
Between the Acts



by Virginia Woolf

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IT was a summer's night and they were talking, in the big room with the windows open to the garden, about the cesspool. The county council had promised to bring water to the village, but they hadn't.

Gentles and simples, I address you all...

*Come hither for our festival (she continued)
This is a pageant, all may see
Drawn from our island history.
England am I...*

*Sprung from the sea
Whose billows blown by mighty storm
Cut off from France and Germany
This isle.*

*Now weak and small
A child, as all may see...*

*Cutting the roads... up to the hill top... we climbed.
Down in the valley... sow, wild boar, hog, rhinoceros,
reindeer..
Dug ourselves in to the hill top...
Ground roots between stones...
Ground corn...
till we too...
lay under g-r-o-u-n-d...*

*Armed against fate
The valiant Rhoderick
Armed and valiant
Bold and blatant
Firm elatant
See the warriors—here they come...*

*My home is at Windsor, close to the Inn.
Royal George is the name of the pub.
And boys you'll believe me,
I don't want no asking...*

*With roses in her hair,
Wild roses, red roses,
She roams the lanes and chooses
A garland for her hair.*

*"To the shrine of the Saint...
to the tomb...
lovers...
believers...
we come..."*

*I kissed a girl and let her go,
Another did I tumble,
In the straw and in the hay...*

The Queen of this great land...

*Mistress of ships and bearded men (she bawled)
Hawkins, Frobisher, Drake,
Tumbling their oranges, ingots of silver,
Cargoes of diamonds, ducats of gold,
Down on the jetty, there in the west land,-
(she pointed her fist at the blazing blue sky)
Mistress of pinnacles, spires and palaces-
(her arm swept towards the house)
For me Shakespeare sang-
(a cow mooed. A bird twittered)
The throstle, the mavis (she continued)
In the green wood, the wild wood,
Carolled and sang, praising England, the Queen,
Then there was heard too
On granite and cobble
From Windsor to Oxford
Loud laughter, low laughter
Of warrior and lover,
The fighter, the singer.
The ashen haired babe
(she stretched out her swarthy, muscular arm)
Stretched his arm in contentment
As home from the Isles came
The sea faring men....*

I know where the tit nests, he began
In the hedgerow. I know, I know—
What don't I know?
All your secrets, ladies,
And yours too, gentlemen...

Hoppety, jiggety, Albert resumed,
In at the window, out at the door,
What does the little bird hear? (he whistled on his fingers.)
And see! There's a mouse....
(he made as if chasing it through the grass)
Now the clock strikes!
(he stood erect, puffing out his cheeks as if he were blowing
a dandelion clock)
One, two, three, four...

'Twas a winter's night (she croaked out)
I mind me that, I to whom all's one now, summer or winter.
You say the sun shines? I believe you, Sir.
'Oh but it's winter, and the fog's abroad'
All's one to Elsbeth, summer or winter,
By the fireside, in the chimney corner, telling her beads.
I've cause to tell 'em.
Each bead (she held a bead between thumb and finger)
A crime!

'Twas a winter's night, before cockcrow,
Yet the cock did crow ere he left me—
The man with a hood on his face, and the bloody hands
And the babe in the basket.

'Tee hee' he mewed, as who should say 'I want my toy'
Poor witling!

"Tee hee, tee hee!" I could not slay him!
For that, Mary in Heaven forgive me
The sins I've sinned before cockcrow!
Down to the creek i' the dawn I slipped
Where the gull haunts and the heron stands
Like a stake on the edge of the marshes...
Who's here?

(Three young men swaggered on to the stage and accosted her)
—"Are you come to torture me, Sirs?
There is little blood in this arm,
(she extended her skinny forearm from her ragged shift)
Saints in Heaven preserve me!

"Look to the beldame there—old Elsbeth's sick!"

(They crowded round her)
Dead, Sirs!

From the distaff of life's tangled skein, unloose her hands
(They unloosed her hands)
Of her frailty, let nothing now remembered be.
Call for the robin redbreast and the wren.
And roses fall your crimson pall.
(Petals were strewn from wicker baskets)
Cover the corpse. Sleep well.
(They covered the corpse)
On you, fair Sirs (he turned to the happy couple)
Let Heaven rain benediction!
Haste ere the envying sun
Night's curtain hath undone. Let music sound
And the free air of Heaven waft you to your slumber!
Lead on the dance!

Gentles and simples, I address you all (she piped.)
Our act is done, our scene is over.
Past is the day of crone and lover.
The bud has flowered; the flower has fallen.
But soon will rise another dawning,
For time whose children small we be
Hath in his keeping, you shall see,
You shall see....

Armed against fate,
The valiant Rhoderick,
Bold and blatant,
Firm, elatant, etc., etc.

The King is in his counting house,
Counting out his money,
The Queen is in her parlour
Eating bread and honey.

"O sister swallow, O sister swallow,
How can thy heart be full of the spring?"

"Hark hark, the dogs do bark
The beggars are coming to town..."

*Leave your casement and come, lady, I love till I die,
Leave your casement and come, lady, I love till I die,*

*For all are dancing, retreating and advancing,
The moth and the dragon fly...*

*For this day and this dance and this merry, merry May
Will be over (he tapped his forefinger on his knee)
With the cutting of the clover this retreating and advancing—
the swifts seemed to have shot beyond their orbits—
Will be over, over, over,
And the ice will dart its splinter, and the winter,
O the winter, will fill the grate with ashes,
And there'll be no glow, no glow on the log.
there'll be no glow, no glow on the log.*

*The King is in his counting house
Counting out his money,
The Queen is in her parlour
Eating bread and honey....*

*Young Damon said to Cynthia
Come out now with the dawn
And don your azure tippet
And cast your cares adown
For peace has come to England,
And reason now holds sway.
What pleasure lies in dreaming
When blue and green's the day?
Now cast your cares behind you.
Night passes: here is Day.*

Lady Harpy Harraden entered her dressing-room, followed by Deb her maid.

LADY H. H... Give me the pounce-box. Then the patch. Hand me the mirror, girl. So. Now my wig... A pox on the girl—she's dreaming!

DEB... I was thinking, my lady, what the gentleman said when he saw you in the Park.

LADY H. H. (gazing in the glass) So, so—what was it? Some silly trash! Cupid's dart—hah, hah! lighting his taper—tush—at my eyes... pooh! That was in milord's time, twenty years since... But now—what'll he say of me now? (She looks in the mirror) Sir Spaniel Lilyliver, I mean... (a rap at the door) Hark! That's his chaise at the door. Run child. Don't stand gaping.

DEB...: (going to the door) Say? He'll rattle his tongue as a gambler rattles dice in a box. He'll find no words to fit you. He'll stand like a pig in a poke... Your servant, Sir Spaniel.

Enter Sir Spaniel.

SIR S. L... Hail, my fair Saint! What, out o' bed so early? Methought, as I came along the Mall the air was something brighter than usual. Here's the reason... Venus, Aphrodite, upon my word a very galaxy, a constellation! As I'm a sinner, a very Aurora Borealis!

(He sweeps his hat off.)

LADY H. H. Oh flatterer, flatterer! I know your ways. But come. Sit down... A glass of Aqua Vitae. Take this seat, Sir Spaniel. I've something very private and particular to say to you... You had my letter, Sir?

SIR S. L... Pinned to my heart!

LADY H. H... I have a favour to ask of you, Sir.

SIR S. L... (*singing*) What favour could fair Chloe ask that Damon would not get her?... A done with rhymes. Rhymes are still-a-bed. Let's speak prose. What can Asphodilla ask of her plain servant Lilyliver? Speak out, Madam. An ape with a ring in his nose, or a strong young jackanapes to tell tales of us when we're no longer here to tell truth about ourselves?

LADY H. H. (flirting her fan) Fie, fie, Sir Spaniel. You make me blush—you do indeed. But come closer. (She shifts her seat nearer to him) We don't want the whole world to hear us.

SIR S. L. (aside) Come closer? A pox on my life! The old hag stinks like a red herring that's been stood over head in a tar barrel! (Aloud) Your meaning, Madam? You were saying?

LADY H. H. I have a niece, Sir Spaniel, Flavinda by name.

SIR S. L. (aside) Why that's the girl I love, to be sure! (Aloud) You have a niece, madam? I seem to remember hearing so. An only child, left by your brother, so I've heard, in your Ladyship's charge—him that perished at sea.

LADY H. H. The very same Sir. She's of age now and marriageable. I've kept her close as a weevil, Sir Spaniel, wrapped in the sere cloths of her virginity. Only maids about her, never a man to my knowledge, save Clout the serving man, who has a wart on his nose and a face like a nutgrater. Yet some fool has caught her fancy. Some gilded fly—some Harry, Dick; call him what you will.

SIR S. L. (aside) That's young Valentine, I warrant. I caught 'em at the play together. (Aloud) Say you so, Madam?

LADY H. H. She's not so ill favoured, Sir Spaniel—there's beauty in our line—but that a gentleman of taste and breeding like yourself now might take pity on her.

SIR S. L. Saving your presence, Madam. Eyes that have seen the sun are not so easily dazzled by the lesser lights—the Cassiopeias, Aldebarans, Great Bears and so on—A fig for them when the sun's up!

LADY H. H. (ogling him) You praise my hair-dresser, Sir, or my ear-rings (she shakes her head).

SIR S. L. (aside) She jingles like a she-ass at a fair! She's rigged like a barber's pole of a May Day. (Aloud) Your commands, Madam?

LADY H. H. Well Sir, t'was this way Sir. Brother Bob, for my father was a plain country gentleman and would have none of the fancy names the foreigners brought with 'em—Asphodilla I call myself, but my Christian name's plain Sue—Brother Bob, as I was telling you, ran away to sea; and, so they say, became Emperor of the Indies; where the very stones are emeralds and the sheep-crop rubies. Which, for a tenderer-hearted man never lived, he would have brought back with him, Sir, to mend the family fortunes, Sir. But the brig, frigate or what they call it, for I've no head for sea terms, never crossed a ditch without saying the Lord's Prayer backwards, struck a rock. The Whale had him. But the cradle was by the bounty of Heaven washed ashore. With the girl in it; Flavinda here. What's more to the point, with the Will in it; safe and sound; wrapped in parchment. Brother Bob's Will. Deb there! Deb I say! Deb!

(She hollas for Deb)

SIR S. L. (aside) Ah hah! I smell a rat! A will, quotha! Where there's a Will there's a Way.

LADY H. H. (bawling) The Will, Deb! The Will! In the ebony box by the right hand of the escritoire opposite the window... A pox on the girl! She's dreaming. It's these romances, Sir Spaniel—these romances. Can't see a candle gutter but it's her heart that's melting, or snuff a wick without reciting all the names in Cupid's Calendar...

(Enter Deb carrying a parchment)

LADY H. H. So... Give it here. The Will. Brother Bob's Will (she mumbles over the Will).

LADY H. H. To cut the matter short, Sir, for these lawyers even at the Antipodes are a long-winded race—

SIR S. L. To match their ears, Ma'am—

LADY H. H. Very true, very true. To cut the matter short, Sir, my brother Bob left all he died possessed of to his only child Flavinda; with this proviso, mark ye. That she marry to her Aunt's liking. Her Aunt; that's me. Otherwise, mark ye, all—to wit ten bushels of diamonds; item of rubies; item two hundred square miles of fertile territory bounding the River Amazon to the Nor-Nor-East; item his snuff box; item his flageolet—he was always one to love a tune, sir, Brother Bob; item six Macaws and as many Concubines as he had with him at the time of his decease—all this with other trifles needless to specify he left, mark ye, should she fail to marry to her Aunt's liking—that's me—to found a Chapel, Sir Spaniel, where six poor Virgins should sing hymns in perpetuity for the repose of his soul—which, to speak the truth, Sir Spaniel, poor Brother Bob stands in need of,

perambulating the Gulf Stream as he is and consorting with Syrens. But take it; read the Will yourself, Sir.

SIR S. L. (reading) "Must marry to her Aunt's liking." That's plain enough.

LADY H. H. Her Aunt, Sir. That's me. That's plain enough.

SIR S. L. (aside) She speaks the truth there! (Aloud) You would have me understand, Madam...?

LADY H. H. Hist! Come closer. Let me whisper in your ear... You and I have long entertained a high opinion of one another, Sir Spaniel. Played at ball together. Bound our wrists with daisy chains together. If I mind aright, you called me little bride— 'tis fifty years since. We might have made a match of it, Sir Spaniel, had fortune favoured... You take my meaning, Sir?

SIR S. L. Had it been written in letters of gold, fifty feet high, visible from Paul's Churchyard to the Goat and Compasses at Peckham, it could have been no plainer... Hist, I'll whisper it. I, Sir Spaniel Lilyliver, do hereby bind myself to take thee— what's the name of the green girl that was cast up in a lobster pot covered with seaweed? Flavinda, eh? Flavinda, so—to be my wedded wife... O for a lawyer to have it all in writing!

LADY H. H. On condition, Sir Spaniel.

SIR S. L. On condition, Asphodilla.

(Both speak together)

LADY H. H. We want no lawyer to certify that! Your hand on it, Sir Spaniel!

SIR S. L. Your lips Madam!

(They embrace)

SIR S. L. Pah! She stinks!

FLAV. Seven he said, and there's the clock's word for it. But Valentine—where's Valentine? La! How my heart beats! Yet it's not the time o' day, for I'm often afoot before the sun's up in the meadows... See—the fine folk passing! All a-tiptoeing like peacocks with spread tails! And I in my petticoat that looked so fine by my Aunt's cracked mirror. Why, here it's a dish clout... And they heap their hair up like a birthday cake stuck about with candles... That's a diamond—that's a ruby... Where's Valentine? The Orange Tree in the Mall, he said. The tree—there. Valentine—nowhere. That's a courtier, I'll warrant, that old fox with his tail between his legs. That's a serving wench out without her master's knowledge. That's a man with a broom to sweep paths for the fine ladies' flounces... La! the red in their cheeks! They never got *that* in the fields, I warrant! O faithless, cruel, hard-hearted Valentine. Valentine! Valentine!

(She wrings her hands, turning from side to side.)

(Flavinda hides behind the tree.)

(She reveals herself)

VALENTINE... O Flavinda, O!

FLAVINDA... O Valentine, O!

(They embrace)

The clock strikes nine.

LADY H. H. Half-way to Gretna Green already! O my deceitful niece! You that I rescued from the brine and stood on the hearthstone dripping! O that the whale had swallowed you whole! Perfidious porpoise, O! Didn't the Horn book teach you Honour thy Great Aunt? How have you misread it and misspelt it, learnt thieving and cheating and reading of wills in old boxes and hiding of rascals in honest time-pieces that have never missed a second since King Charles's day! O Flavinda! O porpoise, O!

SIR S. L. (trying to pull on his jack boots) Old-old-old. He called me "old"- "old" to your bed, old fool, and drink hot posset!"

LADY H. H. And she, stopping at the door and pointing the finger of scorn at me said "old" Sir-"woman" Sir-I that am in the prime of life and a lady!

SIR S. L. (*tugging at his boots*) But I'll be even with him. I'll have the law on 'em! I'll run 'em to earth...

(He hobbles up and down, one boot on, one boot off)

LADY H. H. (laying her hand on his arm) Have mercy on your gout, Sir Spaniel. Bethink you, Sir-let's not run mad, we that are on the sunny side of fifty. What's this youth they prate on? Nothing but a goose feather blown on a north wind. Sit you down, Sir Spaniel. Rest your leg-so-

(She pushes a cushion under his leg)

SIR S. L. "Old" he called me... jumping from the clock like a jack-in-the-box... And she, making mock of me, points to my leg and cries "Cupid's darts, Sir Spaniel, Cupid's darts." O that I could braise 'em in a mortar and serve 'em up smoking hot on the altar of-O my gout, O my gout!

LADY H. H. This talk, Sir, ill befits a man of sense. Bethink you, Sir, only t'other day you were invoking-ahem-the Constellations. Cassiopeia, Aldebaran; the Aurora Borealis... It's not to be denied that one of 'em has left her sphere, has shot, has eloped, to put it plainly, with the entrails of a time-piece, the mere pendulum of a grandfather's clock. But, Sir Spaniel, there are some stars that-ahem-stay fixed; that shine, to put it in a nutshell, never so bright as by a sea-coal fire on a brisk morning.

SIR S. L. O that I were five and twenty with a sharp sword at my side!

LADY H. H. (*bridling*) I take your meaning, Sir. Te hee-To be sure, I regret it as you do. But youth's not all. To let you into a secret, I've passed the meridian myself. Am on t'other side of the Equator too. Sleep sound o' nights without turning. The dog days are over... But bethink you, Sir. Where there's a will there's a way.

SIR S. L. God's truth Ma'am... ah my foot's like a burning, burning horseshoe on the devil's anvil ah!—what's your meaning?

LADY H. H. My meaning, Sir? Must I disrupt my modesty and unquilt that which has been laid in lavender since, my lord, peace be to his name—'tis twenty years since—was lapped in lead? In plain words, Sir, Flavinda's flown. The cage is empty. But we that have bound our wrists with cowslips might join 'em with a stouter chain. To have done with fallals and figures. Here am I, Asphodilla— but my plain name Sue. No matter what my name is—Asphodilla or Sue—here am I, hale and hearty, at your service. Now that the plot's out, Brother Bob's bounty must go to the virgins. That's plain. Here's Lawyer Quill's word for it. "Virgins... in perpetuity... sing for his soul" And I warrant you, he has need of it... But no matter. Though we have thrown that to the fishes that might have wrapped us in lamb's-wool, I'm no beggar. There's messuages; tenements; napery; cattle; my dowry; an inventory. I'll show you; engrossed on parchment; enough I'll warrant you to keep us handsomely, for what's to run of our time, as husband and wife.

SIR S. L. Husband and wife! So that's the plain truth of it! Why, Madam, I'd rather lash myself to a tar barrel, be bound to a thorn tree in a winter's gale. Faugh!

LADY H. H... A tar barrel, quotha! A thorn tree—quotha! You that were harping on galaxies and milky ways! You that were swearing I outshone 'em all! A pox on you—you faithless! You shark, you! You serpent in jack boots, you! So you won't have me? Reject my hand do you?

(She proffers her hand; he strikes it from him.)

SIR S. L... Hide your chalk stones in a woollen mit! pah! I'll none of 'em! Were they diamond, pure diamond, and half the habitable globe and all its concubines strung in string round your throat I'd none of it... none of it. Unhand me, scritch owl, witch, vampire! Let me go!

LADY H. H... So all your fine words were tinsel wrapped round a Christmas cracker!

SIR S. L... Bells hung on an ass's neck! Paper roses on a barber's pole... O my foot, my foot... Cupid's darts, she mocked me... Old, old, he called me old...

(He hobbles away)

LADY H. H. *(left alone)* All gone. Following the wind. He's gone; she's gone; and the old clock that the rascal made himself into a pendulum for is the only one of 'em all to stop. A pox on 'em— turning an honest woman's house into a brothel. I that was Aurora Borealis am shrunk to a tar barrel. I that was Cassiopeia am turned to a she-ass. My head turns. There's no trusting man nor woman; nor fine speeches; nor fine looks. Off comes the sheep's skin; out creeps the serpent. Get ye to Gretna Green; couch on the wet grass and breed vipers. My head spins... Tar barrels, quotha. Cassiopeia... Chalk stones... Andromeda... Thorn trees... Deb, I say, Deb *(She holloas)* Unlace me. I'm fit to burst... Bring me my green

baize table and set the cards... And my fur lined slippers, Deb. And a dish of chocolate... I'll be even with 'em... I'll outlive 'em all. . . Deb, I say! Deb! A pox on the girl! Can't she hear me? Deb, I say, you gipsy's spawn that I snatched from the hedge and taught to sew samplers! Deb! Deb!

(She throws open the door leading to the maid's closet)

(She picks up a scrap of paper and reads)

*And so to end the play, the moral is,
The God of love is full of tricks;
Into the foot his dart he sticks,
But the way of the will is plain to see;
Let holy virgins hymn perpetually:
"Where there's a will there's a way"
Good people all, farewell,*

(Dropping a curtsey, Lady H. H. withdrew.)

He threw himself back in his chair and laughed, like a horse whinnying.

*It ain't an easy job, directing the traffic at 'Yde Park Corner.
Buses and 'ansom cabs.*

All a-clatter on the cobbles.

Keep to the right, can't you? Hi there, Stop!

(He waved his truncheon)

(The truncheon pointed markedly at Mrs. Swithin)

(He flourished it magnificently from right to left)

(He paused—no, he had not forgotten his words)

"The Picnic Party. About 1860. Scene: A Lake. Characters—"

"Look, Minnie!" she exclaimed. "Those are real swallows!"

EDGAR T...; LET ME HELP YOU, MISS HARDCASTLE! THERE!

(He helps Miss Eleanor Hardcastle, a young lady in crinoline and mushroom hat to the top. They stand for a moment panting slightly, looking at the view.)

ELEANOR;. HOW SMALL THE CHURCH LOOKS DOWN AMONG THE TREES!

EDGAR...; SO THIS IS WANDERER'S WELL, THE TRYSTING-PLACE.

ELEANOR...; PLEASE MR. THOROLD, FINISH WHAT YOU WERE SAYING BEFORE THE OTHERS COME. YOU WERE SAYING, "OUR AIM IN LIFE..."

EDGAR...; SHOULD BE TO HELP OUR FELLOW MEN.

ELEANOR; (SIGHING DEEPLY) HOW TRUE—HOW PROFOUNDLY TRUE!

EDGAR...; WHY SIGH, MISS HARDCASTLE?—YOU HAVE NOTHING TO REPROACH YOURSELF WITH—YOU WHOSE WHOLE LIFE IS SPENT IN THE SERVICE OF OTHERS. IT WAS OF MYSELF THAT I WAS THINKING. I AM NO LONGER YOUNG. AT TWENTY-FOUR THE BEST DAYS OF LIFE ARE OVER. MY LIFE HAS PASSED (HE THROWS A PEBBLE ON TO THE LAKE) LIKE A RIPPLE IN WATER.

ELEANOR;. OH MR, THOROLD, YOU DO NOT KNOW ME. I AM NOT WHAT I SEEM. I TOO—

EDGAR...; DO NOT TELL ME, MISS HARDCASTLE—NO, I CANNOT BELIEVE IT—YOU HAVE DOUBTED?

ELEANOR;. THANK HEAVEN NOT THAT, NOT THAT... BUT SAFE AND SHELTERED AS I AM, ALWAYS AT HOME, PROTECTED AS YOU SEE ME, AS YOU THINK ME. O WHAT AM I SAYING? BUT YES, I WILL SPEAK THE TRUTH, BEFORE MAMA COMES. I TOO HAVE LONGED TO CONVERT THE HEATHEN!

EDGAR...; MISS HARDCASTLE... ! ELEANOR...; You tempt me! Dare I ask you? No—so young, so fair, so innocent. Think, I implore you, before you answer.

ELEANOR...; I HAVE THOUGHT—ON MY KNEES!

EDGAR; (TAKING A RING FROM HIS POCKET) THEN... MY MOTHER WITH HER LAST BREATH CHARGED ME TO GIVE THIS RING ONLY TO ONE TO WHOM A LIFETIME IN THE AFRICAN DESERT AMONG THE HEATHENS WOULD BE—

ELEANOR; (TAKING THE RING) PERFECT HAPPINESS! BUT HIST! (SHE SLIPS THE RING INTO HER POCKET) HERE'S MAMA! (THEY START ASUNDER)

(Enter Mrs. Hardcastle, a stout lady in black bombazine, upon a donkey, escorted by an elderly gentleman in a deer-stalker's cap)

MRS H...; SO YOU STOLE A MARCH UPON US, YOUNG PEOPLE. THERE WAS A TIME, SIR JOHN, WHEN YOU AND I WERE ALWAYS FIRST ON TOP. NOW...

...(He helps her to alight. Children, young men, young women, some carrying hampers, others butterfly nets, others spy-glasses, others tin botanical cases arrive. A rug is thrown by the lake and Mrs. H. and Sir John seat themselves on camp stools.)

MRS H...; NOW WHO'LL FILL THE KETTLES? WHO'LL GATHER THE STICKS? ALFRED (TO A SMALL BOY), DON'T RUN ABOUT CHASING BUTTERFLIES OR YOU'LL MAKE YOURSELF SICK... SIR JOHN AND I WILL UNPACK THE HAMPERS, HERE WHERE THE GRASS IS BURNT, WHERE WE HAD THE PICNIC LAST YEAR.

(The young people scatter off in different directions. Mrs. H. and Sir John begin to unpack the hamper)

MRS H...; LAST YEAR POOR DEAR MR. BEACH WAS WITH US. IT WAS A BLESSED RELEASE. (SHE TAKES OUT A BLACK-BORDERED HANDKERCHIEF AND WIPES HER EYES). EVERY YEAR ONE OF US IS MISSING. THAT'S THE

HAM... THAT'S THE GROUSE... THERE IN THAT PACKET ARE THE GAME PASTIES... (SHE SPREADS THE EATABLES ON THE GRASS) AS I WAS SAYING POOR DEAR MR. BEACH... I DO HOPE THE CREAM HASN'T CURDLED. MR. HARDCASTLE IS BRINGING THE CLARET. I ALWAYS LEAVE THAT TO HIM. ONLY WHEN MR. HARDCASTLE GETS TALKING WITH MR. PIGOTT ABOUT THE ROMANS... LAST YEAR THEY QUITE CAME TO WORDS... BUT IT'S NICE FOR GENTLEMEN TO HAVE A HOBBY, THOUGH THEY DO GATHER THE DUST-THOSE SKULLS AND THINGS... BUT I WAS SAYING-POOR DEAR MR. BEACH... I WANTED TO ASK YOU (SHE DROPS HER VOICE) AS A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY, ABOUT THE NEW CLERGYMAN-THEY CAN'T HEAR US, CAN THEY? NO, THEY'RE PICKING UP STICKS... LAST YEAR, SUCH A DISAPPOINTMENT. JUST GOT THE THINGS OUT.. DOWN CAME THE RAIN. BUT I WANTED TO ASK YOU, ABOUT THE NEW CLERGYMAN, THE ONE WHO'S COME IN PLACE OF DEAR MR. BEACH. I'M TOLD THE NAME'S SIBTHORP. TO BE SURE, I HOPE I'M RIGHT, FOR I HAD A COUSIN WHO MARRIED A GIRL OF THAT NAME, AND AS A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY, WE DON'T STAND ON CEREMONY... AND WHEN ONE HAS DAUGHTERS-I'M SURE I QUITE ENVY YOU, WITH ONLY ONE DAUGHTER, SIR JOHN, AND I HAVE FOUR! SO I WAS ASKING YOU TO TELL ME IN CONFIDENCE, ABOUT THIS YOUNG-IF THAT'S-HIS-NAME-SIBTHORP, FOR I MUST TELL YOU THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY OUR MRS. POTTS HAPPENED TO SAY, AS SHE PASSED THE RECTORY, BRINGING OUR LAUNDRY, THEY WERE UNPACKING THE FURNITURE; AND WHAT DID SHE SEE ON TOP OF THE WARDROBE? A TEA COSY! BUT OF COURSE SHE MIGHT BE MISTAKEN... BUT IT OCCURRED TO ME TO ASK YOU, AS A FRIEND OF THE FAMILY, IN CONFIDENCE, HAS MR. SIBTHORP A WIFE?

...Here a chorus composed of villagers in Victorian mantles, side whiskers and top hats sang in concert:

While the chorus was sung, the picnickers assembled. Corks popped. Grouse, ham, chickens were sliced. Lips munched. Glasses were drained. Nothing was heard but the chump of jaws and the chink of glasses.

MR. HARDCASTLE... (brushing flakes of meat from his whiskers) Now...

CHORUS OF YOUNG LADIES... O not me... not me... I really couldn't... No, you cruel thing, you know I've lost my voice... I can't sing without the instrument... etc., etc.

CHORUS OF YOUNG MEN. O bosh! Let's have "The Last Rose of Summer." Let's have "I never loved a Dear Gazelle."

MRS. H. (authoritatively) *Eleanor*; and Mildred will now sing "I'd be a Butterfly."

(Eleanor and Mildred rise obediently and sing a duet: "I'd be a Butterfly.")

MRS. H. Thank you very much, my dears. And now gentlemen, Our Country!

(Arthur and Edgar sing "Rule Britannia.")

MRS H...; THANK YOU VERY MUCH. MR. HARDCASTLE-

MR. HARDCASTLE (*rising to his feet, clasping his fossil*) Let us pray.

(The whole company rise to their feet)

MR. H... Almighty God, giver of all good things, we thank Thee; for our food and drink; for the beauties of Nature; for the understanding with which Thou hast enlightened us (he fumbled with his fossil) And for thy great gift of Peace. Grant us to be thy servants on earth; grant us to spread the light of thy...

Here the hindquarters of the donkey, represented by Albert the idiot, became active. Intentional was it, or accidental? "Look at the donkey! Look at the donkey!" A titter drowned Mr. Hardcastle's prayer; and then he was heard saying:

A happy homecoming with bodies refreshed by thy bounty, and minds inspired by thy wisdom. Amen.

Holding his fossil in front of him, Mr. Hardcastle marched off. The donkey was captured; hampers were loaded; and forming into a procession, the picnickers began to disappear over the hill.

EDGAR (*winding up the procession with Elenor*) To convert the heathen!

ELEANOR. To help our fellow men!

(The actors disappeared into the bushes.)

BUDGE... It's time, gentlemen, time ladies, time to pack up and be gone. From where I stand, truncheon in hand, guarding respectability, and prosperity, and the purity of Victoria's land, I see before me—(he pointed: there was Pointz Hall; the rooks cawing; the smoke rising)

'Ome, Sweet 'Ome.

The gramophone took up the strain: Through pleasures and palaces, etc. There's no place like Home.

BUDGE... Home, gentlemen; home, ladies, it's time to pack up and go home. Don't I see the fire (he pointed: one window blazed red) blazing ever higher? In kitchen; and nursery; drawing-room and library? That's the fire of 'Ome. And see! Our Jane has brought the tea. Now children where's the toys? Mama, your knitting, quick. For here (he swept his truncheon at Cobbet of Cobbs Corner) comes the bread-winner, home from the city, home from the counter, home from the shop. "Mama, a cup o' tea." "Children, gather round my knee. I will read aloud. Which shall it be? Sindbad the sailor? Or some simple tale from the Scriptures? And show you the pictures? What none of 'em? Then out with the bricks. Let's build: A conservatory. A laboratory? A mechanics' institute? Or shall it be a tower; with our flag on top; where our widowed Queen, after tea,

calls the Royal orphans round her knee? For it's 'Ome, ladies, 'Ome, gentlemen.
Be it never so humble, there's no place like 'Ome."

*The gramophone warbled Home, Sweet Home, and Budge, swaying slightly, descended
from his box and followed the procession off the stage.
There was an interval.*

*The King is in his counting house,
Counting out his money,
The Queen is in her parlour..*

*The King is in his counting house,
Counting out his money,
The Queen is in her parlour
Eating...*

*Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us
God save the King*

Then the curtain rose. They spoke.

THE END