're lucky you were born in this wonderful metropolis, but it wasn't luck that got me here, to become the Emperor of this metropolis. It was gumption. Hard work. Schmoozing. Have you got those skills, Adam?

Adam
Customs confiscated them, sir.

Monomark
Never be smart with a man you're in debt to Adam. That's a rule I'll give you for nothing.

Adam
Sorry.

Monomark (appraising Adam like a fine diamond)
Your novel was a week overdue. We'd sent out preliminary notices, set the release date for the 2nd April, people would have come in droves for your book.

Adam
I did write it sir. I can promise you that.

Monomark
I want to give you another chance, Adam. I've taken a liking to you. I thought you were a butterfly but you seem like a bee.

Adam
I'm sorry sir?

Monomark
Butterflies, people who flit round and look beautiful, people like your friends. Or bees, people like me, people like the Americans, people who make honey and work all their lives.

Adam
Normal people.

Monomark

Sensible people.

Adam

I'd very much like to be sensible. One day, at least.

Monomark

Why not make it today? I'm currently in the midst of a crisis. A civil war between my gut and my mind, d'you hear?

Adam

Clear as crystal, sir.

Monomark

I've got a gossip columnist in my newspaper, Simon Balcairn... Know him?

Adam

Well, sir.

Monomark

He's beginning to flail. I'm not happy with how he's doing, to be frank. Maybe you'd be better suited for journalism than for novels.

Adam

Maybe I would, sir. I could stay in London and write articles for you, no customs officers involved.

Monomark

Quite. I'll wait and see what Simon does next, I need good reason to see him gone... Was your novel really that good?

Adam

I'll rewrite it and you can see.

Monomark

I'm not sure if I care enough to wait.

Adam

Patience another one of our English flaws, sir?

Monomark

Absolutely. Off you go, sparky... I'll be expecting the advance back.

(Adam and Monomark leave opposite sides of the stage. Simon enters looking distinctly worst for wear, picking up a phone as he lights a cigarette. Miles does the same, wearing only bed sheets and smoking a cigarette. He picks up the phone and lounges on the chaise longue.)

Miles

Greta Garbo speaking.

Simon

Miles...

Miles

Oh Simon, do hurry up, what is it?

(Simon begins to cry down the line. Miles seems incredibly untouched by the display.)

Miles

Simon darling?

Simon

Miles... Can you please lunch with me tomorrow? I... I'm in an awful jam.

Miles

Damson or strawberry?

Simon

Miles please!

Miles

Oh very well. You are the most awful company Herr Balcairn but I shall do just that. Where shall we go?

Simon

Wimpole Street?

Miles

What extraordinarily good taste you have my darling. Shall I have to pay?

Simon

You may just. I'm quite spectacularly hard up.

Miles

Oh my, how too, too dull! Very well. Wimpole Street at 1?

Simon

I'll see you there.

Miles

So will Mr. Chatterbox, no doubt. Toodle pip!

(Miles hangs up.)

Ready for the next round, Tiger dearest?

(Miles runs back off roleplaying as a tigress in the jungle. Simon stands there for a minute before putting on a record- a waltz. He gets up and taps an invisible woman on the shoulder.)

Simon

I say, Nina... Would you care to dance?

(Simon leads 'Nina' in a lonely waltz about the circular stage. As the record ends, he sits her down on the chaise longue.)

Simon

Nina, I'd just like to tell you... I've loved you since the day I met you. I've done everything... Everything to be the man you would fall in love with... You are so terribly beautiful. What's that? You've left Adam you say? Oh, how frightfully charming of you, shall we elope? I'll leave my job, we'll move to France, we'll be happy there, shan't we darling?

(Simon suddenly seems to realise how insane he must sound. He stands up, dusts himself off, and Adam walks on stage, newspaper over his head, running through the rain to knock on a door. Simon seems to see him, as if he's an apparition, and gives him a look of pure envy.)

Simon

Damnably thing, this love business.

(Adam knocks on a door that is one of the wings. The door is not opened. He knocks again and a figure comes flying out the door.)

Colonel Blount

Don't knock twice! What do you want?

Adam

Is Mr Blount in?

Colonel Blount

There is no Mr Blount here. This is Colonel Blount's house.

Adam

I'm sorry... I think the Colonel is expecting me to dinner.

Colonel Blount

Nonsense! I'm Colonel Blount.

(Slams the door in Adam's face. Adam looks up at the rain, looks behind him, then knocks on the door again. The Colonel opens the door again.)

Colonel Blount

Yes?

Adam

I wonder if you'd let me telephone to the station for a taxi?

Colonel Blount

Not on the telephone... It's raining. Why don't you come in? It's absurd to walk to the station in this. Have you come about the vacuum cleaner?

Adam

... No.

Colonel Blount

Funny. I've been expecting a man all the morning to show me a vacuum cleaner. Come in, do. Won't you stay to luncheon?

Adam

I should love to.

Colonel Blount

Splendid. I get very little company nowadays. You must forgive me for opening the door to you myself. My butler is in bed today. He suffers terribly when it is wet. Both my footmen were killed in the war... Put your hat and coat here. I hope you haven't got wet... I'm sorry you didn't bring the vacuum cleaner... but never mind. How are you?

Adam

Well I-

Colonel Blount

I'd quite forgotten, I'm afraid you'll find me very discourteous... But it is, after all, impossible for me to ask you to luncheon. I have a guest coming on very intimate family business. You understand, don't you? To tell you the truth, it's some young rascal who wants to marry my daughter. I must see him alone to discuss... Settlements.

Adam

Well, I'd very much like to marry your daughter too.

Colonel Blount

What an extraordinary coincidence. Are you sure you do?

Adam

Perhaps Nina told you to expect me. What did she say?

Colonel Blount

'Engaged to marry Adam Symes. Expect him to luncheon. Nina.' Are you Adam Symes?

Adam

Yes.

Colonel Blount

My dear boy, why didn't you say so before, instead of going on about a vacuum cleaner? How are you?

Adam

I-

Colonel Blount

If you don't mind we will do our business before luncheon... You must come down and see the gardens in the summer, we had some lovely hydrangeas last year. I don't think I shall live here another winter. How long are you staying?

Adam

I promised Nina I'd be back tonight.

Colonel

That's a pity. They change the film at the Electra Palace. We might have gone. I believe its Venetian Kisses. I don't really think I like Greta Garbo, I've tried to but I just don't... Well, I don't know about you but I'm going to have a little nap.

(Colonel tries to leave.)

Adam
Colonel, I still need to talk to you... About your daughter.

(The Colonel turns back round.)

Colonel
Who the devil are you?

Adam
Adam Symes.

Colonel
Never heard of you. How did you get in? What do you want?

Adam
You asked me to luncheon. I came about being married to your daughter.

Colonel
My dear boy, of course. How absurd of me. I've such a bad memory for names. It comes of seeing so few people. How are you?

Adam
I-

Colonel
So you're the young man who's engaged to Nina... Now what in the world do you want to get married for? I shouldn't, you know, really I shouldn't. Are you rich?

Adam
No, not at present, I'm afraid, that's rather what I wanted to talk about.

Colonel
How much money have you got?

Adam
Well sir, actually at the moment I haven't got any at all.

Colonel
When did you last have any?

Adam
At customs.

Colonel
I say, are they taking money now? How frightfully odd.

Adam
I'm sorry sir, I'm being abstract. I meant a manuscript that would have made me money.

Colonel

A writer, eh? Noble profession. I'm into the movies myself... Would you be free to go the Electra Palace after this? I hear they're showing-

Adam

I had a thousand pounds last night, but I gave it to a drunk major.

Colonel

Why did you do that?

Adam

Well I hoped he'd put it on Indian Runner for the Handicap.

Colonel

Never heard of the horse. Didn't he?

Adam

I don't think he can have.

Colonel

When will you next have money?

Adam

When I've written some books.

Colonel

How many?

Adam

Twelve.

Colonel

How long will it take you to write twelve books?

Adam

A year.

Colonel

How long would it take most people?

Adam (*getting impatient*)

About twenty years... Colonel Blount, I know this sounds all very hopeless but you see, me and Nina hoped you, that is, that perhaps for the next year until I get my dozen books written, that you might-

Colonel

How could I help you? I've never written a book in my life.

Adam

No... We thought you might give us some money.

Colonel

You thought that, did you?

Adam

Yes, that's what we thought...

(A pause.)

Colonel

I think that an admirable idea. I don't see any reason at all why I shouldn't. How much do you want?

Adam

That's terribly good of you, sir... Well, you know, just enough to live on quietly for a bit. I hardly know...

Colonel

Would a thousand pounds be any help?

Adam

It would indeed! We shall both be terribly grateful.

Colonel

Not at all my dear boy. Not at all. What did you say your name was?

Adam

Adam Fenwick-Symes.

Colonel *(writing out a check)*

There... You... Are! Now don't go giving that away to another drunk major.

Adam

Really sir! I don't know how to thank you. Nina...

Colonel

Not another word. I'll head across to the Rectory and make the Rector drive you to the station. Useful having a neighbour with a motor car, they charge fivepence on the buses nowadays... Robbers!

(The Colonel says all this as he shuffles off the stage. Adam looks like he could not be happier. He gets the record player and puts on another record- Nina by Noel Coward. He begins to leap around the room crying out Nina's name.)

Adam

Nina! Oh Nina!

Nina *(running out on the balcony in a dress.)*

Adam? Adam what is it?

Adam

Nina my love!

Nina

Adam darling, are you tight?

Adam

Not at all, but we shall be! I've been given a thousand pounds!

Nina *(running down the stairs.)*

That seems to be happening to you a great deal more than the average recently... By whom?

Adam

Colonel Blount!

Nina

My father?

Adam

None other!

Nina

How peculiar. He never even gave my mother more than a guinea.

Adam

But now we can get married, can't we? Look!

(He shows her the cheque. She looks at it and puts on a happiness that seems slightly fake, but not in any way noticeably unless you already know what's about to happen.)

Nina

My, look at that!

Adam

Nina, let's elope tonight. I cannot wait any longer!

Nina

But Adam darling, we're supposed to be dining with Agatha and Archie, we're going to make him believe we like him!

Adam

Nina, please! Before another Drunk Major or customs officer ruins us!

Nina

Oh, very well then. I suppose I shall have to.

Adam

Where shall we go? Where shall we run off to Nina? Nina, oh GOD how I love saying your name.

Nina

How about Arundell? I quite like the place.

Adam

Arundell it is! Come, we'll be married before luncheon!

(The two run off stage, the record still playing. Simon arrives on stage looking bedraggled, smoking another fag, looking at a watch, switching off the record as Miles enters. Miles swans on looking fabulous. He walks past Simon, then does a double take.)

Miles

Simon? Is that you?

Simon

Miles... It's so good to...

Miles

Simon, don't you even THINK of touching my new suit with that grubby coat of yours, you look as if you've been sweeping chimneys. It's too, too shame-making!

Simon

I've been going a tad insane these last few days, Miles old thing. That's why I needed to see you.

Miles

Why, we're hardly the closest of bosom buddies my love... Then again, there's something appealing about mincing into London's finest restaurants with a bedraggled bohemian-type with... (he feels Simon's chin in an almost sexual brushing) ...stubble. Oh, how perfectly horrid!

Simon

I've got us a table. Shall we?

(Simon moves two chairs to the central table, the chairs positioned to match up to the walk ways, so the audience all get at least a profile view of the meal.)

Miles

Shall we have wine? I've not been tight for at least a day and it's too dull, I can hear the siren's call of a nice sauvignon blanc...

Simon

Miles, I'm going to lose my job.

Miles (not looking up from the wine list)

My dear, how too horrid... Yes, a nice white will do very well indeed.

(A waiter arrives at the table.)

Miles

Yes, can we have a bottle of your finest sauvignon blanc with two of your finest little glasses?

Waiter

Of course sir, and anything else?

Miles

I'll let you know when my appetite divines it.

(The waiter walks off and Miles watches him leave.)

Miles

I say.

Simon

Miles you really should be more discreet.

Miles

And where's the fun in that? Besides, if you're going to be fired from Chatterbox then there's nobody to expose anything that needn't be.

(Simon begins to cry at the meaning he takes from Miles' statement. For the first time, Miles looks genuinely concerned.)

Miles

Simon do hold it together, we're in public!

Simon

I'm sorry Miles it's just... I've nobody left. My job makes you all hate me deep down- don't try and hide it, I know I'm almost as detested as Archie. My fellow workers hate me because my job came to me because of my old money. My parents couldn't give a damn if I died in a ditch. And Nina...

Miles

Now Simon, you mustn't. Nina will never be your's.

Simon

And Adam will never be your's.

(Miles looks mildly taken aback.)

Miles

Now now, pussycat. Put your claws away or I shan't listen to what you ask of me.

Simon

I... I'm sorry.

Miles

That's quite alright. And you're right, he shan't be. But that is why I understand what it is you're going through and I'm here for you. Admittedly we have our individual ways of dealing with rejection but we are very alike, you and I.

Simon

Your mother is throwing a soiree tomorrow night, is she not?

Miles

She is indeed.

Simon

Could I... Could I be a demon and ask for an invite?

Miles

You certainly might. Has mummy not invited you?

Simon

No... No, she... She hasn't.

Miles

Beastly woman! I shall call her straight away.

(The waiter returns with the bottle of wine.)

Waiter

Anything else sirs?

Miles

Yes indeed; can you fetch me a phone you darling you? I must make a call.

(The waiter walks over to the phone table, picks up a receiver, and hands it to Miles.)

Miles

Merci!

(Miles dials the number. Onto the stage walks Lady Metroland, followed by a maid. She is a vision of elegance and slightly dishevelled chic. She has clearly had an exciting life.)

Lady Metroland

I say Marie, I don't understand what Miles sees in this powder... One snort and I felt nothing at all! I fear he might be so delicate that even such a harmless little drug can...

(She hears the phone ring, and picks it up.)

Hello?

Miles

Mummy!

Metroland

Darling! I was just telling Marie that this naughty salt you gave me is doing nothing more than clear my sinuses.

Miles

You've got forty years of excitement built up though Mummy, I'm still new and fresh faced. I'm not so immune.

Metroland

You're quite right love... What is it?

Miles

This party, tomorrow night...

Metroland

Yes love?

Miles

Can I get an additional invite?

Metroland
But who else do we know?

Miles
Simon Balcairn?

Metroland
My darling, he is such an awful beast, he writes such terrible things about you in the papers.

Miles
But Mummy, I don't-

Metroland
No darling, I can't have him in the same room. If I see him I will take out his tongue with a letter opener, and that would be very bad for the ambience. Good bye darling!

(Lady Metroland hangs up the phone and leaves with Marie. Miles gives Simon a comforting smile.)

Miles
I'm sorry...

Simon
You needn't say, your face says it all. Oh God, I'm doomed...

(Lord Monomark walks through, stopping at the table.)

Lord Monomark
Well, if it isn't my little butterfly! Busy collecting delicious pollen for the next column?

Simon
Of course, sir.

Lord Monomark
Good. Who's your friend here, I don't think we've been introduced.

Miles
Miles Malpractice sir. A pleasure.

Lord Monomark
Lord Monomark at your service... Aren't you Metroland's boy?

Miles
I am indeed sir.

Lord Monomark
Lovely woman. I'll be at her party tomorrow night, hope to see both of you there.

Miles
Absolutely.

Lord Monomark
Especially you, Simon. Make sure you write nothing about me, you hear?

Simon
Of course. Of course sir...

(Lord Monomark leaves. Simon could not look more disgusted at himself.)

Simon
I'm awful.

Miles
My dear, we all are. We just have to find ways to forget it. Come on, drink up.

(Paparazzi stand up in the audience.)

Paparazzi Chorus *(getting up and taking photos)*
Miles! Malpractice! Hey, Miles! Pose for the camera sir!

Miles
Oh Gosh, how did they know I was here? *(it suddenly clicks)* Simon?

Simon
I'm sorry...

Miles
You truly are a beast. I'll see you soon, unfortunately.

(Miles flees and as the cameras stop taking photos, Simon is left alone on stage. He finishes his drink, finishes Miles', leaves the glasses and bottle and walks off the stage. Adam enters in just a dressing gown, holding the cheque in one hand and a cigarette in the other. He puts the cheque down, puts the cigarette between his lips, and pours him and Nina glasses of wine. She emerges, also in a dressing gown.)

Adam
Good morning darling. Champagne?

Nina
I shan't, I've got quite a pain.

Adam
Whatever for? We're to be married!

Nina
Are you sure Adam?

Adam
Of course! Look! *(Picks up the cheque)* A thousand pounds to me from... From...

(He looks at the signature. Nina cannot bear to watch the realisation she has already had.)

Nina
Oh Adam...

Adam

The old fool! He signed it Charlie Chaplain!

Nina

Oh don't be simple Adam, it wasn't foolishness that made him do that, damnable man...

Adam

Why didn't he just give me the cheque?

Nina

I'm sure he thought the moment of realisation would be much more painful for the both of us than just flat out rejection. I'm sure he's imagining the scene in his twisted little head... But I didn't want to tell you right away. You did look happy, you know, and so sweet. I think I really fell in love with you for the first time when I saw you dancing alone in the hall.

Adam

How did such a bitter old man produce such a bird of paradise as yourself?

Nina

You are sweet.

Adam

I'm awfully sorry... I've got your hopes up one too many times. Are you ok?

Nina

My darling I've never hated anything in my life. Still, you had some fun out of it didn't you, which I suppose is something.

Adam

Nina...

Nina

I'm going to the powder room, the pain is getting worse. Good morning, Adam.

Adam

Good morning Nina.

(Nina walks off stage to the bathroom. She stops halfway and, not looking at Adam, says the following line before leaving.)

Nina

It's awful to think that I shall probably never, as long as I live, see you dancing like that again all by yourself.

(Exit Nina. Adam exits the other way. Lady Metroland arrives on the balcony.)

Lady Metroland

My lucky guests, I have SUCH a treat for you all tonight. Fresh from their tour of the Americas, our favourite little yankee Melrose Ape has come with her chorus of angelic girls. I do hope you enjoy the performance... Mrs Ape?

(Mrs Ape enters, followed by the girls, who appear in formation behind her.)

Mrs Ape

Ladies and gentleman, tonight we shall expunge the devil from the collective souls of England with a little of God's music. Girls?

Chorus of girls

There ain't no flies on the lamb of God
He smites them with his tail
And never are his dugs unsafe
Our God would never fail.

There ain't no wrongs in the mind of God
He cannot change his thoughts
He only thinks the things divine
All of our shoulds and oughts.

There ain't no waves in the sea of God
It's tranquil as the sky
And only when the sailors sin
Do sailors sink and die.

There ain't no sins in the past of God
He has no wrongs committed
We needn't recall anything
For there's nothing he's omitted.

There ain't no sting in the bee of God
He only gathers dust
To make the manna the Israelites ate
For he's a guy we trust.

There ain't no stain on the shirt of God
He's always fresh to wear
But quite alike to stains he is
Because he's always there.

(During the song, Miles and Adam, are the first to enter.)

Miles

And he signed the cheque 'Charlie Chaplain' you say?

Adam

Indeed he did!

Miles

What a beast. It seems you may never marry Nina. What a shame, it means I'll owe Agatha fifty pounds.

Adam

I'm glad Agatha is making money as I certainly never shall.

Miles

Nonsense. You have those twelve books a year, remember?

(An unknown figure, actually Simon, enters. He bumps into Miles as he storms around the room writing in a notepad. He drops the notebook and Miles stops him.)

Miles

I say sir, you dropped your notebook.

Adam

Hang on a second, look what it says there! 'That evening Lady Metroland gave a party for Mrs Melrose Ape...' I say Simon, is that you?

(Miles pulls off his disguise, whatever it is. Simon recoils.)

Miles

Simon! Mummy told you...

Simon

I needed to come, Miles. You don't understand-

Miles

Oh I understand all right. Get out of my mother's house.

Simon

But Miles please-

Adam

Simon, you are being awful, just leave!

Simon

Oh it's alright for you, Adam, isn't it? Popular, in love, a great job...

Adam

A job? I have no job.

Simon

Don't act so foolish. You know full well which job I mean.

(Simon walks to the exit.)

Simon

And even if you were poor... You have Nina. That's the only treasure...

(He turns to Miles and Adam.)

Simon

A plague on both your houses, you bastards.

(Simon turns to leave, lets out a hysterical laugh, and flees.)

Miles

How awfully Shakespearean.

Adam

Should we go check he's alright?

Miles

Undoubtedly we should, but I'm far too tight to do my duty. Dance with me?

Adam

You don't even have to ask.

(As the song continues the cast slowly pour on stage to watch and they all applaud from below. The girls exit after the song and Melrose Ape stands alone on the balcony.)

Melrose Ape

Brothers and sisters... Just you look at yourselves. Look inside yourselves deep, deep inside yourselves beyond the glister of your parties and the saucy blades of your jewels. Sinners, or the producers of sinners who have made no attempt to stop the youths of today as they drink and drug their way into oblivion.

Agatha *(to Miles in the crowd)*

I say, she knows us frightfully well.

Melrose Ape

Disgusting Halfings, creatures of the night, prostitutes in tiaras and evening gowns and drug dealers in saville row suits!

Mr Brown

Damned impudence!

Melrose Ape

Impudent am I? Is it impudence to look upon sin and call it by its rightful name, impudence to gaze upon babylon and shriek down curses, impudence to look upon your souls and see nothing but a black, empty void. Beautiful young people they call you, beautiful young people well, one out of three ain't bad I guess.

Adam

I say, that's rather good!

Melrose Ape

Our society has become influenced by horrible foreign cultures who evade customs, who bring in foul literature and negro music and foreign drugs. No narcotics are grown on British soil or even on American soil, I can assure you! Keep our the foreigners, lock up the homosexuals with their sexual promiscuity and their androgyny that destroys the important definitions between genders, God would want it such! And let us turn our eyes to Germany, where a fine man has realised that we must protect society by cleaning the gene pool with the bleach of judgment! Why won't you listen? The lives you lead aren't real lives...

Lady Metroland

Thank you, Mrs Ape, for a fascinating take on ethics. We cannot wait to see you at Albert Hall later. Band?

(A record is put on in the midst of the crowd, a wonderful jazz number. Everyone begins to dance to it. The angels enter on the balcony.)

Divine Discontent

She's taken Chastity off to her dressing room again. Can't see what Mrs Ape sees in her.

Divine Discontent

Oh I wish she'd finish with Chastity. She said we could have some champagne now it's all over. What's London like Fortitude? I can't wait to go there.

Fortitude

Just exactly heaven. Shops and all.

Chastity

What are the men like, Fortitude?

Fortitude

Say, don't you think of anything but men, Hope?

Hope

I should say I do. I was only asking.

Fortitude

Well they ain't much to look at. Not after the shops. But they has their uses.

Divine Discontent

Say, did you hear that? You're a cute one, Fortitude. Did you hear what Fortitude said? She said 'they have their uses'.

Prudence

What, shops?

Divine Discontent

No, silly, men.

Prudence

Men! That's a good one, I should say.

(Chastity returns to the group.)

Hope

Chastity!

Chastity

Hello girls.

Divine Discontent

Chastity, what's London like? Fortitude says-

Fortitude

What I want to know, Chastity, is what Lady Metroland wanted to talk to you about?

Hope

It's not like you Chastity, to go riding in a motor car with a woman.

Fortitude

Let's third degree her!

(They chase her about, trying to pinch her and wrestle her to the ground. She finally throws them off as Divine Discontent grabs her by the pigtail.)

Chastity

Why shouldn't I ride with a friend, without all you girls pitching on me like this?

Fortitude

Friend? You never saw her before today!

(Continue bullying Chastity.)

Chastity

Ooooh, owww, beasts! To tell you the truth, I thought she was a man...

Hope

A man Chastity? That doesn't sound right to me.

Chastity

Well she does look like one and she GOES ON like a man. I saw her sitting at a table, she hadn't got a hat on, and I couldn't see her skirt... Ooooh, how can I tell you if you keep pinching me?... And she smiled and so, well, I went and had some tea with her, and she said would I go out with her in her motor car.

Fortitude

What did she say in the motor car, Chastity?

Chastity

I forget- nothing much.

Fortitude

Give her another little nip girls.

(Chastity runs off screeching, the others following, into the midst of the party. Simon walks forward as the crowd goes into slow motion and the record changes. The angels walk up onto the balcony over the top and start to sing a beautiful choral song that shows that some serious shit is about to go down.)

Simon *(on the phone this time)*

Hello, is this the Daily Excess? Yes, I'd like to phone dictate the next Mr Chatterbox... You ready?

Thanks.

(As he does it, the people he mentions leave the stage dance off stage one by one until only Simon is left.)

The party of Lady Metroland looked set to be another fine gala ball for the vapid and useless bright young people and their satellites, but it turned out to be nothing worse than the trappings of the

Whore Of Babylon herself. The ballroom of her mostly splendid country house was transformed last night into little more than a modern day Stonehenge, a circle for the practicing of dark and occult rituals. Nothing short of Walpurgisnacht happened last night, and Mr Chatterbox was there to catch it all.

Mrs Melrose Ape, American Evangelist and unaware fascist took to the stage not to proclaim virtues, but to expose her own terrible sins. Removing her coat she was naked beneath, and threw herself from the balcony into the arms of a hundred clamouring aristocrats and members of parliament, who took turns to do the most despicable things to her and her angels, who she cried out the names of one by one as they dove into the tempest, revealing each to be a yankee prostitute both in nature and in behaviour.

Lady Metroland, jealous of the glee spread across her guest's now chapped lips, removed her party dress and sprinkled herself with champagne in a terrible parody of baptism, an example followed by the now grotesquely naked Prime Minister and Lord Monomark- yes, Lord Monomark himself- who were vanguards of a mass stripping so great only the servants remained clothed, but not for much longer, as they were set upon by the nobility who wished to have a taste of something altogether baser.

(At this point, the only people left on stage are Agatha, Archie, Miles, Nina and Adam.)

Above it all, hanging from the chandelier, swung a terribly tight and awfully hairy Archie Schwert, who screamed that all the money he had in the world came from slavery and supporting Hitler in the most frightful ways. Below, Agatha Runcible joined the cries as she joined the orgy, screaming her horror at her bogus existence, at her vanity and arrogance in one so ugly and vapid, and finally plunging into tongue down the throat of one local dignitary.

Miles Malpractice meanwhile took two men under his arms and admitted he wished to recreate a scene he had performed with a young musician from Huddersfield just days before whilst throwing off each and every garment in imitation of his wicked mother. Adam Fenwick-Symes was jealous to not be chosen by his so-called friend, and so joined in with the brutish force of the uneducated middle-classes.

And Nina Blount... Nina Blount.... The ugly and sickly trollope clenched herself both provocatively and as if in pain, screeching lines of Lady Macbeth with the most obscene additions and subtractions, before lying prostrate on the floor and demanding the men of the room give her child to be born as foolish and ugly as her and all her kind, who float from high to high in life and hate those who cannot join them.

These are people in reality no different to any of us, but, lost in the haze of their own pride and money, in the tobacco-smoke of fame and lust, have lost all that is human about them. If this is what society aspires to be like I pity the collective, for I have witnessed this terrible behaviour first hand and it is nothing short of sickening. On goes the infinite roller coaster of trite cocktail party chatter interrupted only by vice and neurosis, soundtracked by the tapping of typewriters recounting their every deed and the popping of champagne corks as they forget their every folly, unaware their life is little more than one grand smear of lipstick across London. On and on they dance, and with every drink, with every kiss, with every new dress and with every bogus party, they reach nearer the epoch of shame, horror and ultimately, collapse...

Yes, that's it. Good night.

(As the chorus song ends, Simon is left alone. He goes to the central table and begins to fiddle with it as if it were an oven. The angels produce the ominous noise of gas hissing out. Simon places his head underneath the table and coughs and splutters for a while before falling into silence as the lights go out.)

Act 2

(Adam and Nina enter with picnic basket and blanket and set up camp on stage, maybe even on the central table for elevation.)

Adam
More camembert, Nina?

Nina
Oh Adam, you seem frightfully desperate to make me bloated and quite unkissable.

Adam
As long as you have lips, you'll be utterly kissable to me.

Nina
You are a sweetheart Adam, but you needn't lie. What do I have besides my beauty?

Adam
Your charm.

Nina
And what good is charm without attractiveness? I would love one day to wake up old and plump and haggard, a perfect HARRIDAN darling, just for a day, and see how you reacted to my arrival.

Adam
I dare say I wouldn't even notice it was you.

Nina
How could I convince you?

Adam
If you said something utterly beguiling.

Nina
Fine. Then we have clarified that I am the beguiling Nina Blount, but I have been enchanted for one day.

Adam
Enchanted? This is all very grim. Brothers Grimm, even.

Nina
Yes, but say that I was ugly for a day. Would it change anything?

Adam
Well... It may shock me. But I'd always love you. Eventually we all age and we all become less beautiful but there's always something about us that is attractive, even if we erode on the outside.

Nina
Like the sphinx.

Adam
Quite.

Nina
You are right. With age we shall be less beautiful and more practical, shan't we?

Adam
We must, I suppose.

Nina
I may even get a job.

Adam
What a thing to say!

Nina
It's quite true, or maybe even a degree. Daddy always said I should have gone to Cambridge. I'd love to study Art, or the history of art, and go to Venice and spend oodles of days walking around palaces and squares and talking about columnades and parthenons.

Adam
I don't think they have a great many parthenons in Venice.

Nina
Is pantheon what I mean? Oh who knows, I'm just so giddy to be out in nature!

Adam
Are you cold at all?

Nina
Not frightfully so. I thought I might be but I'm quite spectacularly pleasant.

Adam
You are indeed... Nina, I have something I have to tell you.

Nina
You're not going to try and marry me again, are you?

Adam
No... I'm Mr. Chatterbox.

Nina
Are you really? Good Lord. I always thought Simon was!

Adam
No, I wasn't before... But I am now.

Nina
You are? Well that's marvellous! I wonder how Simon would take it.

Adam

Not at all well, I should think. He suggested I was next in line just before he... Well, wrote that awful story about us in the papers.

Nina

Oh Adam darling, don't...

(She throws herself into his lap and he sits there, stroking her hair. She turns to face the audience, still lying in his lap.)

Nina

Adam?

Adam

Yes Nina?

Nina

Who are you going to write about in the column?

Adam

Write about? Whatever do you mean?

Nina

Well, Lady Metroland and that Ape woman and the Browns all sort of lead that little coup d'etat at the paper didn't they. So many people refused to be written about that there's almost nobody interesting left to gossip about.

Adam

That's true... What if I was to invent people then.

Nina

Invent them?

Adam

Well, I mean, nobody's heard of half the people in the papers. Just soldiers and composers and explorers... the odd diplomat... Who's going to know? People will believe anything if it's in print.

Nina

Oh how exciting! It's like being a novelist.

Adam

I am a novelist.

Nina

I don't see how you can say that when you haven't published a novel. I could equally say... I'm a painter.

Adam

But you've never painted.

Nina

But I might do, someday.

Adam

Oh Nina, you can be cutting!

Nina

You know I'm only being silly Adam, don't you? Come on, let's create some people for you to talk about. How about a lady, a beautiful socialite, a savage lesbian- implied of course- and aviatrix... An Imogen Quest.

Adam

Who is the divorcee of the incorrigible Russian count, Zeldorf, opium addict, nudist, chamber choir singer.

Nina

Who collects stamps with frogs on and enjoys sadomasochism!

Adam

And who wears green bowler hats and yellow suede brogues-

Nina

-Which are all the rage nowadays-

Adam

And wears his pocketwatch as a bracelet round his wrist... Oh Nina, this is all so thrilling!

Nina

Oh I'm so very excited. Shall we get to writing the first article?

Adam

Let's.

(They pack up the picnic basket Adam brings on and as they are about to leave Nina turns and smiles.)

Nina

You know, maybe I should go and study English instead.

Adam

You should?

Nina

Yes. Then maybe I won't misquote so many lines of Lady Macbeth.

(The two run off giggling. The paparazzi, either from their seats or from off stage, arrive. Each yells out a Chatterbox article involving the invented characters and fashions. The articles turn into some sort of chorus number- maybe a dance, maybe something else, unsure. It would be a bit like the journalist's dance and song in Gecko's 'Missing', but I'm unsure as to how it would be done. At the end, the paparazzi begin to swarm round Miles as he leads in Archie, Agatha, Adam, Nina and Tiger onto the stage. They shoe them off as they attempt to photograph them all. Miles is reading the paper. Archie is in a lime green bowler hat, yellow suede brogues, and has a pocketwatch tied as a bracelet round his arm. First article is entitled 'Last Of The Balcairns'.)

Miles

To Manchester Races tomorrow for the Summer Handicap. Count Zeldorf, now romantically linked once again with man-hating Imogen Quest, will be expected to be there in one of his green bowler hats- green bowler hats? Imagine!

Agatha

Imogen Quest? Everyone's going on about her. I don't believe there IS such a person.

Nina

Archie told me he's met her, haven't you Archie?

Archie

Imogen? Known her for years.

(He checks his pocketwatch)

It's getting late and I'm bored, shall we move into the drinks tent?

Miles

Good idea. Archie, pick the stuff up.

Agatha

Nina, I'm quite convinced you know who Mr Chatterbox is.

Nina

Goodness no! I'd swear it was Miles though, if I had to guess.

Miles

If only I were... Oh by the way, you must all come see Tiger dearest win another fabulous trophy in the car races next week.

Agatha

Oh certainly! Can you get us in... How do you say it? Back stage?

Tiger

I'm sure I can. You'll have to pretend to be mechanics however only officials are allowed... 'Backstage'.

Agatha

Oh, you are FAR too beautiful to be a racer... Oh dear, did I say that out loud?

Tiger

I'm afraid you did, but I shan't hold it against you.

Miles

Goodness no! He needs to hold it against me instead.

Nina

Oh Miles...

Miles

He's not called Tiger for nothing darlings. A demon in the car AND the bedroom.

Tiger
Miles, not in public...

Miles
Onwards to the winnings tent!

Agatha
Such larks!

(Agatha, Tiger and Miles head off.)

Archie
Here, I believe Tiger's driving us back to London, how are the two of you getting back?

Adam
We'll be heading back a bit later, see you all later on!

Archie
Right-o.

Nina
Turrah Archie! Adam, can we head inside, it's getting frightfully windy!

Adam
Of course.

(The two turn round. The Drunk Major walks behind them, seeing Archie, and stops for a second.)

Drunk Major
I say! Are you wearing a green bowler hat? Damned youth these days...

(Archie takes the hat off and strokes his lovingly as he walks off. The Drunk Major stops in mid-walk towards Adam.)

Drunk Major
I say, I've forgotten my wallet...

(He stumbles back in the same direction as Archie. Adam turns round.)

Adam
Who was that? I swear I know that voice.

Nina
Probably just the wind darling.

Adam
I'm sorry we have to stay for longer, Mr Chatterbox and all that...

Nina

No worries my love. Too much Agatha and too much Miles can simply be too much altogether. They'll only be abusing Archie anyway. Besides, I'd love to stay with you. Should I put some money on a horse?

Adam

I'd dare say it's too late. The horses seem to be moving.

Nina

Oh honestly! Oh my, is that the end?

Adam

Indeed... I wonder who won?

(Ginger storms onstage.)

Ginger

I can't believe it! Who's even HEARD of Indian Runner let alone suspected it'd WIN!

Adam

Oh my God...

Nina

What? Oh my word!

Adam

Indian Runner... It won!

Nina

Ginger? Ginger Littlejohn?

Ginger

Hmmm? Upon my word, Nina Blount!

Nina

How are you? Darling, how have you BEEN?

Ginger

Simply splendid thanks.

Nina

Ginger, you've got to meet my lovely other half, Adam Fenwick-Symes. Adam?

(Adam and Ginger look at each other and there is a moment of recognition.)

Adam

Ah, it's you!

Ginger

Indeed, long time no see!

Nina

You two know each other?

Ginger

Bumped into each other at Lottie's a few months back, your chap here got quite a few pounds off me in some devilish displays of magic.

Adam

Lovely to see you again. How do you know Nina?

Nina

Me and Ginger grew up together, just across from each other. Isn't this too, too surprising?

Adam

Indeed! Positively destined.

(Enter drunk major on the balcony)

Drunk Major

Indian Runner! Who'd have thought it eh? Oh God, where've I put my hip flask...

Adam

That's him!

Nina

What?

Adam

That's the drunk major!

Ginger

Isn't that the man who put your money on a horse?

Adam

Yes, Indian Runner! I've just won over 30,000 pounds!

Ginger

Well done old thing, how lovely for you!

Adam

Thank you. Nina, will you be ok if I rush off after him?

Nina

Of course darling, I'm sure me and Ginger have tons to catch up on.

Adam

Wonderful. I'll see you both later!

(Adam rushes up onto the balcony and out through the door after the Drunk Major.)

Ginger

Of all the people to run into today...

Nina

Oh isn't this an absolute thing? Where have you been all these years?

Ginger

Planting tea out in Ceylon. Well, I wasn't doing the planting so much it was the workers... But I was damned involved in the whole process.

Nina

Oh Ginger, how wonderful! Has it made you fabulously rich?

Ginger

More than you can ever imagine.

Nina

Oh how tremendous!

Ginger

How about your fellow over there?

Nina

Adam? Oh, well, he's not been planting tea all this time, he's-

Ginger

No, I mean... Is he fabulously rich?

Nina

Oh Adam? Not at all. He gets nearly a pound an article now though; he's a journalist. Though I'm not supposed to say anything but... Oh Ginger, it feels like I can tell you because we're such old friends!

Ginger

How about a drink?

Nina

Oh can we? That would be simply divine!

(Ginger and Nina leave, chatting, through one of the exits. Adam runs through the other door on the balcony and drops back down to the ground level.)

Monomark

Hey, Sparky!

(Adam turns to see Monomark, who walks over.)

Adam

Sir! Don't worry, I'm busy collecting all the gossip- Zeldorf this, Imogen that...

Monomark

Yes well, you may want to tone it down with the Zeldorf anything and the Imogen whatchamacallit. I've been hearing rumours that nobody knows these supposed high falootin' society figures.

Adam

Sir, I'd never make anything up-

Monomark

I'm sure you wouldn't but the majority says otherwise, and if I'm nothing else I'm a man of democracy. Hell, it's why I went into the press. I have just this to say- no more Zeldorf, no more Imogen, no more bowlers and brogues and bracelets you hear? Consider them as off limits as Metroland and Melrose.

Adam

Absolutely, sir...

(Monomark leaves and Nina runs back on.)

Nina

Adam darling, I'm sorry, I don't think I can stay with you at the hotel tonight as we'd planned.

Adam

Oh really?

Nina

Yes, I'm so sorry... Ginger's only in the country for a few days and then he's off to France for a business deal and I think this is really the only time I have to really cement our friendship again before he comes back in a few weeks. We've got so much to catch up on Adam, I can't miss out on anything.

Adam

Very well but... But we were going to go to the after party and I shan't very well want to go without you. And without the party I've got nothing to include in Mr Chatterbox.

Nina

Well then, why don't I write it? You get a good night's sleep and I'll write about what me and Ginger get up to in London. We're BOUND to see a few faces we can legally write about.

Adam

Well ok then... See you soon love.

Nina

Absolutely. Oh, I'll invite Ginger along to the races as well! Ginger! Wait for me!

(Nina runs back off stage. Adam is alone.)

Adam

Is that... That's the drunk major again!

(Adam runs after him. Nina walks back on stage on the telephone.)

Nina

Is this the Daily Excess? Yes, I'm dictating for Mr Chatterbox tonight. Are you ready? Splendid.

Count Zeldorf has officially landed in London again after his recent trip to Zurich in which he has just purchased Imogen Quest's splendid diamond engagement ring, full stop. The ring, comma, once a treasure from a very splendid maharajah, comma- no darling I have no idea how to spell maharajah- is now the symbol of a bond between two of the most enigmatic and elusive figures in London High Society, full stop. It is rumoured they may be decking out the entire wedding party in

green bowler hats, comma, yellow suede shoes and as many pocket watches as they can muster, exclamation mark.

Yes, that's it. Thank you so much!

(On the balcony, Monomark storms on with a copy of the paper in his hands.)

Monomark
ADAM!

(Adam follows after him looking apologetic.)

Adam
I'm sorry sir, I just... I wanted to give them a just send off in case my readers didn't feel they got a reason to stop app-

Monomark
Adam, this is not a novel, people don't need closure in real life... I thought you were a real bee in the making, son. Turns out you'll always just be a butterfly. Now scoot, I've got a new columnist to find.

(Monomark leaves and Adam stands alone on the balcony.)

Nina
I'm so very sorry Adam. If only I'd known...

Adam
It's fine, it's fine... Though now I have no way of making money. Didn't you say you and Ginger were going out and you'd see some new faces?

Nina
Well, we ended up staying at his home in Belgravia for most of the night instead. Darndest thing, we just never stopped talking except to go out and buy the makings of breakfast ourselves and then cook them! We talked till sunrise, can you believe it? And cooking without servants... I've never seen anything like it, so... So oily!

Adam
When was the last time we talked till morning?

Nina *(who has begun to fix herself up, putting on earrings and changing dresses.)*
What was that?

Adam
Have we ever talked all night Nina?

Nina
Of course we have darling.

Adam
When?

Nina

Do you want an exact date?

Adam

Well yes.

Nina

Well... I can't remember.

Adam

You can't remember or you can't remember.

Nina

Darling what's the difference?

Adam

One is not being able to remember the date of an event you recall, one is not being able to recollect any such deed happening.

Nina

My dear you're being frightfully facetious... Are you tight?

Adam

No Nina, I'm not tight. I... I think I'm jealous.

Nina

Oh Adam you shouldn't be. Ginger's an old friend that's all, and he's got that frightful moustache, it makes him look just like that Adolf chap. No, I can't say you have any reason to worry... Though I must say, he is frightfully rich.

Adam

I should say so. He did just give me £1000 the first time we met.

Nina

How lovely of him to do such a thing. He's ever so sweet about you, I'd dare say you'd make the fondest of friends.

Adam

Maybe we shall someday... Where are you going tonight?

Nina

Oh... Nowhere.

Adam

It's ok. If you're meeting up with Ginger again it's alright.

Nina

Is it?

Adam

Well, no, it isn't. But it should be. I'm sorry.

Nina

That's quite alright. Maybe you should find an old female friend and reunite and then I can be jealous as well.

Adam

I haven't any old female friends.

Nina

Oh... Well, then stop being friends with Agatha and then start being friends again.

Adam

Mission accepted. Have a lovely night.

Nina

Oh I shall darling, do try and have one as well. Write something, please.

Adam

I'll try. After all, who needs Zeldorf and Quest when you have oily breakfasters and oilier men. Good night, Nina.

Nina

Good night... My, this all feels horribly final, somehow. Like this may be the last time this ever happens.

Adam

Does it?

Nina

I don't know... Maybe I've just been seeing too many films recently. I must dash, see you later darling!

(Nina leaves. Adam leaves through one of the doors upstairs. Enter Tiger with photographers, reporters and Miles and Agatha at his back.)

Reporter

And Mr. Rockhold, how do you plan to win the race today?

Tiger

Well I plan on driving better than the others.

(Cordial laughter.)

Reporter

And who are these two?

Tiger

Well, this is Miss Runcible.

Agatha *(showing a band on her arm)*

I'm the spare driver. It says on my arm and everything!

Tiger

And this is my friend and manager, Miles Malpractice.

Miles

I'll be helping out on pit repairs. I always enjoy giving Tiger a screw or two.

(The reporter laughs at the innuendo awkwardly. Tiger looks affronted. The reporter leaves, giving Tiger a handshake. He is followed by the other paparazzi.)

Tiger

Why did you go and say that?

Miles

Oh puppy, can't I have a little fun now and then?

Tiger

Not when it involves toying around with my career.

Agatha

Now Tiger, darling, what does this flag mean that you've given me?

Tiger

Well, if you wave it, it means I have to exchange with you as the driver.

Agatha

Well of course you would, I'm the spare driver.

Tiger *(to Miles)*

Is she tight?

Miles

My dear she always is. Probably quite high as well.

Tiger

WHAT?

Miles

Oh darling don't fret about it, if there's anybody who can do just about anything they could do whilst sober when they're absolutely polluted, it's Agatha Runcible.

Tiger

I don't like this... I don't like this one bit. I have to head to my car. See you later.

(Miles tries to kiss him but Tiger ducks out of the way. Miles looks affronted as Tiger runs off. Adam, Nina, Archie and Ginger enter.)

Archie

Oh dear, are we late?

Agatha

I'm the spare driver.

Nina

Agatha dear are you sure that's wise?

Agatha

Not at all, but then I'm very rarely sure on anything. Such larks! I say, who's this?

Nina

Agatha, this is Ginger. He's an old friend.

Agatha

Lovely to meet you!

Ginger

Lovely to meet you too.

Nina

This is Miles.

Miles

Pleasure... My, you are scrumptious.

Ginger

Oh my.

Nina

Miles, down. And Ginger, this is Archie Schwert.

Archie

Pleased to meet you.

Miles

I must go find Tiger, excuse me.

(Exit Miles.)

Ginger

Indeed, lovely. I'm off to get a drink, anyone else want one?

Nina

Oh, I'll have one please.

Adam

No, don't worry Nina, I'll get you one.

Ginger

It's quite alright, I'm going that way anyway...

Adam

Maybe I am too. I can get her a drink.

Nina

Adam, don't be like this-

Adam

I'm not being like anything. I'll buy my fiancée a drink. Vodka martini?

Nina
Yes please.

Adam
Right then. Off we go.

(Adam and Ginger walk off. Nina looks terribly awkward.)

Nina
Oh dear...

Agatha
Is Adam tight?

Nina
No. Just jealous.

Agatha
Shame. Its frightfully bogus being the only drunk one here. Do sip up everyone!

Archie
Happily. I'll go get a drink as well, if you don't mind.

Nina
Not at all. Go forth and satisfy!

(Archie exits after Adam and Ginger.)

Agatha
Is everything alright darling?

Nina
Oh Agatha darling, I feel like I'm in the most frightful fix and I have no idea what to do. Everything is so chaotic in my head and... Daddy's lost all our money.

Agatha
All of it?

Nina
He tried to make a film and everything went to pot! I haven't told anyone and nobody really knows but... I don't think I can ever stand to be poor.

Agatha
Oh my... Nina, you're...

Nina
I'm such an awful, awful woman.

(Adam re-enters with two drinks.)

Adam

Here's your drink, I got to the bar first so Ginger will be a bit later... Nina what is it?

Nina (*starting to weep*)

Nothing, don't worry.

Adam

No, honestly, is it... Was it how Ginger behaved earlier?

Nina

Not at all! Ginger didn't even do anything wrong, you did!

Adam

Me? What did I do wrong?

Nina

You make Ginger feel so awkward all the time just because you're both men.

Adam

I fail to see what you-

Nina

You know exactly what I mean Adam. And the worst part is I completely understand why you're doing it. But I need you to stop being so chivalrous.

Adam

Why? I'm your fiancée!

Nina

You're not my fiancée.

Adam

Ok, so maybe we're not engaged yet, but...

Nina

I mean you're not my anything. My fiancée, my boyfriend... It's over, Adam.

Adam

Nina?

Nina

Daddy's lost all our money trying to make a film. I'm poor and I need money and I can't survive off the remainder of your Chatterbox money.

Adam

But Nina...

Nina

Goodbye, Adam. I'm going with Ginger. We discussed it last night as soon as I got the telegram.

Adam

But Nina! (*He grabs her as she tries to run off.*) Nina... I said once before that if you lost everything you thought made you you I'd still love you. Well even now I still love you. I don't care if you're poor, I know we're in love.

Nina

Adam you don't understand, I can't, you're poor too...

Adam

Then look at me. For today I am old, and withered and haggard but I can be beautiful again. All I need is a chance and I'd give it to you. I AM giving it to you. Love me, Nina.

Nina

I do Adam... But I'm not as good as you. And I can't see past the ugliness and I don't know...

Adam

What?

Nina

I don't know when you're going to look beautiful ever again to me. I'm so sorry, goodbye.

(Nina runs off.)

Agatha

Is she going off to buy a drink?

Adam

I have to go. I have to try and stop her and Ginger...

(Adam runs after her. Agatha is stood there. Archie returns.)

Archie

Gave Ginger the money for my drink and then him and Nina pegged it. Odd bunch, aren't they?

Agatha

Quite. When does the race begin?

Archie

It's about to begin, I believe.

(Miles returns)

Miles

Tiger is being frightfully cold. Is the race starting?

Archie

I think it's about to.

Miles

Well I shall wish Tiger luck anyway. Is this it?

Archie

I believe so.

(There's the sound of a gun being fired. The cars roar away- whether this is done with physical theatre or not is left up to the cast's decision. In the process, one car crashes off and explodes.)

Agatha

I say, was that car supposed to explode?

(The race continues. As Tiger wins the first lap the three all cheer. Agatha starts waving her flag enthusiastically.)

Archie

Oh Agatha you didn't!

Agatha

What?

Miles

Now Tiger has to stop and swap with you!

Agatha

Oh does he? Awfully sorry.

(Adam returns.)

Archie

Looking for Nina? She left with Ginger.

Adam

I tried to catch up to her, but...

(Tiger gets out of the car and approaches them.)

Tiger

How dare you!

Miles

Don't shout at Agatha, she's very delicate.

Tiger

Well she'd better toughen up. She's got to race.

Agatha

I do?

Tiger

Yes. Hop in.

Agatha

Crumbs. How nerve-making!

Archie

Are you sure you're ok Agatha?

Agatha
Absolutely Archie m'boy... Right, off I go. Such larks!

(Agatha disappears in the car into the race, which begins once again. Tiger watches with the other three men as, suddenly, Agatha veers off the track, through a hedge/through the studio entrance.)

Tiger
What just happened?

Miles
Agatha's gone off the track!

Tiger
Has she crashed?

Archie
No she's just... Ploughed through a hedge into some fields.

Adam
I say!

Tiger
If there's but a scratch on her bonnet...

Miles
Tiger darling, Agatha wasn't WEARING a bonnet.

Tiger
I meant the car. My car! That's my livelihood!

Miles
Oh do be quiet darling, it'll all be fine.

Tiger
Easy for you to say, you've lived off your Mummy all your life.

(Tiger is about to run at Miles but Adam steps in the way.)

Adam
Tiger old thing we've had a splendid day, don't ruin it now.

Tiger
How am I ruining... How am... You bloody people! Who the hell do you think you are! All you do is fanny about with drugs and alcohol and fashion and money that you haven't earned and for what? You all end up sad and alone because you don't really give a damn about anyone but yourselves. Bright Young Things is the right name for you lot because you're not people... You're just pretty ornaments on a carousel, going round and round endlessly and people watch you and giggle and laugh because you look so damned amusing in your finery. You're just marionettes. Dolls waiting to be given life... You're not real. None of what you live is real.

(Tiger storms off stage. The three men look at each other. Suddenly, the Drunken Major emerges out the door at the top.)

Drunk Major

I say, where did Tiger Rockhold's car go? I had good money on him.

Adam

The Major! The Major!

Miles

Adam, where are you-

Adam

If we don't have anything but being rich we might as well be that, and that man has £30,000 for me.
Major! Major!

(Adam runs after him. Miles and Archie are left alone.)

Archie

Awful lot of tosh Tiger said just now, isn't it?

Miles

No, it isn't. That's the thing... I wish you didn't admire us so much. It makes us so very hard to see we're not worth admiring at all. Mrs Ape, Balcairn, Tiger... We laugh at them but we do it because if we dare to look at ourselves...

Archie

Miles?

Miles

I have the horrible feeling I get when a party has come to an end, Archie darling. I don't think there'll be another one for some time.

Archie

Shall we go for a drink?

Miles

I don't think there's anything else we can do.

(They both exit.)

Act 3

Miles

There seemed to be nothing left to be done to expand on the wonder of the party season for the bright young things this year, but that was before Archie Schwert purchased nothing short of the world's largest zeppelin for a party for all the most fashionable people in the capital. There was Mary Brown, her silly little friend Martha... Motorised darling, Tiger Rockhold... And none other than Nina Blount and Ginger Littlejohn, there to celebrate their engagement.

(Below, there is a party. It seems to be winding down.)

Metroland

Thank you for taking Miles in like you did.

Monomark

I gave him a job. I didn't adopt him.

Metroland

You know what I mean. The devil makes work for idle hands.

Monomark

I'm sorry about him and Tiger, by the way. I thought the boy was a bee.

Metroland

That's quite alright. We all thought he was a finer man than that- wait, how did you know?

Monomark

About Tiger + Miles?

Metroland

About Tiger - Miles.

Miles

People leapt in constant fear that something had pierced the giant silver cigar, but the only popping sound was that of champagne being freed from its prison and poured down the gullet of everybody present. Never have the sinful generations been so close to heaven as they carried out their debauchery amongst the clouds, shrieking like thunder and flashing just like lighting.

Monomark

Why is that... Is that Mary Brown and the Maharajah of-

Metroland

Did Tiger tell you?

Monomark

And look at poor Martha, she looks so down I'm surprised ol' Melrose isn't-

Metroland

Darling.

Monomark

Maybe not today, but soon, everyone will know. Tiger... Has bridges to burn.

Metroland

Don't we all.

Monomark

It'll be fine. Like all fires, we may get away with just the lingering scent of smoke.

Metroland

And if not...

Monomark

Then your butterfly's wings may prove to be little more than feathers and wax.

Metroland

My boy isn't like the Runcible girl, he's strong.

Monomark

I wish I wasn't the only one who could see it. Because I won't help him. It's not my place.

Metroland

And what is your place? To slander him in the papers?

Monomark

It's my place to report the news.

Metroland

No, it's your place to sell papers.

Monomark

Sometimes they're the same thing. The fall of the heir of the Metroland Empire, that's news. The demise of Miles Malpractice sells papers.

Metroland

You disgust me.

Monomark

Would you like me to start writing about you again?

Miles

Of course, Mr Chatterbox would never join in. No, dear readers, instead he could not help but look at Nina Blount, who, pulling herself from the tangle of bodies, found a chair to sit upon, and a moment to gaze at her wedding ring bought from the most fabulous jewellers on German Street, and it was then, for the briefest of moments, Mr Chatterbox dared to think he saw doubt. But when you're engaged to a man who models his facial hair off fascist dictators, maybe that is what one deserves.

Metroland

I had always hoped that the new generation wouldn't be human currency like I was, sold to the highest bidder. I was sold to my husband, now they're sold to the media. I thought they were going to be different. I hoped...

Monomark

There will be a new Agatha. There will be a new Miles. Mr Chatterbox isn't the only role that keeps going. Eccentricity is replaceable.

Metroland

Our children aren't like Melrose Ape's angels.

Monomark

To my readers, they might as well be.

Miles

I would love to fill my darling readers in further on the sin and stupidity of the latest Schwert soiree. But unfortunately the bedroom calls, for we cannot spend our lives eternally observing, it is too, too exhaust-making. Until next time, readers.

(Below, whilst Miles finishes, Nina and Ginger end up dancing together as the party disperses. As they turn about, we see Nina look worried, and Ginger look convinced he has done the right thing. Adam enters from the side and watches the scene unfold as Ginger goes to kiss Nina and she places a finger on his lips and they leave. Adam exits once again.)

(Agatha is lead on by a Nurse and sat down on the chaise longue and covered in a blanket. Another Nurse (2) scurries on.)

Nurse 2

There's a man to see Miss Runcible.

Nurse 1

Send him away. She's in no fit state...

Nurse 2

I've already told him but he seems rather adamant. He says he's a very good friend of her's.

Agatha

I say... A very good friend? What's the chap's name?

Nurse 2

Adam Fenwick-Symes. Tall, short hair, well dressed...

Agatha

Adam? Adam's here?

Nurse 1

Don't you try and get up now Miss Runcible, you're in no condition to be vertical.

Agatha

Then let him in, for God's sake. I haven't been surrounded by so many harridans since... Customs... New Years... Adam was there... Oh please, let Adam in...

Nurse 1

Very well. Fetch Mr... What was it? Fenwick Symes?

Nurse 2

Of course.

(Nurse 2 exits in a flurry.)

Nurse 1

Now I'll have no exertion from you, Miss Runcible.

Agatha

Believe me, I've never exerted in my life.

Nurse 1

I'll believe that...

(Nurse 2 returns, Adam following. He holds a bouquet of flowers in his grip.)

Agatha
Adam!

Adam
How are you?

Nurse 1
Now you have only twenty minutes and there's to be no pleasantries...

Adam
Can't you give us just a bit longer?

Nurse 1
Only if you assist us.

Adam
Assist us?

Agatha
Money, Adam. Will five pounds suffice?

Nurse 1
Very much so.

(Adam, reluctantly, hands over five pounds. Nurse 1 pockets it into her bosom and the two Nurses leave.)

Adam
She hasn't told me how long I have.

Agatha
As long as she thinks she can manage before she can ask for more money.

Adam
I say! Even the asylums are crooked nowadays!

Agatha
Of course they are Adam, they're human too... Be a dear and fetch the cocktail things and the gramophone from the trunk will you?

(Adam goes to fetch them and speaks as he does.)

Adam
I'm afraid I shan't be able to afford your company if they return... That five pounds was all I had in the world.

Agatha
The last of the Chatterbox money?

Adam
Indeed. I hear Miles is making quite a good job out of the thing.

Agatha

Last I heard. I haven't seen him since the race, have you?

Adam

Once, but it's been weeks since...

Agatha

I do hope he's alright.

Adam

He's Miles. Of course he's alright... Noel Coward?

Agatha

What else?

(Adam puts on a record. The song whirs into life and he begins to dance.)

Agatha

You dance beautifully by yourself.

Adam

Thank you. Maybe it's best to be alone...

Agatha

Nina not regained her senses yet?

Adam

No, daft girl... She's still planning on getting married to Ginger.

Agatha

Oh my dear. You know we all feared it would happen, ever since they reunited at the Handicap... We just didn't have the heart to tell you.

Adam

Yes, well, I jolly well wish you...

(Adam realises how enraged he sounds. He stops and smiles, on the verge of tears.)

I'm sorry. I don't mean to yell.

Agatha

Yes you do. You just don't mean to yell at me. Just because I'm the only other woman you can shriek at...

Adam

You're right, I'm sorry.

Agatha

That's quite alright... Poor lamb, I wish I could kiss you and tell you it will be alright but I'm awfully tired all the time since they put me on this medication. It's not a bit like naughty salt, I don't see why they call them drugs...

Adam
Oh Agatha...

Agatha
I'm fine Adam. Honestly... Though I do keep having the oddest dream. I've never had a recurring dream before and its too, too horrid. I imagine we're all in a race; motor cars, like the one Tiger drove, like the one I...

Anyway, there's you, and me, and Miles, and Nina and Simon and Archie's there in what looks like a car but it's just a bicycle with an enamel frame he's had made down Southampton docks or at least that's what everybody says... And we're all driving. Round and round that circuit, and there's rain and it spins up from the wheels like liquid parasols and we screech round and its all frightfully amusing. And then Simon is blinded by the flash of a camera from the roadside, or... Or maybe he's hit by lightning or something, I'm not quite sure, dreams are so awfully ambiguous and then he goes spiralling into the wall and there's an explosion, and all that's left is a single wheel bumping comically across the road in front of us like a tumble weed. And the rest of us keep going and at one point Ginger has arrived in the race and I can't quite explain why, but we're all going. Round and round and round and one by one all of our cars crash. Miles, Nina, Ginger, you... Such a great many explosions and fires, it's like Passchendale, and then there's just me, pootling round this course and I should slow down because I've won, I've won but I... I can't... I keep going, faster and faster, the breaks don't work and the steering is becoming heavier and heavier and I know eventually I...

Adam
Agatha?

Nurse 1 (from off stage)
I say, you can't go... Oh, ten pounds? In you go sirs...

Adam
Who's that?

(Enter Miles and Archie and other bright young things. There is an air of exhaustion though Miles still carries the air of the life of the party.)

Miles
Agatha, darling!

Agatha *(snapping out of it)*
Miles!

Miles
And Adam! Oh, what a cornucopia this has turned out to be, Archie, do be a dear and put something cheerier on the gramophone.

Archie
I've just the thing. Fresh from across the pond.

Miles
Who suggested it?

Archie

Oh... Imogen, of course...

Miles

Of course. Of course!

(Miles and Agatha begin to laugh almost hysterically. Adam and the others titter along.)

Archie

What?

Agatha

Oh Archie... You are a sweetheart. There is no Imogen Quest.

Archie

Yes there is!

Adam

No, there isn't... I invented her!

Archie

Then... Then why did you interrogate me about her?

Agatha

Because darling, we knew you'd pretend you knew her. You are SUCH a climber.

Archie

I am just as good as... As...

Miles

Oh Archie don't be a bore, it was just a bit of fun.

Archie

Yes, well, now I see how you all feel about me... Come on then.

(Archie leads off, expecting the others to follow. No one does.)

Archie

Oh I see... Is this all I am to you? Money and laughs?

Agatha

Not at all Archie, you're so much more. Yes, you're...

(Nobody can think of anything. Archie, fit to burst, is about to leave but turns back round.)

Archie

Tiger was right. You people are so vapid, the only way you feel like you're real is to tear us all down. Well soon... Soon...

(Archie, unable to think of anything more, leaves. Everyone laughs except Adam.)

Adam

I say, I feel awfully bad.

Miles

Oh why darling? He's hardly worth trembling your pretty little jaw over.

Adam

I suppose... Shall we dance?

Miles

Shan't we just! It can be our wedding dance, and you may never leave me, forever and ever, amen!

Adam

At last, someone to love me!

(The two begin a merry dance to the cheery record Archie put on. The others all join in and Agatha claps along.)

Agatha

I say, we've never had a party in a mental hospital before, have we?

(The song ends. Adam seems oddly touched by what Agatha says. He causes Miles to stumble in the dance. Adam laughs at it, but Miles begins to weep bitterly.)

Adam

Miles, what...

Miles

I'm sorry, it's...

(Miles removes the sunglasses he has been wearing the entire scene. His face is rosy with tears and he cannot look anyone in the eye.)

It's... The most beastly thing. Tiger he... He sent some letters to a national paper... Letters of... Some of my finest prose...

Agatha

Oh Miles!

Adam

Miles, let me...

Miles

No, don't, no! Don't... I'm not... The paper published the damnable things and now... Now I have to run away...

Adam

Oh why! There have been suppositions before!

Miles

But never cold hard fact! Daddy says I'm a disgrace, Mummy doesn't say anything but I know she'll put the reputation above me, and... No. I'm going to go away. For some time.

Adam

But where, Miles? Where can you go?

Miles

Berlin, I suppose. I hear its better there for... For people like me. But I don't know where I'll be. And I can't let people know where I am. I... I have to say goodbye.

Agatha

But Miles, isn't Berlin filled with the most awful people right now? That man, with the frightful moustache...

Miles

I don't care. Hitler may be a damnable man but for all I know he doesn't plan to imprison me for who and how I love... No, I must be gone. Goodbye, everyone... How too, too dull this all is!

(Miles shakes everyone's hand and gives them a kiss on the cheek. He gets to Adam and gives him a kiss before laughing.)

Miles

It was always you, Adam. If you're ever in Berlin...

Adam

I'm so sorry, Miles.

Miles

No you're not. Because you don't know. You can't know... Agatha, darling...

Agatha

Miles, I don't know what I shall do without you.

Miles

You must keep going Agatha. Please... You must always be fabulous, as a tribute to me.

Agatha

I shall.

Adam

We all will. For you.

Miles

Oh thank you. Thank you all, it's... I'm so sorry to be so ugly the last time you shall ever see me.

(Nina runs in just as Miles is leaving and they crash into each other.)

Nina

Oh Miles!

(She suddenly sees his face.)

Oh, Miles!

Miles

Goodbye Nina. Please don't marry Ginger, he has the most awful... Everything.

Nina
Miles...

Miles
Goodbye, my darlings. Forever be bright.

(Miles leaves. The others all watch him, and, this time, the other bright young things on stage feel the need to follow after. Agatha, Adam and Nina are the only ones left. Nina and Adam look at each other and there is so much tension it feels heavy.)

Nina
Hello Adam.

Adam
Good day, Miss Blount.

Nina
Oh Adam, don't-

Agatha
I should love to stay and chat, but sleep is knocking and I really can't stop him when he wants to come in. Good night, darlings.

Nina and Adam *(still looking at each other)*
Good night, Agatha.

(Agatha falls into a deep sleep.)

Nina
Oh Adam-

Adam
No, don't. Nina. Because just now we lost one of our closest friends and also that damned fool Archie Schwert and I've suffered from an epiphany.

Nina
An epipha-

Adam
Yes, an epiphany. And I fear that as soon as you speak to me you'll enchant me again and I'll enter that terrible wonderland of naughty salt and races and all that awful guff that I've been spellbound by all this time. It's like... It's like Plato's cave, and I'm finally free, and if I ever dare to return it'll lead to my death.

Nina
Adam, what-

Adam
Oh Nina, what a lot of parties... Masked parties, Savage parties, Victorian parties, Greek parties, Wild West parties, Circus parties, parties where you have to dress as somebody else, almost naked parties in St. Johns Wood, parties in flats and studios and houses and ships and hotels and nightclubs, in swimming baths and

windmills. Dances in London so dull. Comic dances in Scotland and disgusting dances in the suburbs. All that succession and repetition of massed humanity. All those vile bodies. And now a party in a mental hospital...

Nina
Adam...

Adam
Nina, at every party I always see the same three types of people. The people who are always climbing and never satisfied, fools like Archie, terrible fools like Ginger, then there are those so utterly comfortable in their own pantomime existence like dear Miles and dearer Agatha... And then there are those who have been engulfed almost entirely by the river of champagne but they are not entirely deaf, and if I told them to run away and leave it, they would. You are one of those people Nina. I can see the desire to not care lingering in your eyes like a train down a long tunnel.

Nina
Adam, you're speaking utter nonsense...

Adam
Oh Nina run away with me. Run away from all this horror and decay. All we have to do is realise that this is all just a house of cards a, a, a CITY of cards, and escape! Not to Berlin like Miles, not drugged up in a motor car, like Agatha. Like two people in love, away from all the horrors of this place. To Paris, or Amsterdam, or...

Nina
Adam stop.

Adam
No, I can't. I can't stop. Because I don't know how long it'll be before I'm sucked back into that horrid world and I want to escape whilst we have the chance.

Nina
Adam stop it! I can't go, you keep forgetting...

(She shows the hand with the ring on.)

Ginger.

Adam
Leave him.

Nina
Oh Adam, stop being a fool. What would father say? What would the papers say? No, I can't...

Adam
Leave him like I'm leaving the world of bright young things Nina!

Nina
And do what? Do what, Adam? Live on the run, some gypsy bohemian covered over all in scarves telling fortunes and scrounging for our next meal? No thank you. No, I don't love Ginger. No, I don't want to stay here in this awful perfumed room of hedonism we call London. But we can't all be romantic visionaries. We can't all be some wild artist. Some of us have to live normal lives we

detest and want to run away from because otherwise you're no longer special and that's all you have, you have your individuality, because you don't have money and you don't have prospects or...

(Adam slaps Nina. Nina looks at him with an expression of incredible relief.)

Nina

Good. Now we can no longer love each other.

Adam

No... Love isn't a formula.

Nina

Well I certainly cannot love a man who hits me.

Adam

You can't or you shouldn't?

Nina

I can't... I shouldn't... I can't... I...

Adam

Nina, please...

Nina

Stay away, Adam. I'm no longer yours. Ginger is vile, yes... But he's rich. And in the end that's what everything is. That's what love is, art is, life is... Survival of the richest.

(Nina leaves. Adam sits down at the table centre stage and, from the other side, Lottie Crump enters with a pen and a cheque book.)

Lottie

Welcome back Adam, it feels like an age! Are you ready to pay your cheque? It's been two years today since you moved in here you know. It feels symbolic.

Adam

Lottie, I-

Lottie

You know when the King came to stay once before he paid me the very next day, how about that? Not like that nowadays...

Adam

If only I-

Lottie

Now if only I could find my cheque bo- Oh would you look at that? Right here in my hand! Can you BELIEVE it!

Adam

Hardly.

Lottie

Now you understand what this miraculously already filled in cheque says, don't you?

Adam
Of course.

Lottie
76 pounds, three shillings and

Both
Tuppence for the cheque.

Lottie
Oh you bright thing, you remembered. Right, here's a pen and, oh, look, a cheque book! Funny how that happens, ain't it?

Adam
Ok...

Lottie
Yes, that's right... Now sign it?

Adam
Ok... Charlie... Chaplain.

Lottie
Very funny, Mr. Fenwick-Symes.

Adam
Ok, ok, this one I'll do for real.

Lottie
Wonderful.

Adam (*writing*)
Adam... Fenwick... Symes.

Lottie
There we go. Let's hope this one's accepted unlike the last one...

(Doge stumbles in.)

Lottie
Oh lordy, what is it Doge?

Doge
There's a gentleman at the front desk... He wants to see Mr Adam.

Lottie
It's not a debt collector is it?

Doge
No madam. He came earlier.

Adam
But I don't owe any debts!

Lottie
Quiet child... What did you tell the nasty man Doge?

Doge
I told him Mr Adam was in Newcastle, ma'am.

Lottie
First sensible thing you've done all year, Doge... Anyway, send the man in.

(Doge leaves. Lottie looks around the room.)

Lottie
Been around for thirty-five years in this spot... Never seen the world go topsy-turvy like it is this last few days.

Adam
Look, I know it's odd I paid my bill, but...

Lottie
Not about you, you daft dolt! The world, Adam. That thing you've never cared about, it's... Its changing.

Adam
Look here, this isn't that Hitler fellow is it?

Lottie
He says he's going to invade Poland. What's to stop him from invading here as well?

Adam
Lottie...

Lottie
He says he hates Jews, Adam. Says he hates them... Us... Me... For what we are. We've ruined the economy, he says.

Adam
Lottie, he doesn't mean you-

Lottie
Apparently they're already disappearing. All across Germany. Graffiti already sprayed across the shops. Everyone there seems to agree what... What'll prevent that happening here? I don't want to go missing Adam, I-

Adam
Is this why you're so adamant I pay?

Lottie
Oh Adam... What's going to happen to us?

(Doge returns with Ginger in tow. Lottie is in tears at the table, Adam comforting her.)

Ginger

Breaking more hearts, are we Symes?

Adam

Now look here Ginger-

Ginger

No you look here! You look here jolly sharpish, you hear? I've had just about enough of you, right up to here- excuse me, can we be alone?

Lottie

Happily. Doge?

Doge

Ma'am?

Lottie

Let's go listen to the wireless, shall we? Let the best man win.

(Lottie and Doge take the vinyl off the gramophone and sit down beside the machine as if tuning a wireless.)

Ginger

Now look here Symes, look here, what I'm about to say may sound unpleasant you know but, but... But DAMNIT. You know, the best man has won here, n-not that... Not that I'm saying I'M the better man but... But DAMNIT all the same! I mean bad luck on you and all that, you know, awfully sorry, my condolences but when you think about it, you know, when you sit down and, you know, just... DAMNIT. You see what I mean?

Adam

Not especially. May I hazard a guess that this has something to do with Nina?

Ginger

You know damned well it has.

Adam

Right. Shall I draw my pistols now, or...

Ginger

Don't you dare be impudent with me, I'm too rich to be looked down upon.

Adam

So that's why you have money is it? To levitate you so high people can't see what a wet blanket you are?

Ginger

Now you look here Symes, I came here for a civil little chat.

Adam

No you didn't. You came here to lord over me the fact you have Nina and I don't, there was no discourse involved in your vapid little mind.

Ginger

That I have... Good lord, so she hasn't got through to you yet?

Adam

What?

Ginger

N-Nothing... Look. We're engaged, you hear? I want no further involvement from you in her life or in OUR life, you see? Or there will be hell to pay.

Adam

What makes you think she cares for me at all?

Ginger

You mean she hasn't called?

Adam

No, what for?

Ginger

Oh nothing, I just thought you might have talked about this before, what with you being so close...

Adam

We're not close. Not anymore.

Ginger

Well good. That's what I want. She's mine now, just like she used to be. Finders keepers, and all that.

Adam

You're pathetic.

Ginger

I'm in love, Adam.

Adam

Same thing.

Ginger

What made you such a cynic?

Adam

Your fiancée.

Ginger

Maybe this is why she chose me, then. Because she knows I believe in love in... In decency, in the good, honest thing to do! You see, I've known her since we were children, used to play with her... friends of the family... now I know you two were engaged but... I used to have her photo at my bedside in Ceylon- ah, that sounds wet but it's the truth. That's all there is too it. She doesn't care

for my moustache but there you go, I have a birth mark on my upper lip. You're brainy. You don't have a wine stain on your upper lip. You're poor but girls are odd, see-

Adam

How much do you want for her?

Ginger

What? Did you listen to a bally word I-

Adam

For Nina. How much. You treat her like she's stocks to exchange and share and besides... It's all about survival of the richest.

Ginger

What the-

Adam

It's all about money. Isn't it? That's why Nina wants you.

Ginger

Nina wants me because she loves me.

Adam

I always thought you were inextricably foolish but now I have incontrovertible proof. A hundred pounds for Nina.

Ginger

You're behaving absolutely awfully! ...Besides, a hundred pounds is a deuce of a lot.

Adam

Maybe you're not as rich as Nina thinks you are.

Ginger

Maybe you're not as decent as Nina thinks YOU are... Fifty pounds.

Adam

A hundred.

Ginger

Sixty.

Adam

A hundred.

Ginger

Seventy.

Adam

Seventy six pounds, three shillings and tuppence, that's as low as I can go.

Ginger

... Alright. Fine.

(Ginger fishes out notes from his wallet.)

Ginger

You were always an odd one, Adam. Even when we first met.

Adam

Seeing through your illusions doesn't make me odd. It makes me intelligent.

Ginger

Rich in brains but poor in funds... Yes, you are an odd one. Why Miles and Agatha's lot accepted a poor little artist like you I'll never know.

Adam

Because they liked me.

Ginger

They don't like anybody. They just enjoy how useful they are.

Adam

I could say the same about you and Nina.

(Ginger hands him the three shillings and takes out the tuppence.)

Ginger

You're an odd one Adam... You'll do more harm to yourself than good being this way. And that's my tuppence.

(He hands over the coin and leaves. Adam stands there staring at the coin as if Nina's corpse lies in his palm.)

Doge

Phone for you, Mr Adam!

Adam

Thank you, Doge...

(Adam picks up one of the phones.)

Adam

Hello?

(Nina runs on, picking up the other one. She looks flustered.)

Nina

Adam, thank goodness, the operator could only just put me through! I had a fight with Ginger, I thought about what you said, I told him that I'd never loved him and all I wanted him for was the money and he walked out in the most awful reverie... I think he's coming to see you! Has he come to you yet? Has he told you?

(The truth has slowly dawned on Adam. He is disgusted at both of them.)

Adam? Adam, are you there?

Adam

...I'm sorry Nina. I'm afraid I can't love you after all.

Nina

... Adam?

Adam

You were right. It seems I don't love you as much as I thought.

Nina

Adam, you can't mean that, not after-

Adam

I sold my share in your love to Ginger. I no longer have any stakes in you.

Nina (*about to burst into tears*)

How much?

Adam

I'm sorry?

Nina (*in the first moment of genuine anger we've seen except perhaps the asylum chat*)

HOW MUCH ADAM? HOW MUCH DID I FETCH?

Adam

Seventy six pounds, three shillings and tuppence. I started off at a hundred but Ginger beat me down.

Nina

What am I? Your whore, Adam? Your whore that you can barter over with the other men? You don't own me!

Adam

I certainly don't anymore. Thank you, Nina. I can pay my bills and get on with my life.

Nina

Adam I love you-

(*Lottie and Doge put on the record. It starts with the sound of radio crackling.*)

Adam

Survival of the richest, Miss Blount. I relinquish your vile body.

(*Adam hangs up and Nina puts down the phone. She bursts into a rage, tearing around the room, knocking over chairs, and finally standing over one of the smaller tables. The gramophone, on the central table, is now the focus after Adam and Nina did their circuit of the circle stage. Nina is sat weeping as Doge and Lottie get up to welcome Adam in, and point him to the gramophone. They listen as Chamberlain announces war with Germany. They both look at him, and give him a final pat on the shoulder.*)

Lottie

Give Hitler one for the Jews, love. Give Hitler one for me.

(Lottie follows Doge out of the staging area. Adam takes the now finished vinyl off the gramophone and puts on another one. It's a song of parting and love, an old jazz song- 'we'll meet again', 'blue birds over the white cliffs of dover', etc. Etc. As the song plays, Adam leaves the stage. Nina throws off Ginger, who arrives to try and give her a kiss, and he leaves the other way. Archie enters with a bag, pulls out a gun and, staring up at the sky, shoots himself in the mouth. He tumbles to the floor. Miles runs on, holding his baggage and screaming as Gestapo officers blow their whistles and follow him on. One grabs him, the other punches him in the face. He slumps in the arms of the one holding him. Agatha begins to sing along, awakening from her malaise on the sofa. Nurse I enters and gives her an injection and she stops singing in a depressing trailing off.

There is the sound of a bomb going off and everybody drops down dead except Nina, who sits up from her slumped position on the table. She has a pen and paper and begins to write a letter.)

Nina

Dearest Adam. I wonder how you are. How proud of you I am, everyone says you should have a VC. Ginger has got the most divine job making up war news and he made up the most wonderful story about you the other day, about how you'd saved hundreds of lives. So maybe you don't deserve a VC, or maybe you do but... You never write to me so I shan't ever know what you do. There are a great many soldiers and I can't for the life of me tell which one you are, those uniforms make you all look so frightfully similar. I presume you heard about Tiger? Poor thing. If only he hadn't sent Miles away I'd feel sorry. Did you hear about Miles too? Lady Metroland hasn't left her house since we heard from the German Embassy. I thought they only sent Jews to concentration camps but apparently not. I hope he survives.

Ginger and I are very well. I'm going to have a baby... My dear isn't it too awful? But Ginger has quite made up his mind it's his, and is as pleased as anything... So that's alright. He's quite forgiven you and says, anyway, you're doing your bit now and in war time one lets bygones be bygones.

I've started working at a hospital. I felt I had to do something for the war effort other than having a baby which everyone says is patriotic but it doesn't make me feel British it just makes me feel ill. To be near my new job imagine where we're staying? The Shepheard's Hotel of all places! Lottie is frightfully lovely, and she always asks after you, and tells you to make sure you give Hitler one for her. I presume she means a punch- she has awful taste in men but even she couldn't go for that funny little man.

Do hurry home darling. I miss you and I fear you may have been the love of my life. They're still bombing London and it is SO horrid. Please write back. Nina.

(As Nina finishes the letter, another explosion is heard and Nina slumps down dead across the table. There is a constant barrage of explosive noises now as Adam runs on, dressed as a soldier in the field, and finds himself alone surrounded by corpses. Somebody stands shaded in the wings and pulls out a gun.)

Drunk Major

WHO GOES THERE?

Adam

Friend! Friend, I... I'm English too!

Drunk Major
English are you, chappy? What's your name?

Adam
Adam? Adam Fenwick-Symes?

Drunk Major
Good lord... Are you really?

(The Major emerges from the shadows.)

Adam
The Drunk Major!

Drunk Major
I am not a major! Good sir I'm a Brigadier!

Adam
I'm sorry... You see, I've lost my whole platoon...

Drunk Major
Whole platoon? I've lost the whole bloody Army! Did find somebody though, found her in a town just outside Amiens... Come here, he won't cause you any harm...

(From the same wing as the Drunk Major appears Chastity. She looks nothing like the girl before- she is now in a tattered red dress.)

Adam
Hello... Who are you?

Chastity
I dunno. I been called a lot of things. I was called Chastity once. Then there was a lady at a party and she sent me to Buenos Aires and then when the war came she brought me back again and I was with the soldiers training on Salisbury Plain. That was swell. They called me Bunny... I don't know why. Then they sent me over here and I was with the Canadians. What they called me wasn't nice and then they left me behind when they retreated and I took up with some foreigners. They were nice too though they WERE fighting against the English. Then they ran away and the lorry I was in got stuck in a ditch so I got in with some foreigners who were on the same side as the English and they were beasts but I met an American doctor who had white hair and he called me Emily, because he reminded me of his daughter back home so he took me to Paris and we had a lovely week till he took up with another girl in a night club so he left me behind in Paris when he went back to the front and I hadn't no money and they made a fuss about my passport so they called me 'numero mille soixante dix-huit' and they sent me and a lot of other girls off to the East to be with the soldiers there. At least they would have done only the ship got blown up so I was rescued and the French sent me up here in a train with some different girls who were very unrefined. Then I was in a tin hut with the girls and then yesterday they had friends and I was alone so I went for walk and when I came back the hut was gone and the girls were gone and there didn't seem to be anyone anywhere until you came in your car and now I don't rightly know where I am. My... Isn't war awful?

Adam
I think I saw you once... At a party... At Lady Metroland's house... Lord, how long ago was that?

Chastity

I don't know... Does time exist anymore?

Drunk Major

Money certainly doesn't... I suppose now, however, is the time to return my debt to you. £34,000 I believe it was. Enough to get married.

Adam

Indeed.

Drunk Major

I once tried to marry. A lovely girl, named Lottie Crump. Turned me down, however, said I was too old.

Adam

Did she just? Do you know how she is now?

Drunk Major

Received a copy of the paper in my last post. Said her entire hotel was blown up in a bombing raid. Whole place, sky high. Everyone inside... Dead.

Adam

Oh God... Oh God, Nina...

Drunk Major

Nina?

Adam

Nina, Nina Blount, the, the girl I love...

Drunk Major

Blount? New a Blount back in the last war... Ugly chap...

Adam

She was beautiful. Beautiful, so, so very beautiful... And I left her, I... I threw her away like I threw away a thousand pounds on a horse like... Like I threw away everything because that's all we did, we consumed and we discarded in horrible measures... Oh God, what did I do with my life...
NINA? NINA, CAN YOU HEAR ME?

Drunk Major

Keep your voice down old thing, the Hun'll hear us!

Adam

I don't care! I want to die! I want to...

(Chastity has reached the corpse that was previously Archie and pulled the gun from his hand. She holds it shaking at Adam.)

Chastity

Some of us have come too far to lose their lives on your foolish hollerin'.

Adam

Won't you go to heaven anyway? Isn't it all fine for you angels? *(Starts singing)* Ain't no flies on the lamb of God, he's faster than a whip...

Chastity

There are no angels! There is no heaven there is no... No anything...

Drunk Major

Except for hell. Except we go and call it Normandy.

(Adam looks at the gun and stops making any noise at all. Chastity drops the gun and sits back down, rifling through the bodies of the corpses. Adam looks up at the sky in an attempt to stop the flow of bitter tears.)

Adam

Look... There's a star.

Drunk Major

Already? It's only three in the afternoon.

Adam

It's there, see? Right above us...

Chastity

It's getting awfully close for a star...

Adam

Oh God... This is it, isn't it?

Drunk Major

Should we run?

Chastity

Where to?

Adam

Exactly. Let's just be destroyed. Like we destroyed everything else. Like we destroyed Simon Balcairn and Archie Schwert... and Miles Malpractice and Agatha Runcible and... And dear sweet Nina Blount. All of us did. The Bright Young Things must... Like a star... Flicker and fail...

(There is another sound of a bomb. The Major, Chastity and Adam all look up as the lights drop out. Everyone gets up, the other cast members join in, and a bow in the round occurs.)